"Disorientated, intimidated, mesmerized......neon signs, icons, logos, pictures, flashing, glowing, sparkling, my journey along this street was an experience I've not had before. The sheer overload of information, each colour, each light, fighting for independence from and dominance over its neighbouring placard... this is not the city I had imagined. Everyone rushing, no-one stopping, no-one observing...... as if oblivious or unconscious in this bizarre world. I feel myself being carried by the robotic crowd, like an intricate system of circuit cars they veer off the path and into the bustling bellies of these brightly coloured facades. The intense movement, the marvel of these new spectacles makes it impossible for me to comprehend direction or location. I jump for refuge, piercing through the belly of blues, yellows, reds and golds.....to silence. Where am I now? Am I welcome here? Should I step further inside?..... I want my mommy!

I wrote the above piece as a descriptive experience of a person foreign from the condition that is the modern city. The intensity of the unmediated experience of the city ,as seen first through eyes innocent of "commercial vulgari
ties" ,revert the individual back to the childhood nature of insecurity. Georg Simmel identifies the sensory challenges of metropolitan life as a "fin-de-siecle theme of crowding, acceleration and over-stimulation". It is this distinctive mode of social experience that interests me and how the individual maintains or indeed regains a space for individu
ality in face of what Simmels calls "the levelling effects of the mature money economy" or mass media-mass produc
tion society. In his essay, 'The Metropolis and Mental life', Simmel derives the claim of the individual as a "preservation of autonomy and individuality of mans existence in the face of social forces, historical heritage, external culture and the technique of life".

Urban space is a new matrix of social experience dominated by the "privatization of public space", i.e. the media event. The cumulative impact of developments in media technology, mass commodity production and advances in the cinema industry on the relation between media space and public space has been profound. The identity of the individual has been redefined according to Debord as a "commodity" within a "vicious circle of isolation". Debord describes the media as a system of government, with governance over the mass, possessing a pre-mediated and cal
culated control over the individual. McQuire too identifies this as an "expanded matrix of media feedback loops that increasingly shape the ambiance and intensities of urban space".

Neil Leach describes the city as "an ecstasy of communication", inhabited by those who are unconscious in a "com-
modity- inspired slumber", who have adapted a crucial mechanism of sensory training for modern city living. Simm
el describes the city as an environment in which "one grows accustomed to continuous abstractions, to indifference towards that which is spatially closest and to an intimate relationship which to that is spatially very far removed. Individual expression is replaced by a new street conformity described by Simmel as a behaviour in which "men unlearn spontaneous action, they merely react to stimuli from outside". Simmel describes this as the "blase attitude", arising from persistent over-stimulation. Leach too identifies this as a "culture of reification", that objects the whole act of viewing where, "such appreciation of depth, perspective, or relief is reduced", promoting a gaze which sweeps over objects without seeing in them any other than their objectiveness. Jean Baudrillard describes this as a process of "aestheticization" where nothing is either beautiful or ugly any longer, the individual is numb.

Integral to the modern metropolis condition is the fact that photographs of the city often outlast the buildings and the urban settings they depict. In the mid eighteenth century, Charles Marville
recognised the potential of photography in documenting the changing face of Paris during the Haussmann redevelopment into a progressively modernised city of large boulevards from its previous medieval condition. As "Photographer of the city of Paris", Marville mapped the reconstruction and developed a deeper significance in the way the calculated photographs embodied the new relationship between image and urban space. In the "Media City", McQuire argues the Marville’s work "exemplifies a critical shift in media practice" and in this new "terriory of images", urban knowledge is crystallised, laying foundations for the construction of the media city thus pioneering a new relation between technological images and urban space. While Haussmann’s urban zoning of boulevards meant that the working class became more segregated to the outlying suburbs, McQuire notes that the new boulevards produced new patterns of social contact, a new social experience. He references Fierro’s observations of the boulevards where "their constituents had full access to the city’s major thoroughfares...an arena for the display of the bourgeoisie...a wide demographic mix of economic classes and nationalities. Later on these conditions are harnessed as abstract administrative forms of control, colonised by retail and commerce. Simmel argues that these boulevards are a "characteristic experience of the modern city, living among strangers who remain strangers", where modern public life is characterised by "civil indifference" as personal knowledge is replaced by an "increased reliance on expert technical systems". In his book on culture, Simmel describes the situation as a "process of differentiation, refinement and enrichment of public needs" that ultimately has transformed the struggle with nature for livelihood into an interhuman struggle for gain, which Debord describes as "consumable survival". Simmel denotes the individual as being "reduced to a negligible quantity... a mere cog in the enormous organisation of things and power" which transforms them from their subjective form into the form of a purely objective life.

In contrast to the precise and calculated development of the Haussmann Boulevard condition, Las Vegas is described as a city comprised of a "set of intertwined activities that form a pattern on the land...not a chaotic sprawl but a set of activities whose pattern... depends on the technology movement and communication and the economic value of land". Venturi describes this city as an architecture of "styles and signs" that is antispacial, an architecture of communication over space, "communication dominates space as an element in the architecture and in the landscape". Venturi describes this new antispacial movement as "commercial persuasion", a "roadside eclecticism that provokes bold impact in the vast and complex setting of a new landscape of big spaces, high speeds, and complex programmes". The "symbol" is the megatexture of the commercial landscape. The individual makes verbal and symbolic connections through space, spatial relationships are made by symbols more than forms, symbol dominates space. Venturi concludes that in Las Vegas, image takes precedent over "form or process", where the sign is more important than the architecture.

Venturi identifies the manipulating control Las Vegas has over the individual. The ever changing aesthetic of the facade and the controlled navigation of space render the individual submissive, "commodification dominates social relations". Venturi notes that the rate of the obsolescence of a sign seems to be nearer to that of an automobile than that of a building, "the reason is not physical degeneration but what the competitors are doing around you". Venturi witnesses the demise of the traditional facade to that of an over embellished framework that supports the iconic symbol, "a succession of facelifts". He notes the transformation of the Golden Nugget Casino over a thirty year development, "once a building with a sign is now a totally sign covered building". Our aesthetic judgement is challenged to the extreme within a fascination of the excess:

Abstract Forms examining how people read the city in terms of depth analysis, negotiation of forms and recognition of space by visual stimuli.
"...the order of the Strip includes; it includes at all levels, from the mixture of seemingly incongruous land uses to the mixture of seemingly incongruous advertising media... It is not an order dominated by the expert and made easy for the eye. The moving eye in the moving body must work to pick out and interpret a variety of changing, juxtaposed orders, like shifting configurations of a Victor Vasarely painting...unity that maintains, but only just maintains, a control over the clashing elements...chaos is near, its nearness, but its avoidance, gives force".

While Venturi vividly depicts the power of the facade in Las Vegas he also examines interior space, complex configurations, manipulations of the senses and false oasis' within a "hostile context". Venturi draws upon Rome as a precedent from which to objectively analyse the configuration of Las Vegas. He notes the "casinos and lobbies of Las Vegas are ornamental and monumental and open to the promenading public". He reveals the sensitive and complex connections between public and private space in Rome and compares this to the exterior-interior threshold condition to be found in Las Vegas. Simmel likens these sudden and rapid changes of scene to that of the formal qualities of film, a "proto-cinematic character". The manipulation and control of light creates a condition where "time is limitless", "the combination of darkness and enclosure of the gambling room and its subspaces make for privacy, protection, concentration and control". This control "disorients the occupant in space and time". Light is identified as anti-architectural, navigation and control is mediated by a set of sensory devices,

"One loses track of where one is and when it is. Time is limitless, because the light of noon and midnight are exactly the same. Space is limitless, because the artificial light obscures rather than defines its boundaries...walls and ceilings do not serve as reflective surfaces for light...space is limitless because its edges are dark".

Tom Wolfe uses Pop prose to suggest the powerful images of Las Vegas. Venturi uses this a tool to compare Las Vegas with other "pleasure zones" in the world. He looks at the ability of the Las Vegas to engulf the individual into a new role, a journey of the imagination through simulations like that of Caesars Palace, a ranger at the Frontier or a jetsetter at the Riviera. The "Strip" delivers this heightened symbolism, an "allusion in architecture" that reminds the individual of something else, "perhaps of harems or of the Wild West". The contradictory nature of the Las Vegas sign and symbol as being for both day and night mean this illusion transcends time, "as polychrome sculpture in the sun, as black silhouette against the sun and at night a source of light".

Baudrillard sees our social and cultural situation as one dominated by simulation and hyperreality, "a virtual world floating above the real world in its own sealed off hermetic envelope". He refers to the term "real" as been "hijacked by the multinational conglomerates...an empty slogan...claiming its authenticity against its very absence of authenticity", in reference to these artificial "pleasure zones". Baudrillard considers Disneyland as the "perfect crime", the forefront precedent that defines "the archtypal dream-centre" of consumption culture. Disneyland, a make-believe kingdom to be contrasted with the outside world, transports the individual in an imaginary world of the "prop". Baudrillard believes the greatest success of this simulation is to make us believe that it is actually make-believe;

"Disneyland therefore lends authority to the world outside...a make-believe kingdom that makes us believe the world outside is real...yet it is here that the greatest deceit takes place...for the world outside belongs no longer to the to the real, but to the hyperreal".
Baudrillard concludes that Disneyland is part of this hyperreal world outside its constructed boundaries. He considers "Disneyfication" as a new social religion of the metropolis, where dream and reality are entangled in a "never-never world", transforming the social experience into a journey of differentiation between what is real and not real. Logical articulation towards what is real and make-believe is replaced by a method of "tautology". Baudrillard identifies that repetition, the recognisable sign, incessantly reduplicating itself, is the "magical", a repetition contrary to logical discourse of the individual, culminating in a "pure and simple incantation of brand name and political slogan".

Venturi looks at the patterns of navigation and occupation of the metropolis, particularly in reference to the City of Las Vegas. Baudrillard too examines the "networks of objects paths" in an attempt to understand the "inertial constraints of the consumer who will proceed logically from one object to the next". Leach describes an individuals progression through space as one "consumed by a syndrome of images". In "Architecture as Signs and Systems", Denise Scott Brown attempts to map, as did Kahn, a movement system through the metropolis. Examining the city as a series of patterns formed by a series of interrelated subsystems, Brown superimposes cross cuts of the Las Vegas Strip as a way of moving from analysis to synthesis. Through this system of analysis conclusions can be drawn on how the social experience of the individual is manipulated and also enhanced by the shift between public and private space, the visual effects of external facade versus the controlled and manipulated conditions of internal space.
The Project: Designing a new urban condition orientated around the blind community, examining the methodologies adopted around orientation and negotiation of form in the city, the application of these methodologies in the design of a new sensual urban experience.
The Site: Utilising the redundant interior of the existing Georgian block situated between William Street and Thomas Street in the heart of Limerick City Retail.
Recognition of urban space by visual embellishment
Initial design, new market condition using the existing Georgian grid as the basis. Model examines how the design can be formed on a system on pilotes expressed through the facade.
Study on how light has ability to penetrate from above and be utilised as source of orientation and direction for those who are partially sighted, the concept of contrast between light and dark.
Tactility Study: How people register form and surface by use of touch, documenting how we distinguish form by use of tactile response.
Using built forms as nodes of navigation around the existing Georgian garden grid
Distinctive moments on the journey through the space offering different sensual experiences both acoustic and tactile, the use of water and wood as acoustic mediums to establish orientation in space.
The Final Design
Tactile Plate demonstrating how grain in surface can be used as a tool to guide and offer direction in space. Change in grain of surface can indicate a change in condition or direction i.e. an approaching door opening.