“Skydiving, Archaeology and Travel Writing”
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Introduction

This journey begins with disparate subjects that may seem unrelated to each other or, indeed, to the field of architecture. However, having begun to implement their development through architectural processes, I have seen that any subtle likenesses between them, and maybe even their very differences, become what activates the communication between them. Let me introduce those interests here: they are skydiving, archaeology and travel writing.

These interests should widen my vision for what architecture can be, and for what disciplines it can attract and consider; inducing unfamiliar thoughts in the mind and introducing unexplored perspectives to architecture. I want to know more about these subjects myself and by dissecting them through the lens of architecture, I believe that they can offer further fuel to my creativity and can combine intricately to inform and generate my practice of architecture.

This thesis text will explore and revise these three personal interests that I have. They may not necessarily be the interests that have captivated me for the longest time, or that are most immeasurably intertwined with architecture, but they can each offer something unique to my architectural process. This text is a compilation of thought, situating pieces of information alongside each other in a process of discovery. The interests appear here as written fragments.

The following fragments are things that I know and things that I have discovered through writing them down. Writing them has allowed me to think specifically and in detail about aspects of my interests. They describe a journey and a progression through perspectives; documenting processes, places, stuff, people, proposals and thoughts. This text is, at times, a travel journal, a proposal, a critical portrait. It is a tool of thought; the remains of a process.
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Some notes written in Islay

We came upon an ancient burial ground today while cycling. There were decorated slabs or crosses laid out under sheets of glass in a small field. The ground sloped up from this before dipping again, revealing the remnants of a building long ago fallen. There is nowhere here to view it from above, save one hill upon which the road ran. We soon after cycled along this way, and from between a mound of earth and a shed, I saw the site from above. It was a fleeting, moving image; as I was on the bicycle, I saw it for no more than a few seconds. It was enough to see the hollows between the risen walls. The walls were a frame, and the grass was a thick green sheet laid over it, sagging between the rectilinear structure.

It is similar to Ireland here but everything happens outdoors. Now, I am sitting by a bay in Portnahaven. There are numerous seals in the water below. In the distance, the water churns between two headlands. It is cold, only because my feet are damp from walking through a field with a loch in it earlier. The sun is even shining weakly through the clouds. The light here on this island has a very particular ever-morning quality to it. The rocks are dark grey and covered with umber-brown seaweed. I can see six small boats in the bay. The houses are stepped down along the hills. They are mostly white cottages.

It feels more breezy here than at Port Charlotte. I can hear the waves lapping against the rocks and also seagulls, sheep and cars crunching gravel alternately. It is glorious here. Being on Islay makes me think of our existence as Irish, as islanders. It is only here that I realise that Ireland is an island. It has never really been clear to me before now; we must have a somewhat insular life. I think now of all the islands I have been on recently: Malta, Zante, Islay, Ireland. I remember on Malta seeing that many people had similar signs on their houses, ones that cast a shadow of the name on the wall, or ‘No Parking’ signs or ‘Garage in Use’ signs. Everything was coming from the one source. Likewise, here, I have seen that some houses have the same black signs as each other with white lettering naming them. I have seen very few people in this town. We had a taxi journey yesterday from Port Charlotte to Bowmore, to the big shop there. It took maybe half an hour, which I thought was so far away. But then I recall that, where I live is also half an hour from the big town where we have to go to shop.

01.10.2014 Bench at Port Charlotte
Today is the first of October and we are still on the island. It’s sunny this morning and a little bit windy. The grass is green and the sea today is a distinct blue. Today will be a day of reading and reflection. I can hear a persistent, echoing tapping noise, that of a construction worker hitting a slate into place and the slow, sloping of the sea onto the beach below. I have seen some people out this morning, but not many. It almost feels as if there are no other people here besides our group. A local just greeted me with “Good Morning”. The man was carrying a plastic carton of milk and was wearing a peaked cap and dark clothes. Maybe it is important for me to record in writing some piece of the island.
I met an elderly Scottish man in the kitchen of the hostel this morning. He told me that he had seen a beached whale here somewhere, 200 yards from the water’s edge. I am sitting on the rocks by the pier now. It is morning, almost midday, and especially windy today. I can hear a plastic bag rustling in the grass behind me, the water crashing off the rocks ahead of me and the humming of a truck, as if carried across the bay. I wonder if there are significant ruins on Islay. If there are, I could site my initial project here. Because I think that the dropzone I will make will be on an island. Preferably an island with archaeological ruins. These are the conditions I set out: it will be a dropzone for skydiving and an information centre for the ruin and it will be on an island with archaeological remains which can be viewed from above. Maybe Crete? Knossos? Or I wonder if I can site it on Corfu, as near as possible to Butrint. No, you wouldn’t see Butrint from there. Maybe in Albania. But that’s not an island. Or Zante, but it has no major ruins. Where then? Islay would be good. It feels outdoorsy here. I think skydiving would make sense here. And it wouldn’t take long to reach it from anywhere on the island. Maybe I am designing an ideal world. An island where one can live by the sea, and still be within easy reach of a dropzone. It would provide employment to an island. Would it be too windy? I must find out if there are major archaeological remains here. Ireland is just a bit too big to live by the sea and also be near a dropzone. So not Ireland. Because by making another dropzone in Ireland, I’m not providing Ireland as an island with much extra. Maybe Malta? Or maybe I will make one airport for skydiving on every inhabited Greek island. Or maybe one for the Ionian islands etc...or on every island with ruins. But Zante deserves one too. What of my project? My thesis? What is my proposal, for the purpose of Saturday’s seminar? The sun is warming my body while the wind buffets it. Island life.
**Butrint, Albania**

This is a photograph that tells a story of layers: layers of human interaction with land. Layers aside, this photo captures what, to my mind, exemplifies a ruin. The photograph is taken from the acropolis at Butrint in Albania. The description will start from the bottom of the photo and work towards the top.

The first layer is a green scrub: natural, untended - leaves and branches.

The second layer contains grey walls and green grass, steps and paths. Human influence is tangible. Brick and stone are piled in small layers. There are walls at right angles, walls without roofs, walls enclosing grass.

The next layer is trees: an area of light and dark and green texture.

Beyond that is the body of water known as the Vivari Channel.

Beyond that again is the Vrina Plain, a flat expanse of fields with a fortress near and a town afar.

Enclosed by mountains to the south.

Above them, the sky.
From an Aerial Perspective

Viewing a place from an elevated height reveals things about it that may never otherwise be observed from the ground. Patterns of nature and settlement alike become clear. Landscapes appear as enormous textures stretched towards the horizon, which itself is suddenly more present. The terrain seems unexpectedly infinite as the edges of the world blur behind layers of mountains, towns and trees, overlapping each other and extending into the foggy distance until they disappear from view. It is an attractive viewpoint; whether from the top of a mountain, a plane or uncharted mid-air, the overview afforded from above continuously impresses.

A falling skydiver experiences the horizon afar and the sky above and the clouds around and looks below for the field to land in. The parachute opens and the skydiver slows down and floats about under canopy and then dangling feet are superimposed onto the landscape far beneath. There is space all around, the nearest horizontal plane is the ground and the horizon line curls in the distance.

The perspective afforded to the skydiver from 13,000ft (and less) is somewhat similar to what one might see on a terrain map perused by architects. Architects are generally obsessed with the plan view and this is similar to what skydivers experience in its three-dimensional sense and in full colour when falling. But the skydiver sees two drawing types from the lofty mid-air position: a plan and elevation merging at the horizon. The ‘plan’ or ground is observed at strange scales as the skydiver falls. Skydivers measure the distance they are from the ground by reading the height on an altimeter. So when you are 3,500ft above the ground, it is unlikely that you are at a neat, conventional scale that could be represented on a map by a scale bar. The skydiver sees the ground at varying scales as it comes closer. All skydivers know which specific field to land in and can locate that place from a great distance away, even if they are not used to looking at maps of terrain as architects are. This would suggest that it is somehow an inherent skill to be able to read elements of a landscape in terms of texture and pattern - rather than the abstract lines of a conventional plan, the meanings of which must be learned.

Crouching at the door of a plane, the skydiver experiences two very different scales at once. There is firstly the close-up texture of the plane, of the rubber floor underfoot, of the small screws holding panels of the interior of the plane in place. In contrast to that is the landscape thousands of feet beneath; an impersonal, abstract pattern of fields which are smaller than a fingernail slotted between roads and sprawling grey towns. The view from the plane is immense. As the door of the aircraft opens, you are looking down on an architectural site model. There is little indication that it is not in fact a two dimensional film projected onto the opening that is the door. It is difficult to detect the perspective until you notice one mountain slowly moving against another, or similar. Towns and field boundaries below are etched onto the ground. There is a swimming pool here, and there a purple field. You know that the grey line below is a motorway with toy cars moving on it.

You are left with a portrait-like impression of the world from above fixed in your mind once you experience a place from the bird’s eye view. Once you know it from above, you will see it differently from the ground too.
A Guide to Skydiving Gear

The skydiver will require a number of basic items in order to complete a successful jump. Other things can be later added to the ensemble to generate further confusion, but here, for now, are named the essentials.

ITEMS REQUIRED:

Main Canopy
Arguably, the most important piece of equipment is the main canopy or parachute. This is most often created in garish, highlighter-esque colours which delight the eye and may give the skydiver an overwhelming feeling of giddiness as the canopy unfurls above the head. The ram-air type parachute is probably most commonly used in the sport. This type of parachute has nine cells, seen at the front of the canopy, which are filled with air as the parachute moves and allow it to remain airborne. In its open position, packed with air and floating about with a body below it, the canopy is observed as a rectangular kite-like creature, an agglomeration of nylon, seams and colour. It is strung above the head with a number of lines named alphabet-style. These lines are all attached to the container, which is worn on the back and connects the skydiver to the parachute. There are also brake lines or steering lines which culminate near the hands of the skydiver in the form of two toggles, which allow the canopy to be moved deliberately in favourable directions. Particular care must be taken to seek out the brake lines upon deployment of the canopy. On a cold day the hands should be hooked into position around the toggles - which are two loops of fabric - so that they may freeze into place. (Cold, fumbling hands may lose hold of the loops so this must be achieved quickly). A bag will follow behind the canopy, attached by a line. This is the pilot chute and it is perfectly normal that it trails behind. Like most beasts, the canopy has a nose and a tail and should be regarded with caution.

Container
The main canopy is housed in a container. This is to all intents and purposes a bag in which the canopy sits while waiting for its next jump: serene, helpful, bored. The container will of course be brightly coloured in keeping with the spirit of the sport, and will likely have a striped fanlike pattern worked into it. The tough material will have, if mainly light in colour, an assortment of grass and mud stains on it, from previous users who may have landed on it directly instead of on their feet. There are straps attached to the container which are used to lash it to the skydiver around the chest and legs. When secured in its natural position on the back - packed and heavy - the stance a large container may induce on a skydiver can be likened to that of the typical school-going student who has overloaded his/her bag with books. The container has a built-in safety system in the form of an AAD (Automatic Activation Device) which will deploy the reserve parachute if needed.

Reserve Canopy
The jealous cousin of the main canopy, the reserve canopy is pale and white from being confined in the lonely compartment of the container it shares with the main parachute. Rarely needed, it barely ever sees daylight. It feels that its importance is often under-appreciated though it
is always there to act, (heroically, it thinks), as backup when the main canopy messes up.

Logbook
This is a small, blank book with the ambition to be filled*. It has ample space for the skydiver to recount, criticize and romanticise his/her jumps. The blank space may be presented in the form of a table to be filled out with each jump. This book serves as a record and proof of progression in the sport, and as a way of helping the disoriented skydiver in remembering just how many jumps he/she has done in a long day. It is most commonly detected in the hands of student skydivers.

*Disclaimer: log book will not fill itself. Jumps must be completed and logged regularly. A writing utensil such as a pen will be required in addition to the dedication on the skydiver’s part to log each jump before it is forgotten about.

Helmet
This item is fairly self-explanatory: a contraption, already familiar in name and use to people worldwide, that is worn on the head in sports to protect the skull. The skydiver’s helmet differs from most others in that it is usually covered in stickers and when not on the head is carried rather like a trophy. The helmet is available in a variety of forms and colours. Some cover the face and eliminate the need for goggles.

Goggles
Not to be mistaken for swimming goggles, this piece of equipment is added to the skydiver’s garb when he/she begins to do freefall descents - to protect from wind, weather and flying debris which might assail the eyes up in the sky. Goggles are generally available in clear and tinted varieties. While not unfashionable, there are certain visible after-effects of goggles that the skydiver should be conscious of. Be aware that there will be red marks left on the face for a short time after the descent, and also that certain goggles may allow for windburn to occur on all areas of the face excluding the part around eyes, making for a semi-permanent pair of goggles on the face until such time as the windburn or tan (as it may be) fades away. This look is particularly popular during the summer months or in sunny climates. By being aware of the effects of goggles on the appearance, skydivers may make allowances in advance to combat any loss in dignity. Sunglasses are sometimes worn in place of tinted goggles and may be attached round the head in an improvised way. It is not recommended to wear glasses under goggles as they tend to fog up and squash against the nose, inviting poor visibility and a sensation of compression on the face.

Altimeter
An altimeter, commonly known as an alti, is an analogue device worn like a watch on the left wrist during a jump. It is strapped around the limb with a Velcro band and there is additionally a loop through which the first two fingers of the hand pass to prevent rotation about the arm. An altimeter tells the height above the ground. It has only one hand and a white or glow-in-the-dark face. Altimeters are available in feet or metres, depending on the skydiver’s preference. A digital altimeter may sometimes be used to supplement or replace the analogue,
either out of a desire for more accurate heights or perhaps laziness. Different models will have heights inscribed on them in varying places (generally corresponding to degrees of a clock face). On an altimeter, the twelve o’clock position is the starting point and is named as zero. It is essential that the hand is always at zero when the skydiver wearing it is on the ground or else it will be next to useless in the air. From there, the hand of the alti will rotate slowly in a clockwise direction (with rising altitude) until it stops at about the twelve or one o’clock position – the height of the ascent. Thereafter, the hand of the altimeter will rotate rapidly in an anticlockwise direction as the skydiver leaves the plane and plummets downwards. The skydiver needs the altimeter for all manner of things and it can be deemed an essential kit item. The altimeter is the thing that a nervous skydiver may stare at for reassurance during the ascent of a crowded plane before a jump. Or that a tired skydiver may fix his/her gaze upon so that a look of concentration might grace his/her face.

_Jumpsuit_

This is a durable one-piece suit worn over the clothes that can be likened to a superhero outfit. It serves a number of functions from controlling how fast you fall, to protecting the clothes when landing in a particularly awkward way. A jumpsuit may have grips on it, which make it easier for other skydivers to grab onto the suit while in freefall. Most jumpsuits are made-to-measure and customised. When choosing colours for a jumpsuit, it is important to co-ordinate with your parachute and container if possible. A general rule of thumb to remember is that a borrowed jumpsuit will almost always be the wrong size and colour for your purposes.

_Gloves_

Wearing gloves is a matter of choice, but a good pair is said to take the edge off the cold thousands of feet above the ground. The skydiver will instinctively opt for a pair of gloves that will match any other gear owned. Gloves may also prove useful for the prevention of getting thorns in the hands when landing in a prickly field.

_The plane_

Without the plane, skydiving couldn’t happen. Generally, the skydiver needs to be elevated some 13,000ft into the air before the sport can take place and the plane allows for the transportation of a number of skydivers to this height in about twenty minutes’ worth of an ascent. A common plane at skydiving centres is the Pilatus Porter, which fits comfortably* one pilot and nine skydivers. An uncomfortable journey may contain ten skydivers and the pilot. The door is easily opened and it is therefore a highly recommended plane for such a use. External colours and patterns may vary.

*The term “comfortably” is used loosely here to denote that, in a comfortable ascent: no one has to sit on anyone else or has a container in their face, and everyone can feel their elbows, see out a window and move at least one hand.

_Pull-up_

There are variations of this name according to location, but the pull-up is essentially a flat, colourful (to the point of being luminous)
shoelace of material with pointed tips, used with force to close the container once the parachute is tucked away inside.

IN PRACTICE:
Preparing the parachute for packing
Firstly the parachute is laid carefully on the floor. There will be a carpet in the hangar on which the container must be put. This carpet may be orange or lime green or some other such loud colour. It is always obvious and easy to find. There will be mountains of other skydivers’ gear waiting on the carpet, which must sometimes be moved aside surreptitiously to create space. It is wise never to leave the container on the bare floor or this will result in other skydivers berating you. Check that the parts of the rig are laid out in this order in a line: the pilot chute will be first, then the canopy will be in a big colourful bundle after. Next to that the lines should be stretched out to their full extent and attached back to the container. When the parachute is aligned as such, it is advisable to begin packing.

A brief guide to the opening mechanism of a parachute
The handle is integral to the deliberate opening of an airborne parachute by a skydiver. The handle is attached to the pilot chute, which is stored externally on the underside of a packed parachute. Check carefully: the handle used to deploy the parachute may resemble a soft juggling ball. Otherwise, it may be a tubular piece of orange plastic. It is best to note its form, in addition to its position on the container, before entering the plane. Once the handle is pulled (outside of the aircraft), the pilot chute comes free and should catch the air, drawing a pin out of a loop which will allow the container to open, spilling its contents into the air. The contents should consist of a small, dark bag and a vast quantity of looped string. The string pulls away from the bag and drags the colourful canopy out of it. The canopy unfolds and inflates and should be in good working order at this stage. Of course, this all happens within seconds and without affecting the skydiver greatly: the metaphorical awakening of a butterfly overhead.

GENERAL NOTES:
Personal gear is usually acquired slowly over time and is therefore often uncoordinated in colour. Some skydivers manage to assemble a reasonably refined colour palette for their gear, but it is not uncommon to see skydivers who, either out of necessity or poor planning, end up wearing many clashing colours on any one jump. This should for the most part not detract from the validity of your status as a skydiver.

In the absence of personal gear, rented gear is a reliable option. However, it is still best to get someone to check that your gear is in good working order and applied correctly to your person before exiting an aircraft at height.

There are many terms and accessories which are elemental to the sport with which the student skydiver will eventually become familiar through sustained contact.

In this guide are outlined only the basic utensils: the student should seek further advice and practical demonstrations from a qualified
instructor before acting on any of the suggestions given above. The foregoing information is meant as an introduction to the gear in common usage in the sport of skydiving, rather than an inspiration to partake therein.
Trust

This guide is intended to be read by the skydiver who may be experiencing some uneasiness at the idea of skydiving. Present this information to loved ones to ease their sense of foreboding at the thought of jumping. Press it into their sweaty palms in the hope that it may answer some of their questions and assure them that a skydiver must do what is necessary by placing trust in unlikely places. Do not show this guide to those novice skydivers who are happy in their obliviousness. General ignorance is the desired level of knowledge recommended for happy skydiving. The more that one knows about its mechanisms, the lesser the level of inherent trust that one can have in the sport. This guide aims to reinstate some of that lost confidence in skydiving-related situations. As always, the views expressed in this piece should not be taken as advice, and cannot replace instruction from a qualified skydiver. However, this guide should hopefully put to rest any fears the skydiver may be experiencing and allow him/her to embrace the sport in a renewed state of unconcerned obliviousness.

Notes to achieving trust in situations surrounding the act of skydiving:

Good skydivers will place their trust in the gear provided to them. For the duration of a jump, you should not complain about, doubt or interfere with your gear. You will strap the rig to your body and place the altimeter given to you on your wrist and the helmet onto your head. If there are scratches on the face of the altimeter, you must trust that it has fallen with skydivers hundreds of times before and has told the altitude evenly and calmly each time. If the helmet is missing paint, you know it has been on the same journeys as the altimeter and your faith in it will double. When the rig is covered in grass stains and the fabric is hard and faded, you should realise its worth.

Before you get in the plane you should be responsible and get a gear-check. This should be by someone who knows what to check for. It will usually be done by someone else, because you, as a novice skydiver, are clueless as to what to look out for. As you get more experienced, you learn that you yourself should carry out an additional check on your gear as you ascend in the plane. Burdened with this knowledge, you pretend to check your rig in the plane at 10,000 feet, but really all that you remember to look for is the handle that will open your parachute.

It is not unusual, when in a plane, to feel movement on the back of your rig. This usually means that someone is checking your gear, or has noticed that some part of it is looking out of sorts and is rearranging it. You may or may not know that person. You should assume that he is more experienced than you and let him continue. Trust that he knows best. He will usually end the examination by clapping you on the shoulder, or rig. (The rig should be treated as an extension of your body when you are airborne). Thank him and try to put the uneasiness out of your mind.

Planes can be uncomfortable places. Skydivers are often crammed into small planes to allow more people to jump in less time. In such a situation, you may be sitting on the floor and will have to lean your rig against someone’s knees behind you. If you are lucky enough to have a seat, you may feel your container grazing the inside of the aircraft. Someone might at some point look at the awkward position
you’re sitting in, grimace, and advise you to remember to check your handle before you exit the aircraft. This can be taken in bad taste and cause the skydiver ‘at risk’ to try to look for the said handle immediately, but to no avail, as it is usually unreachable. But trust that the person means well and allow your face to resume the serene expression that should so grace it when looking out of a plane window. You may not know until you’re out whether the gear works or not, or whether some essential mechanism has been dislodged or wedged into the wrong place. But never mind. You place trust in the People of the Plane. In the confined space, respect is necessary. Your trust extends to the pilot and the machine itself.

You may fly the first parachute you ever pack. This is a perfectly sane suggestion. You will not be nervous about it because you don’t know enough about what could go wrong to make you nervous. You may wonder about its validity, certainly, but do not allow it to bother you too much.

You will jump out of a plane and fall for thousands of feet and you will pull the handle and hope that it works, and that your rushed pack job won’t result in a hard opening or malfunction. Or if you haven’t packed it yourself, you trust that it has been done correctly. That there is indeed a parachute inside the container and not a grotesque jack-in-the-box. These are minor details and should not diminish your enjoyment of the sport.

The beginner skydiver usually has no idea how any of the gear works in any case, so do not worry if you have jumped out of a plane before and still don’t really know how you made it back to the ground. People will often place rigs on their backs and jump without knowing the slightest thing about them. It is usually with experience and immersion that you get to know your equipment. Allow yourself time to get used to the oddities of skydiving and its gear. Cherish your early skydiving days where you know little about how anything in the sport works.

Finally, you should not watch videos containing ‘skydiving fails’ or the like. These are bound to spook you and should be avoided at all costs.
A Retrospective ‘Grand Tour’

Greece has always held a particular interest for me. In this retrospective travel journal, I will document a journey I made there in January 2014, beginning and ending with Athens.

Athens (one)
It was my first time in Athens and I arrived by night. I saw the Parthenon on the Acropolis in that darkness: yellow lights focused on it, looming large over houses. I remember seeing it emerge at the end of a straight street, greater than I had expected. Later I saw it through glass from a room at the top of the hotel I was staying in, great still. Athens sounded like motorbikes, air-conditioning units and Greek voices. I saw more of the city from the window of a bus the next morning, travelling west, but not enough to know it.

Corinth
It is early morning. I have joined other people on a small bus and we move now as a group. We all disembark outside a low building next to a bridge over the Channel of Corinth. I have only ever seen one photograph of this before, an aerial view. I see it now from a different perspective, from the bridge. It strikes me that the water is astonishingly blue. I hang my camera over the rail and take my own photograph. The channel is huge. At one end it disappears into the mist. At the other, it opens out onto sea and mountains. I sit and eat an apple before getting back on the bus.

Peloponnesus
We are now in Peloponnesus, the large peninsula or island that forms the south of Greece. The road snakes through narrow gorges. A man on the bus tells us in his Greek voice stories of myths that shaped the landscape. I see the stories on the land, through the glass of the moving bus. Peloponnesus was a peninsula before the Corinth Channel was made. At that point, it became, technically, an island. There is a new bridge connecting it in a different place now, near Patra in the west. So it is a kind of artificial peninsula again, joined at that point. There are of course also bridges over the Channel at Corinth, but the immensity and power of the cut in the land that is the Channel makes it feel very separate from mainland Greece.

Mycenae
The acropolis of Mycenae can be seen from the road near the Treasury of Atreus. There are a few people walking at odd angles on the slope of the acropolis. I turn away from it and walk up the gravel towards the Treasury. It is a tholos, or round beehive tomb: a hollow conical space in an artificial mountain. There is what feels like one elevation imposed on the side of the hill. From this two walls slope out, creating a narrow, long space in front of the entrance, through which I walk to enter the tomb. On the stone on the inside of the walls, black has crept over a lot of the yellow.
I approach the acropolis of Mycenae itself a while later. There are interesting pits dug into the ground spread out below it, presumably by
archaeologists, and these are fenced off by thin ropes threaded through steel poles. There is a tall mountain off to the right. The acropolis is covered in stones which are the remainders of the citadel. There is a new path leading up to the main entrance, the Lion Gate. The tall, lengthy perimeter wall is to the left of the gate and to the right, there is a lower wall that suggest a sort of room next to the gate. The detail above the entrance is intricate and the individual stones are enormous. The path continues under the gate and up through the settlement. The stone used at Mycenae is a light, sandy yellow, sometimes dark grey and sometimes almost a pale white.

As I climb, the path morphs into a kind of metal-grille walkway and turns back on itself a number of times to gain the full height of the acropolis. At the top, there is a view of a flat terrain for miles below, hemmed in by layers of far-away mountains. The low ground is shrouded in fog and the clouds above the mountains are coloured by a touch of pink. As I progress through the site, the path becomes is a kind of pebbledash and the ground falls away steeply to one side of it. There is, of course, a cat moving around among the low walls of the ruin complex. I am by now at one of the lesser gates of the citadel. The path rejoins the one which I took on the way in.

I descend, exiting through the Lion Gate, and come upon a tholos without a roof. It is interesting to me as it is more ruinous than the Temple of Atreus. A beige gravel path directs me to walk between the two arms that form a right angle to the only elevation. Here, grass grows on either side of the path. This tholos is somehow secluded from the rest of the site. Entering it, I cannot see the ruined walls on the acropolis above. From inside the tholos-without-a-roof, I can see a circle of sky above me, enclosed by the tall wall. From the top of the wall, the ground slopes up and away a little, but beyond that there is only the sky. This wall is made of a multitude of small stones. They are a bright beige-yellow close to the ground and stained darker close to the top. Vegetation clings to the stones and spills out over the top of the wall into the cylindrical space. I return to the bus, which is waiting in the near empty car park. There is a lone snack stall in the form of a van set up on the tarmacadam. I stand by the fence and look down on the Nemean landscape.

**Epidaurus**

After passing through the orange groves of Argos, we arrive at the theatre at Epidaurus. After entering through the modern-day entrance gate, there is a long, low building with a kind of porch along one facade to the left. Under this, there numerous of stones with inscriptions on them. To the right there are steps and we ascend these to the theatre. The stone used to make the theatre is generally greyer than at Mycenae. I climb the steps and sit for a time in the theatre. People are testing the acoustics down below on the circular stage. Tiers and tiers of seating emanate upwards from this circle. There are trees above the theatre, following the curve of the steps. There is modern lighting installed amongst these, alluding to how the theatre is still used as such in modern times. From where I stand there is an extensive view of the trees and blue mountains beyond. I look down at the surface of the stone seats. They are mottled by the weather. We pass by the stones with inscriptions again on the way out. It is getting cold and a little bit dark as we leave.

**Nafplion**

We stop for food and then continue on to the old capital of Greece: Nafplion. It is a beautiful name. I see a Mycenaean stone bridge from
the bus on the way. The bus stops in Nafplion, by the water. It is a seaside town with a castle on a large hill above it. It is well into the
evening by now; raindrops are lighted by streetlamps in the dusk. There is a castle out on the water at the harbour, silhouetted against the
rain-clogged sky. We go to a bustling café full of locals and sit there while their melodic Greek voices overlay each other minute by minute
in the yellow room. The hotel is outside Nafplion, among fog and olive groves and purple mountains.

Olympia
The next day the bus passes through Arcadia: I see its mountains and plateau and later, Tripoli and Megalopolis. The plains we pass through
are beautiful, their mountains a scalloped trim at the edge of the low ground. The road through the mountains is dramatic; the world outside
them erased by dense fog. The road reaches the coast and turns northwards so that the Ionian Sea moves by outside the window. The
Alpheus River signals the boundary of the valley in which Olympia lies. We come upon Olympia, its entrance on a narrow road. We get our
tickets and I clip an information leaflet with a map on it to my camera. There are archaeologists at work to the left after the entrance. They
have set up their equipment beside the pit they have dug. A jumper rests on a broken column.

Olympia is mostly fragmented columns. It is flat here, with many trees, giving a feeling of expansiveness. All of the trees are bare and in
places, underfoot, the ground is covered in orange oak leaves. It could almost be a piece of Irish ground. The bare trees seem as much a
part of the experience of the place as are the columns. Elsewhere, the ground is grassy and sometimes the grass is worn away to expose
the pale yellow earth. There are walls here too, both of brick and of stone. A huge reconstructed column sits on a giant plinth. It is made
of layers of circular slabs of stone with hollow centres. I see more trees and fallen stone. The stones are sometimes arranged haphazardly
within boundaries of thin ropes. Some have inscriptions and some others are organised into broken walls, as though they were once part of a
building. Many of the rocks have great scars resultant of the insistence of the weather.

At the entrance to the stadium, there is a reconstructed arch. The stadium is open and without trees or much stone, in contrast to the rest
of the site. Mountains form a backdrop to it. The stadium has a long, bare, sandy rectangular patch in its centre, and the rest is covered in
green grass that slopes upward from the edges of the sand. The stadium feels humble in its pared down, functional composition - despite
its importance as a site in history. I make my way back towards the entrance through the trees and the columns, noticing that some of the
grey columns are the same colour as the bark of the bald trees. Moss has reclaimed stones everywhere here, and rain has changed them with
age; meanwhile, near the entrance, the archaeologists expose bare earth and clean stone from the ground. I visit the museum and see the
multitude of artefacts that have been found here, arranged within white walls. The sun is shining outside and we eat lunch.

Rion-Antirrio Bridge and Continental Greece
We cross the suspension bridge from Peloponnesus to Continental Greece, stopping on the far side where there is a museum and a toll
plaza. I take a pencil rubbing in my notebook of a name in Greek from a kind of sculpture outside that has hundreds of names carved into
its glossy surface. I climb a metal stairs to the top of the toll plaza and from there, look out on the bridge and the land opposite. I head back
to the bus and the sun is setting, silhouetting mountains strongly against an orange sky.

**Nafpaktos**

We head to Nafpaktos in the bus and stop at the harbour there. The town is quiet and the streetlights are turning on. The harbour curves around a mass of still, grey-green water with white boats afloat on it. It is getting too late to see much and after we get onto the bus, the rest of the day’s journey is spent in darkness.

**Delphi**

We arrive at Delphi that night. I have little notion of my surroundings except that we are up very high; the bus climbs for a long time before stopping.

In the morning, the view from the cave-like hotel is spectacular. We go to the ancient site of Delphi, visiting first the sanctuary of Athena Pronaia. It is very mountainous here and I have no impression of the presence of low ground at all. It is as if the mountains slope away into bottomless ravines. There is an orange-ish gravel path that descends from the road to the sanctuary, and here, there are great cut stones, fallen and arranged in rows and piles among the grass, as if waiting to be reconstructed. The ground falls away sharply at the edge of one of these composed fields. I cannot see the bottom of the slope from where I stand. There is a circular plinth near the path with pieces of columns arranged in a circle on it. I look more closely at some of the stones arranged on the ground. A number of them have protruding cylinders on them, like buttons. It begins to rain and the white and yellow stones look resplendent against the grey sky.

We soon after cross to the sacred precinct. It is all arranged on the slope of a mountain. We begin the ascent of the Sacred Way, which runs up the hill on terraces of a sort, often doubling back on itself. Again, as at Olympia, there are archaeologists at work here. The stones at Delphi seem to grow out of the grass, despite the slope of the site. We enter the Agora and follow the gravel path and I look back towards the road. From here, the sanctuary of Athena Pronaia is visible through the cypress trees. There are masses of stone here, worked beautifully. By the reconstructed Treasury of the Athenians, there is a new cast path, inset with sparkling gravel. The path leads up towards the base of a grey mountain with patches of yellow on it, the same colour as the stone here. The path becomes made of huge flagstones and there are cypress trees in places along it. I see the Temple of Apollo, in ruins. It is long and rectilinear, made of enormous grey stones. I move up a narrow stone stairs to the theatre. From here, I can look down over whole site, disappearing as it steps downwards into the distance. Beyond that are the immense grey-green mountains. I make my way back down the slope and go to the museum. There, among other things, I see a model of a reconstruction of the sacred precinct, which exemplifies the slope of the site with its upright buildings. After visiting the museum, we leave the valley in which Delphi lies in the rain and go for lunch. We leave then and head towards the next destination.
Thermopylae
The mountains that we drive through are wrapped in clouds. Greece has a truly different character in winter than in summer. Sometimes villages on the hills become apparent through the whiteness as the road winds northwards.

We stop at Thermopylae, where there are hot springs by the side of the road, with steam emanating from them in the cold, and low-lying clouds resting almost at the bases of the surrounding mountains. After passing the city of Lamia, the bus enters the region of Thessaly and drives northwards until the town of Kalambaka, where we stop for the night. We see immense mountains against the orange sky on the way into the town.

Kalambaka and the monasteries of Meteora
In the morning, we visit a workshop where icons are made. Kalambaka is dominated by the enormous monoliths and mountains to which cling the monasteries of Meteora. Here also are the snow-capped Pindos mountains, and Kalambaka lies on a plain beneath. These monasteries look as though they are grafted to the rock, as if they have grown at bizarre heights from the very substance of the monoliths. There is little distinction from afar of where the base of the manmade walls meet the rocks upon which they sit. As the bus drives away from the town and up into the mountains, the sheer scale of these monoliths is overwhelming. It is a foggy day, and when the bus stops on the road near one of the monasteries, the fog sweeps over it and obscures it from view, so that all that can be seen is the cable car that gives access to the monastery, its taut cables disappearing into the blank mist. From there, we drive onwards and visit the monastery of St. Stephen, which is inhabited by nuns. There is a prime view from here of Kalambaka. We are up so high that it is a true aerial view. I see from here a green mountain, strange and beautiful in profile, standing alone. We enter the monastery via a bridge and are admitted into courtyards that nestle within the outer mass of the building. There are many minute level changes within the complex. One of the courtyards has a small garden to one side of it and looking over the edge of the rail and a shingled roof, I see Kalambaka again, spread out below. We turn away from the edge and enter into the church, the inside of which is warm and heavily decorated. It has a cruciform plan. There is a smell of incense on the air and there are ornamented timber seats and gilded walls.

After leaving St. Stephen’s, we go to All Saints or Varlaam monastery, which houses monks. The entrance is through a small gate that leads to a path which winds around one rock, crosses a bridge to another and ascends this via hundreds of steps. On crossing the bridge, I see a cable car moving to another monastery off to the right and higher even than Varlaam. The smooth beige rock upon which the monastery is set is covered in green moss; that, combined with its gigantic scale and the white vapour gathered on it, makes it seem other-worldly. At the top of the steps, there is a final small bridge to the entrance, which has heavy timber doors, and then I am in the monastery. Like the last, this one has many level changes, but this time with whole rooms below the main ground level. There is a room with artefacts, vestments and old manuscripts from the monastery on display in it. From a courtyard outside, there is a view to the monastery of St. Barbara growing out of a rock below. A road winds through the valley and opposite there are caves in the face of the mountain. Kalambaka cannot be seen from here; we are far removed from it at this stage. I ascend to the winch tower, which, I am told, would have provided the original point of
access to the monastery via a basket. We leave the monastery and descend the steps until we pass through the gate again and are back on the bus.

We see ruined, inaccessible monasteries and more caves from the window of the bus as we near the town of Kastraki and wind our way around the mountains back to Kalambaka. From there, we depart and begin the long journey south towards Athens, which the bus reaches by evening.

*Athens (two)*

The following morning, I wake early and, leaving everything behind at the hotel, I make for the Athenian acropolis on foot. I pass through streets that are quiet until I come upon a primary school, to which parents and their children are flocking. The streets are quiet again after that on this crisp January morning. It is incredible to reach the base of the acropolis suddenly, and for the place still to be without people. There is a wide pavement here, off which leads the entrance to the acropolis among other sites. I climb first towards the entrance through the low trees, passing an amphitheatre. There are people at the gate but as I gain entrance and climb further towards the summit, I am one of only a few who are ascending the acropolis at this early hour. I reach the ancient entrance and can see what must be all of Athens. I approach the Parthenon and the other buildings and realise the full glory of the setting. There is work underway on the Parthenon and it is strange to see prefabs within it. I walk over to the low wall at the edge of the acropolis, and from here I can see Athens spreading for miles until it fades into a haze. Presently, I descend and go to see the Theatre of Dionysus, which is among the trees below. The sun has grown warm now and there are more people about. I wander around for a while underneath the trees before going to the New Acropolis Museum nearby. There is a room at the top which is the same orientation and perhaps dimensions as the Parthenon itself, and which houses the fragments of its friezes. By the time I leave the museum, it is approaching midday and there are hundreds of people milling around outside. I depart Athens that afternoon for Ireland, positivity inspired within by all that I have seen.
Proposal for a Skydiving Centre at Butrint, Albania

An account of the fictional skydiving centre at Butrint.

Brightly clad people, constant activity: the hangar at the skydiving centre on a cloudless blue day. The building is nondescript; it is the activity that is important here.

The skydiving centre consists of a runway and a number of buildings and hangars gathered together on the Vrina plain, just south of the site of the ancient city of Butrint.

The walls are hung with canopies, spread in thin layers against the concrete, like nylon tapestries. The building is immense enough to house two porter planes, a hundred people, classrooms, a kitchen, piles of gear on carpets - the stuff of skydiving.

The sun is scorching at Butrint during the summer. The heat of the plane is amplified by the waves of energy coming off the tarmac. The centre is south of the acropolis, on a flat area of land.

The drive here from the modern city of Sarandë is by roads of white dust. There are bunkers and collapsed houses and mussel farms among mountains.

The skydiving centre is here to allow viewing of the ancient site of Butrint from above. To save the site from corruption, a different viewing point of the site was needed. Otherwise, misleading paths would have been built through the site, changing the experience of walking through the ruin.

In the past, the Butrint area was inhabited by farmers, archaeologists and tourists; they are still there, but now skydivers occupy the place too.

A door opens thirteen thousand feet above the plain. Bodies plummet towards the ground, canopies open and float down through the air like the florets of a dandelion clock; underneath, archaeologists painstakingly dig away, removing fine particles of dust slowly and carefully. They look for what is under the surface, while the skydivers look down upon the scene.

It is a place of colour, a place of speed and of slowness; it is rooted in the past and in the present.
Self-Specified Definition of a (Building) Ruin

A ruin is a physical accumulation of material in the form of a building/complex/site, or a part thereof, that was once assembled in (presumably) a purposeful way and is now decaying, or has grown backwards towards the ground. It creates a situation, a setting. It both tells a story and waits for its next chapter to be written. A building ruin can assume many forms and it appears as varieties that are repetitious or specific. This speaks of temples, old cities, earthworks, castles, churches and so on, found and dissected for study. To clarify: buildings that grow backwards do not get any younger. A building in its youth is just that, a building; as it gets old and decomposes, it becomes a ruin.

This definition will not assume what the purpose of any ruin was before it became such. It is enough to speculate that a building or site or complex in its ruinous state is not today used for the purpose for which it was originally intended. Likewise, it will not claim that a ruin is an empty or unoccupied building. However, a characteristic of the ruin is that it is now, in some way, a building without a purpose. From that, it can be proposed that any building constructed today without a brief is a type of ruin - though it will, as a new construction, no doubt lack some of the other essential signs of a ruin. So this definition suggests two categories of ruin: the old ruin and the new ruin. The old ruin has disintegrated into this state, while the new ruin has been built into this state, or is rather an unfinished building that will never be maintained. This does not imply that a ruin is a forgotten place, or that it is uncared for. Ruin is also a condition, a term that can be applied to a thing to describe the manner in which its elements are disintegrating.

A ruin is made of walls but not of roofs. These low limbs of the ruin are generally made of stone, brick or some other such hard material and look like they have been de-built; taken down piece after piece by some force of Humankind or Nature. They sprawl close to the ground with grass growing tall beside them and little plants growing in the cracks where there is no mortar. They create an impression of space and present the suggestion of rooms or enclosures. A ruin may be perceived as an extruded plan, but it is more likely to be a plan that was pressed back towards the ground from its once full height. Columns may also be present as spatial elements in a ruin. It is not a case of one or the other, wall or column. A combination of these elements makes a compelling ruin. Columns often stand taller than walls in a ruin. Or they may be fallen and broken. Old, large columns are sometimes built in layers as walls are built in layers. A ruin is beautiful; a ruin is ugly.

Leading from that description: a ruin is not a monument. It does not have to be of the greatest significance. It does not need to be the wealthiest in terms of artefacts found there. It is enough that it should have a presence and be able to hold its surroundings in a distinct manner. A new ruin is closer to being a monument than is an old ruin. A ruin is a skeleton. Its physical layers have disintegrated over time – or were never there to begin with, in the case of a new ruin. In an old ruin, this frame is the permanent part of a building/complex/site that exists still, even when the softer temporary-in-nature materials have dissolved. In a new ruin, the light materials were never added. Seeing any ruin is like seeing a black and white film version of the...
building-before-it-was-a-ruin. Any light, excess material or paint has peeled off and buildings that were once seen in colour are now seen in greyscale or sepia. The surplus falls away over time. It is a beautiful, delicately thin patina of age that is left on the surface; richer than expected, as the coat of each stone is composed of minute details. A ruin is simply bare bones left exposed to the elements.

Other layers remain with the bones; layers that cannot be seen. A ruin is not a thing in isolation. It is part of a landscape and is integrated into the social, political, cultural and historical attributes of its particular terrain. These flavours remain part of the ruin: when experiencing it, presuppositions about its function and form are brought to the table, informed by these things - whether they have arisen from documented material or have been fabricated through assumption.

Nature often reclaims the ruin. It consumes walls and conceals fallen stones. A ruin always has some relation to Humankind and Nature, sometimes a cyclical one. Humans build and abandon their creations to Nature, which deconstructs them. The building becomes a ruin. It is not destroyed but only altered gently over time. Trees change the spatial character of the ruin. Leaves colour it and rain reshapes it.

A ruin is affected by the study of archaeology. It must sometimes be extracted from the Earth before it is recognisable. It reappears, skeletal, from the layers of dirt which have cloaked it. It does not have its original ground surface intact when it emerges, unless this has been found well below the surface - sometimes a stone road or sometimes a path, woven from branches. A new ground surface is often created for the old ruin and this can change the experience of it, designating a new datum level at which the ruin operates and is experienced.

A ruin is all of this. A ruin is what is left of a building after external forces act on it.
Packing the Parachute

Parachute packing is a ritual that is observed by most serious skydivers.

The aim of packing the parachute is to make it as small as possible so that it may fit inside the container and to achieve this as quickly as possible. In other words, the goal of packing a parachute is generally to get the skydiver back in the air as quickly as possible. Therefore the quality of the pack-job is proportional to the speed of the pack and the desire of the skydiver to return to the air that day. Remember that, ultimately, the best pack-job is the one that gets the skydiver back into the air in the shortest amount of time.

Steps:

1. Place the rig on the carpet provided. Stand between the lines and run them through your fingers as you walk forwards, away from the parachute. Raise the parachute to chest-height and give it a good shake, then toss it on the floor in front of you. Place a heavy object such as a container filled with stones into the empty belly of the rig. The parachute should now be in a fully supine position and ready to pack.

2. Kneel beside the rig and lovingly stow the brakes. This is a peaceful process and will most likely be the calmest moment you’ll have during a day of jumping, so you should not tolerate any disturbances at this point.

3. Crouch between the lines and then carefully place them between each of your fingers and shuffle towards the canopy, moving to a standing position as you go. This should detangle the lines as though your hands are a comb running through some creature’s hair. By the time you reach the end of the lines, you should be standing with the canopy at chest-height in front of you again with the lines taut behind you.

4. Move the lines from between your fingers into a bundle for each hand, which you can then place onto each corresponding shoulder. Try to keep the lines as taut as possible or someone will surely tell you to start again.

5. There will now be a small rectangle of luminous material between you and the canopy. This is the slider and you should place it over your head so that it sits just behind your shoulders. The slider is a rogue and may attempt to get away from you by sliding down the lines towards the container as you are preoccupied with the canopy in front of you. You mightn’t even notice until someone tells you that you have lost your slider, and then you’re at their mercy to give it back to you. Anyway, forget about it for now.

6. You should now be standing with the parachute draped off your shoulders and hanging in front of you with the bottom of its fabric finishing a little way above the ground. The next step is to count the cells. Reach to your right, grab the fabric and turn it about itself until you find a logo. Run your finger along the edge of the material here until you have determined the location of the first cell. Let your fingers
sit in the middle of the cell, and then flick it behind your back to hold it in your left hand. Repeat for cells two to nine.

7. You will now have the edges of the nine cells together in your left hand. Take them and tuck them between your legs.

8. Return your gaze to the mass of material in front of you. You will have a number of lines to your left and right, hanging among the folds of nylon. Your task is to separate the lines on each side into specific groupings. Flake the material between each bundle of lines to separate them.

9. Take the slider back over your head (if you have not lost it already) and flake it between the lines at the top of the canopy. It may resemble a star at this point if done correctly.

10. Grab the edge of the canopy that’s hanging closest to the floor. This may often seem very far away and may have to be flicked upwards towards your outstretched hand with a foot in order to reach it. If done correctly, you will now be holding the edge of the material at a point where there is a large label with a seam down its centre.

11. Take the material about the label and wrap it around the bundles of string just above where the slider sits on the lines. The lines may start to come together at your shoulders now. Take the two bundles of rope off your shoulders and group them all together. Hold them in your left hand and rest them on your left shoulder, keeping the lines taut.

12. Now flick the material out to the right and left to cover the sides of the canopy-bundle in front of you and twist it into a seam along the back of the canopy. You may need to hold the canopy away from you and lean it on your hip to achieve this.

13. This next part must be done swiftly in order to preserve your work up to this point. Quickly but carefully, place your hands under the canopy on the side with the seam and swing it out and downwards away from you onto the ground. You must keep the lines taut at this point. The side with the seam should be lying on the ground.

14. Now is a good point to take a break if one is required, as your shoulders are no longer weighed down by the canopy. Check that the lines are still as straight as possible before moving onto the next stage.

15. Stand with the lines between your feet and kneel down, taking care not to disturb them where they lie. Gather the edge of the material with the label on it around the lines and hold it all tightly in one hand. Smooth the material away from you with another hand. Start to gather the material underneath at the seam and lie down on the bundle of material to try to get as much air out as possible. This is another good point at which to get some shut-eye as it is perfectly socially acceptable to lie on the ground on your parachute at a dropzone.
However, if this is not at this point desirable, continue to tuck the parachute underneath you until the bundle is as flat and compact as possible and then bring yourself back to a kneeling position beside the parachute.

16. Fold the canopy back on top of itself starting with the part near the label, a little at a time, keeping the lines taut. There will be a small, dark bag (called the d-bag) attached to a thick line. It is into this that you need to shove the folded parachute. This is a difficult process and may take a few attempts. Once the material is forced into the bag, use the elastics and rivets attached to it to pull the flap closed.

17. Now fold the lines, a little at a time, into loops and secure them with the elastics to the d-bag. This may cause your fingers to bleed a little. Continue until most of the length of the lines is stowed away.

18. Remove the heavy object that you placed in the rig earlier and bundle the d-bag with the loops of string on it into the container with any excess lines sitting under the bag. Then tuck in the risers using the appropriate flaps on the container.

19. The next step is to close the container. You may or may not need to sit on your parachute for a while at this point in order to squash enough excess air out of it to close it into the container. Take a pull-up and thread it through the closing loop on the front of the rig. Bring the tips of the pull-up together and feed this through the rivets on the three flaps at the front of the container one at a time, pulling tight and with force after each, to bring enough of the closing loop through the rivets in order to be able to push the closing pin through it. This requires strength and brute force, and often another pair of hands. Use your feet if necessary.

20. After the closing pin is in place, the hard part of the process is over and the parachute is essentially packed. Tuck the last small flap over the closing pin and push the line from the pilot chute under the flaps. Fold the pilot chute itself and stow it in the pouch at the base of the parachute with the handle sticking out.

21. Your parachute is now packed. Proceed to put your name on the manifest and get ready to jump.

22. Repeat steps 1 to 21 if desired.

Note: these steps are not recognised by any national or international skydiving body. While the process described is generally accurate, the grouping of tasks into numbered steps is merely this skydive's attempt to order the process into manageable chunks. As with any skydiving-related action, seek independent advice if you find any of the information in this guide to be misleading or at all questionable in nature.
Encounters with Archaeology

Archaeology is a process which reveals space which was once shrouded in earth. It speaks of layers and of finding edges within masses of material. Archaeology equates making. Making in a different way, almost subtractively, creating revisions of what is there already. I have seen archaeology in the making.

Ruins are the physical manifestation of archaeological processes and the experience of ruins is part of archaeology. A ruin in Ireland has different qualities to a ruin in Greece.

Ruins in Ireland are usually experienced in the rain, the sky a dense grey backdrop. There are animals walking around among the stones. There is no one else there or seemingly anywhere nearby. You trespass in fields and there are no signs to lead you to your destination. You find a castle or a ringfort in a field, covered in brambles like the setting of some Irish legend. Mythology and place intertwine in the imagination.

You hear the wind racing against itself, passing over stones and whistling through long, yellow-green grass. Your feet are ensconced in big socks and wellies but you still feel connection to the ground. Your feet pass over compacted soil or damp grass and you stand on stones that press up through the thin sole of your boot, to make contact with the arched underside of your foot.

The experience of archaeology in Greece is different. When visiting a place in the summer months, it is overrun with tourists. Your feet are in sandals and the dust coats your toes. The photos you take are marred by an assembly of pinks and reds collaged onto the yellow stone. The stones are hot and there is little shade.

But the experience of Greek ruins in winter is different again. You arrive, and there are less people. The people that are present are wrapped in dark coats and seem silent. You can’t see everything all at once because it is wrapped in fog. There are oak leaves on the ground at Olympia and it rains at Delphi. The Greek mountains are enveloped by low clouds and the air is damp. The places you visit speak more clearly to you somehow than they would if you visited them in summer. Maybe it is because there are less people there, so the voice of the ruin is more audible to you in the sharp silence.

You wander among fragmented columns in the fog and place your hand on the stone to find that it is damp and cold. Its mottled patina seems greener than you could ever have expected. Archaeologists slowly clear away earth in a corner of the site, which is roped off thinly from where you stand. Boundaries seem to break down in Greek ruins in winter. You are more free, somehow, to stray from the path and climb over walls; to experience archaeology at a slower pace.
It is this undetermined experience of ruins that makes them seem more valid as places. When the experience of a ruin is already decided upon and regulated, it makes for a less varied experience of that place. Often, we meet with archaeological complexes which are so protected that they have lost their appeal. They are caged in by roofs and movement through them is determined excessively by walkways. The imagination is curbed by the implemented desire of modern humans to control the site.

Often I am frustrated by experience of a ruin at ground level. Walkways through a ruin complex can detract from the experience of that place. They hide the ground from your view and there is somehow a permanence about them despite their light material substance. You are coerced into believing that walking this path is the only way to experience this space. These new paths mask the potential of exploration, of finding more things buried in the ground. At least if the ground surface is left as earth, while perhaps not the true ground level or surface, you can imagine that the archaeologist may one day again excavate here - that there is potential for someone to rework the site as has been done many times before.

Walking a place means knowing that place. It is necessary to visit a site to understand its context and to get a true sense of it. The spatial impression of an archaeological complex is immense. Words you heard spoken there are soon forgotten, but a spatial sense of the place remains ingrained in your memory.

There is also value in experiencing archaeology from above. It can sometimes be seen from that viewpoint as a gentle scarring on the earth’s surface. Ground and walls alike are read in the same plane. The nature of archaeological space may at times be understood better when seen from an elevated position. Sometimes walking amongst the walls of a ruin will not reveal how, for instance, walls are seemingly carved out of the ground; how the outer faces of certain prehistoric temples are backed into the earth like modern retaining walls.

Maybe the processes of archaeology are exactly opposite to those of architecture, yet somehow, they remain intrinsically linked. The archaeologist digs downwards, carves and brushes away fine particles to find walls slowly. The architect builds upwards and buildings are made as quickly as possible. Generally, slow building is not applauded. Archaeology works downwards towards the walls that were built upwards.

Archaeologists are concerned with how the building might have looked in the past while architects want to know what a ruin will look like in the future or how to repurpose it for the present.
The Hidden Banality of Skydiving

The door of the plane opens. For a moment I gasp for air. It is always a shock when the door is rolled back and cool air floods the plane. I feel the air curl inside my lungs. What I thought was breathing before was an imitation of what it could be like; up in the sky I breathe the energy of wind, not just static air. The first skydiver jumps. I shuffle in my turn to the edge of the aircraft to look down. I crouch on the ground next to the door. The wind takes my breath away. A body falls away from the moving vehicle. The ground moves by below. In an instant I have thrown myself arms first out of the door. I dive downwards and level off into a stomach-down position. The air rushes loudly past my face. Everywhere around me there is nothing. I check my altimeter. I do two backward loops in quick succession. I come level with the clouds and can measure myself falling against them. Only then can I realise how fast I’m falling. I feel the air pressing against my entire body as I hurtle downwards. I watch the ground below me for a while before doing my final locating of the dropzone. I motion a fake pull of the handle of the parachute. I scan the air around me and it’s clear. I check my altimeter again. My eyes are fixed to it now until it is time to pull for real. The hand of the altimeter seems to move at an accelerated pace as it nears 3,500 feet, the height at which I will pull. The hand brushes over the number and continues to glide anti-clockwise. My left hand moves above my head in front of me. My right hand scrambles to find the handle, behind me. I pull it. Everything happens quickly now. The canopy explodes above me in a ball of colour. There is a noise like a clap of thunder. The air catches in the fabric. It pulls and smooths it. It shapes it into a canopy above my head. The lines become taut. I am jerked upwards. I sway for a moment under the parachute. This all passes as if time is on some bizarre fast forward setting.

* * * * *

I go to the dropzone and there are grey clouds sitting above in the sky and everyone waits all day for the clouds to move away - but they don’t - and I go home without jumping.

Water drips from the Porter’s wing into puddles on the green floor and we draw pictures with the water on the floor using our feet and then we stand close to the large door of the hangar and look out at the rain.

Another day and the weather is bad and the gear all sits on the carpet nearby, waiting with us.

I make the journey up to the dropzone on two Saturdays in August and on neither day can I jump. The wind is too high and the faded weather sock sticks out in the wind at a right angle to the ground. We practise packing parachutes and stand in circles while we wait.

The weather turns bad after lunch today so we walk to Tallard to pass the time but all the shops are closed except the bakery.
The wind is up in the afternoon again and we all sit around in the hangar. Some of the men bring in the planes and everyone sits there together under the immense roof. We sit around and play cards and look outside and walk to the door and walk back inside. We lie on our bellies on wheeled creepers and speed around on them and slide under the planes. We sit by the walls and look outside and fill up our logbooks and wait. And the weather doesn’t improve and we all go back to the apartments and sit for the evening and complain about the wind.

The wind is up again and we are shown how to take apart a three-ring system on a parachute and put it back together in turns and sometimes we watch the packers pack up the last parachutes of the day and then they sit on the couches and wait.

When the bad weather rolls in, we tangle up some parachutes and try to unknot them.

The bad weather arrives quickly today and there are two or three people who are still packing their rigs as the planes are taken in. We play many rounds of cards and sit in a circle until we know that we will not jump today and leave the dropzone.

We sit on a timber platform and stare at the green floor and compare logbooks and look out the door at the orange flags blowing madly in the wind, and still we wait in case the storm will clear, but it doesn’t.

We sit waiting on the floor of the hangar in the weak October sun as tiny spiders weave webs around us. Skydivers put their names on the manifest and wait.

My name appears on the board for the final load of the day and I put on a jumpsuit and wait but it gets dark too quickly and the last load is cancelled.
Airports

The airport is a building typology common to most countries; common almost to the point of being boring. Some people find airports and all that surround them just that. Airports speak to me of travel and adventure and newness, but I will not contest that they are generally mundane and unmemorable in their architecture. Grey is the colour of airports.

It is hard to remember individual airports sometimes. Each one feels familiar somehow, no matter where you have landed, though they are never comfortable or homely.

I have sat in airports for hours, doing nothing. Perhaps it is because of airports that I know what waiting really is. I have grown to like waiting. It is almost better to sit and watch and wait than to actively try to pass the time. I feel that I have sat on the same grey perforated metal seat in every airport that I’ve been in and waited.

Airports are possibly the best kind of place for people watching. They are strange places because people carry around so much stuff with them. Everyone is waiting somewhere or going somewhere to wait. It is rare to see so many people moving about with so much stuff anywhere else. All my worldly possessions (that I have access to) sit beside me in one cabin-sized bag. I feel very aware of my stuff when in airports. I cannot leave it behind me anywhere safely. I am constantly afraid of losing my passport or boarding card or leaving my jacket behind.

The best visits to airports have sometimes been the ones between more airports, the places that are greeted and waved off very suddenly, when I am so disorientated that I barely get to change the time on my watch. The experience is short and there are times when that suits best.

Airports are great places to think. They are so grey that they somehow induce creative thought. I start to imagine where I am going (as well as thinking about where I’ve just come from), who I will meet and places that I might see. I imagine the stories behind the people that I see walking past in constant streams.

The shops are disinteresting and smell over-strongly of perfume. There is generally a sparkly black path leading through the store. The whole effect is disorientating.

I organise my life in an airport according to the next mini-meeting. I am constantly waiting for the next stage: to check in a bag, to go through security, for the gate to appear on screen, for boarding to begin, to get on the plane.
I think about what it would be like to be a passenger on a plane in the early days of flight. Travelling by plane has become so mundane that people sometimes claim to hate it. But really we are lucky to be able to experience flight.

What do airports do and why are they seen as such boring places? Maybe the excitement that they can bring, the experiences they allow you to access, make up for their utter boringness? Airports are places to say goodbye and hello, places which allow you to greet the familiar and the strange, places of speed and of stress, of waiting and boredom and slowness, of interaction and isolation. They are places of commerce and transition, points of departure and arrival, always too hot or too cold.
Punctuated Notes, or Reconstruction of a Journey through Greece

Notes transcribed from a journal kept of a journey through Greece made in January 2014.

Day 1

2nd stop. Mycenae. tholos. round, beehive tombs. treasury. ramp and lever. covered by artificial hill. diameter 14m. equal to height. relieving triangle. marble over it. lime. black indicates corrosion (inside). soft graves enclosed in a circle. circle A and B 16th century BC. remains of people of royal origin. Acropolis of Mycenae was surrounded by trees. built on hard limestone. Cyclopean stone. 50 years to build. 3 gates. Principal is the lion gate. attack tower from right. vulnerable. first time we have a narrative picture. earliest. king – column. lions – strength, protection, all religions. altar. Mycenae coat of arms. double doors. upper construction now lost. was mud brick. Agememnon’s grave? sound carries really well up here. Green to Purple-grey. so far away. Nemea gorge. N. Pass (where white building is).


raining now. 4th stop. food. souvlaki. tragedy. goat. comedy. on the way to Nauplion which was the old capital of Greece. Coming up: Mycenaean bridge. nearly 5. nearly dark. streetlights are on. Nauplion – Greek, Italian, Turkish elements. Pantazis. 5th stop Nauplion. 6th stop hotel. Raining.

Day 2
Left Nauplion at 8am. 3 hours to Olympia and then a journey to the centre of the Earth, Delphi. Lerna, marshy, swampy. Hercules, 9-headed snake. draining the delta of hydra river. building dams. over Erasino river, a nice town. (a place called liquid with a roof like a tent and peeling pink and yellow paint). I never appreciated the plains before, but in winter, with fog and surrounded by mountains, they are
beautiful. φουρνος. windy road. mountains. then Arcadian mountains and plateau. apples, pears, cherries. 600m above sea level. Tripoli. commercial centre. ΠΩΛΕΙΤΑΙ. windmills and huge solar panels. Megalopolis. power stations. Was that a kestrel, sitting on a fence post? Messina valley. Kalamata olive grove. 1st stop. Messina olive oil for insulating wood. easy to carve. cardiovascular diseases almost unknown. olive oil lamp. harvested nov-dec before fruit's fully mature. green oil. silver green tree. The Ionian Sea! Ionian islands. never under Turkish occupation. a few bumps in the road there! so many greenhouses! west receives more rain. N. river. hoods over chimneys. thaskala. police. Ζάχαρω. what town is this? it is full of Greeks. Pirgos? think I just saw an emu. a lake... spring baths of ica... ελιν (petrol) panhellenic. a sanctuary to be visited by Greeks only. Γ ΑΙΑ. small roads. like an island road. Alpheus river. boundary of valley of Olympia. Olympia. place of light. sun came out. soft soil. stadius. unit of measurement. feeling drowsy + hot. saw a bird in a cage through a window. Schliemann. OLYMPIA! alitis. sanctuary. little forest. round building is exceptional in Greek architecture. gymnasium. perstyle columns. interior. palestra. wrestling rooms. symposium. Doric column. like two fingers slope for roof. Ionic interior. Doric exterior. shellstone material. stucco cover. Theos the god. 3 servants of the god. a big house. priests. 3 families. permanent population of sanctuary. Pheidias statue of Olympia. workshop of Pheidias. aligned with temple. equal dimensions. workshop was equal to room where statue would be housed for lighting reasons. entering Altis, the sanctuary. clear boundary. normal vs. gods. oak. δρυς. tree of Zeus. oak leaves everywhere. that's why it feels like Ireland. also the colour of the stone. wild olive tree. (Judas trees in April are purple). Ptaeron. exterior. column. column original trees. reminds. 450's classical. characteristic. anyway, golden ratio. Doric, peripteral. German school of archaeology worked in it. so things were left as found. lion heads to drain roof. and daisies. Hippocrates. a place for political propaganda. enter Greek temple from east. promising to compete fairly. entering Olympic stadium. reconstructed arch. people sat on ground. Barrel vault. Bulgaria, Macedonia. Hera’s altar. Where the Olympic flame is lit. Museum. West pediment of the Temple of Zeus. Battle of Lapiths and Centaurs. East pediment. chariot race of Pelops and Oinomaos. Corinthia helmet. protecting face and neck. clay vases from Pheidias’ workshop. bronze objects. human body made for the impossible. male statue. fusion of masculine + feminine. Roman statues were polished. grand masters. preferred rough. statues like of Nero’s wife are made of prefabricated body with hole left for head. outside. sun is shining.

Food at Olympia. Now, journey to the centre of the Earth. 2 hours to Patra. these tall yellow grasses are so weird. they’re everywhere and I’ve never seen them in Greece before. I wonder if they’re cordelines. nap. suspension bridge. STOP. Turkish castle. almost sunset. now on continental Greece. From Rion-Antirrio Bridge. names/plaques. Nafpaktos. Turks. Venetians. harbour. medieval. headed for the coastal road to Delphi. aqueduct brings water of 2 rivers to Athens! it’s getting dark. Greece at night time. port of Delphi. road will climb now towards hotel. view will be a surprise tomorrow. so, in the hotel, the old one. hotel reminds me of a cave, and of Fallingwater.

Day 3
Leaving hotel. Delphi. 09.15. snakes know about death. Python. High street and low street Delphi. hotel on high street. Gaia. Delphi. house of dolphin. sanctuary of Athena Pronaia. different elements of nature balancing out here. the centre of the Earth. can only plant olive trees here. Fedriads. the burning ones. ion. gymnasium of Delphi. where boys went to learn. lessons. letters. gymnastics. music + 1 more. pro – before. naos – temple/boat (pronaia) pro refers to topographical or chronological. Athena, Apollo. 370’s BC. 3rd temple. rain!
originally made of wood. Doric frieze. originally wood. no marble planks nailed together. overhang. 3 planks together. wood roof triglyphs (3 planks). ope – hole. metopi. frieze – triglyphs + metopi. placing stud over nail. these were face down. pour melted metal to join blocks. lead. gorge home of Gaia + Python. Pythian games. site. near museum. coming from Elis. 21st March – 1st day of spring. pithea. oracle of Delphi. parenthesis. Apollo leaves here in winter Dionysus is master here. Temple – site of oracle. first oracle of year. Castalian spring gorge. keeping permanent representatives of each city here. Amphictions – neighbours. market. agora. flat brickwork – Roman times. columns. no fluting. easy to build basilica from. gateway. propylon. walking up ‘sacred way’ through sanctuary. 400 BC. APTEIO. Argos + Sparta. Spartans to the left of the sacred way. poet. son of Argos. inscriptions. political + indiv. propaganda. treasury of the Sicyonians. Walter Gropius to build embassy. sacred way. treasury of Athenians (Bravo koukla). sphinx marks a grave in Greece. rock of the sibyl. where Apollo killed Python. where oracle is given. laurel tree beside rock of the sibyl. island of Chios. grey-black marble from Chios. at the temple, the site of the oracle. Doric, peripteral. (like temple of Zeus yesterday). longer because 4 rooms in this, usually 3. two Greek inscriptions. warning ‘know thyself’ “not do anything in excess’ not to ask stupid questions. walk to centre. cult statue. this is 3rd temple of Apollo. made of local material, from the mountains. Trophonyus. architect. Pythia, she is in the basement toxic fumes from the centre of the Earth. hallucinating gases. only the priests could understand. go to war return not die in war. comma depends Byzantium where to build a town that will be a great colony. build city, sail strait between Asia + Europe. Istanbul, Constantinople, Byzantium. theatre. from above, temple becomes part of landscape. at the theatre in Delphi. Museum. dafni, Greek for laurel. archaic – old. all Greek gods have an animal and a plant. 128 BC earliest music on planet. armonian mundi. music notation. statues of kings. Antinoos. last god on earth. charioteer. eyes made of glass. unlike Apollo statue. this is looking at you. a god. lunch. 2.45pm. leaving Chalet Maniatis restaurant. Delphi...here is so beautiful in the rain. Andonis + Nikos. 10 people. passing through Amfissa. heading north. Eleonas village. so pretty on the hill. means olive grove. we’re up in the clouds. stop at Thermopylae for statue of Leonidas. for your eyes only, Bond film features Meteora monastery. tomorrow. leaving at 8am. icon workshop. encaustic technique. egg tempera. combined. passing Λαμία apparently. too foggy though. Thessaly. There’s Λαμία now. a submarine plateau in Aegean sea. Pindoos mountains. Katholik an a central church in each monastery. stopped at a huge place in the countryside. reminds me of applegreen place near Dublin. Thomaka town. Room in hotel feels Asian.

Day 4
Leaving 7.50am. Petra – rock. plain of Thessaly was a lake. Zindoos icons. workshop. Thessaly plain. Holy Trinity first. too foggy for photos. next, St. Stephen’s. so warm + comforting in here, smells like incense. heavily decorated. door connected naphxos to main church. Greek cross plan. 4 equal barrel vault with dome. screen, leonostisos. Apato – not to be entered. Apse. Always facing east. head of St. Karambakas. Built 1798. museum. liturgical vestments. a parchment. old refectory. θυμιατηρ. incense. a mountain profile. now going to All Saints monastery (Varlaam). can see Saint Barbara’s (Rousasis) from here. Jesus painted inside the dome in the main church. 12,000 litre wine barrel. Tower of b... tower of winch.

going to Kastraki now. handkerchiefs hanging. Sketes. holes in rocks where hermits used to live. railway station of Kalambaka. Theopetra
the rock of God. people were living in the caves. MYAOI? heading south to Athens to take highway at Lamia. my seat number on the bus is... Stop at Lamia. Théa café. Αφοί? pigeons and peacocks. another stop. a scarf. back in Athens. about 6pm.


Food at Olympia. New journey to the centre of their earth. 3 hours to Patras. The boat went the wrong way. We never saw them in Greece before I wonder if they’re conducted. They’re almost sumptuous. Roman statues were polished.
43

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kathedra.

neri palace. the temple of 

Athena. had a 250 bc. Scenic:

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Athena
Bibliography

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Thesis Project: Research and Analysis

In semester one, I experimented with a type of drawing which can describe the texture and substance of both ground and wall (or plan and elevation) simultaneously. It is concerned with the notion of foreground, middleground and background. These drawings also place an emphasis on the horizon line.
Skydiving sketch showing the texture of the plane floor underfoot and the texture of the fields far below
Skydiving sketch showing the compactness of the interior of the plane as experienced before the expansiveness of open sky.
Fragments/drawings which describe pieces of things and places which represent my thesis interests.
An early proposal for a skydiving centre at Butrint, Albania
I followed the processes of archaeology in my model-making and began to represent my proposed sites by carving out wax models, in the way that an archaeologist might extract material from a site.
Thesis Project: Site and Project

My thesis project is a skydiving centre on a bog in Co. Offaly. The site is a field - with a grass airstrip and a group of existing buildings - and extends to include the surrounding bog landscape of Offaly. The proposal is to build a thin timber raft to the South of this airstrip upon which this activity can continue to take place and where other activities can take hold. A new diagonal pathway reaches from the raft into the bog and towards an existing network of tracks. Walls grow out of the raft, made out of stacked timber and in the same way as the ground. The most densely occupied part of the building faces onto the landing field. The building is also tallest here in order to accommodate planes. As the building extends back into the bog, activity is less prescribed, and the project becomes a landscape of low walls among which people can spend their time while waiting to jump.
Zoomed-out site plan showing the context of the site with Tullamore to the left. I wanted to situate my project within a large-scale landscape which can be read from a great height.
Zooming in on the site, the texture/pattern of the bogs and fields can start to be read against each other.
Site plan showing grass airstrip and the location of proposed timber raft and diagonal pathway
Site plan analysis
Ground texture plan of the raft with walls
Zoomed-in ground texture plan
Sections taken through the project and the bog
1:20 construction section
Curved plan-elevation drawing of proposal