

CONSTRUCTING A POSITION

At the CA2RE Conference in Ghent in 2017 I presented a paper titled *PhD by Prior Published Work – A Case for Appropriation*, outlining a PhD that would develop a position between the conservative attitude to research that values explicit knowledge, and the liberal one where researchers reflect on the tacit knowledge embodied in their work. In the paper I referenced an essay by Julia Williams Robinson titled *The Discipline of Architecture* where she distinguishes between tacit and explicit knowledge and teases out the tensions between these two different conceptions of knowing, positing an “*Integrated Paradigm*” where the two approaches would be synthesized to their mutual benefit. She argued for an approach that was more grounded in the social and technical realities in which it operates citing the infamous destruction of the Pruitt-Igoe social housing project in St Louis, Missouri in 1972 – “*The critical questions that Pruitt-Igoe raised about the discipline of architecture could have served to expand its boundaries to include the social, economic, and political issue of understanding the needs of the poor. Instead, the discipline’s boundaries remain the same, with such problems defined as outside its primary domain.*”

While more recent theorists have moved towards a social theory of architecture, this movement has generally been at the expense of the technical expertise through which the profession of architecture gains its legitimacy. This paper will draw on the work of Bruno Latour to construct an alternative approach where the social agency of architecture is developed through technology and construction.

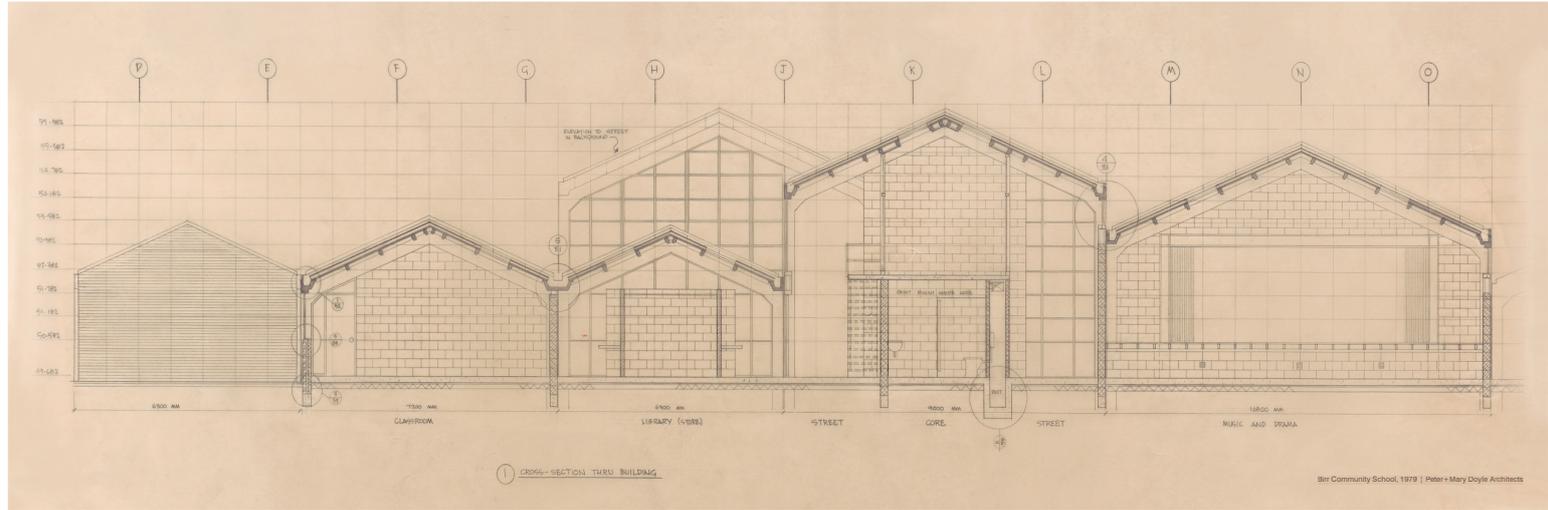
**Prototype and Manifesto**

In the course of researching a history of modernity in Ireland I studied the technical details of projects over a century of modernization. One of the conclusions reached was that the construction detail was an essential component of different statements of modernity at different points in history. Many projects have details as prototypes – bespoke responses to performative aspects of the project that explicitly manifest the intentions of the architects. This is consistent with the practice in philosophy of appropriating the language of construction to express abstract ideas and points to a different way of conceiving of the architectural detail – not as a linguistic construct – but as the manifestation of a social intention. This reading of technology links construction to wider social projects and practices and offers a principle to follow in the expression of architectural design.

**Keywords:** architectural detail, tacit knowledge, theoretical position, explicit knowledge, integrated paradigm

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**Constructing a Position - Prototype and Manifesto**

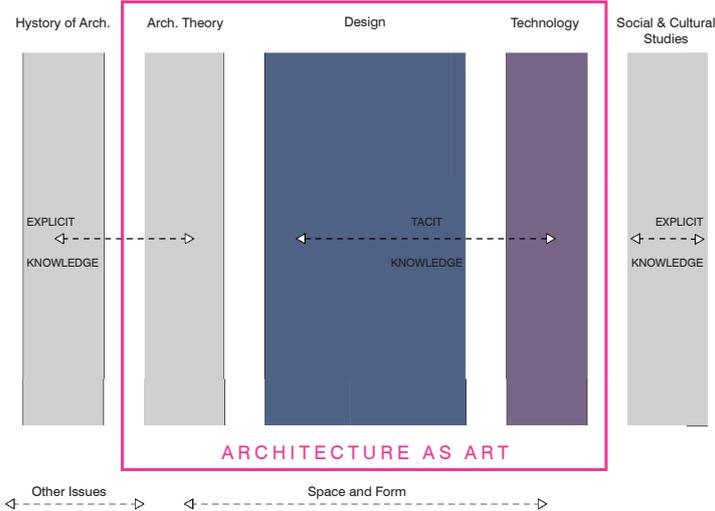


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*"The critical questions that Pruitt-Igoe raised about the discipline of architecture could have served to expand its boundaries to include the social, economic, and political issue of understanding the needs of the poor. Instead, the discipline's boundaries remain the same, with such problems defined as outside its primary domain."*

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One of the conclusions reached was that the construction detail was an essential component of different statements of modernity at different points in history. Many projects made details as prototypes - bespoke responses to performative aspects of the project that explicitly manifest the social and artistic intentions. This is consistent with the practice in philosophy of appropriating the language of construction to express abstract ideas, and it points to a different way of conceiving the architectural detail - not as a linguistic trope - but as the manifestation of a social intention. This reading of technology links construction to wider projects and practices and offers a principle to follow in the expression of architectural design.

Keywords - Architectural detail; Tacit knowledge; Theoretical Position; Explicit Knowledge; Integrated Paradigm.

Revised Disciplinary Diagram  
 After Julia Robinson + Bruno Latour

