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PAVILIONS AND POSITIONS

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ABSTRACT

At the CA2RE Conference in Ghent in April 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 concluding the paper I identified a number of pavilions that I had designed and curated (in collaboration with others) as examples of "dialectical critical practice" (Fraser, 2013) where the constructed work and the written words act together as a form of embodied manifesto. This paper will situate these works within the wider discourse on architecture in Ireland since the 1980s. It will examine the pavilions of Ireland for the Venice Architecture Biennales in 2012 and 2014, and the exhibition Making Ireland Modern which formed part of the centennial celebration of the Easter Rising in Ireland in 2016 in this wider context.

A PREHISTORY: DUBLIN IN THE 1970S.

I was educated in the School of Architecture in University College Dublin (UCD) in the late 1980s and I graduated in 1990. There was a particular discussion happening in the school at that time between two generations of architects educated before and after 1968. While Ireland was largely unaffected by the upheavals that effected other western societies in 1968, a number of crises crystallised and took inspiration from changes happening in Paris and elsewhere. One of these was in the school of architecture where the students organised a protest against the management of the school, led by distinguished modern architect Professor Desmond Fitzgerald, over the decline in teaching standards and the threat of withdrawal of RIBA accreditation that had been made in 1966 and again in 1968. The crisis was motivated by the student's self-interest rather than a wider social concern, and had more to do with Fitzgerald's management than any attack on modernism, but the net effect was that in 1969, the direction of the school passed to distinguished British architect, Professor Ivor Smith, who brought with him a group of young British architects as tutors. This group which consisted of Fenella Dixon, Edward Jones, Chris Cross, Michael Gold, Charles MacCallum, and Smith himself, became known as "the Flying Circus" - a reference to the British comedy series *Monty Python*.

The flying circus lasted for four years until the school was reaccredited and a new head, Professor Cathal O'Neill, was appointed. The circus had a significant impact on the generation of students that they taught and many of them went on to work in leading revisionist practices in London in the late 1970s including Stirling & Gowan and Colquhoun & Miller. This connected them to the theoretical discussions in the Royal College of Art (RCA) and the Architectural Association (AA) where at that time post-modernist and rationalist critiques of modern architecture were being developed. The overall thrust of these positions is summarised by Kenneth Frampton in his introduction to Alan Colquhoun's Essays in Architectural Criticism where has wrote - "the Modern Movement refused, by and large, to distinguish between a cognitive and an evaluative approach to reality. Instead it merely confused the two, attributing, as Colquhoun argues, a representational role to practical buildings or 'conversely burdening the representational function with the responsibility for solving practical building problems" (Frampton, 1981: p5).

Cathal O'Neill was a graduate of UCD who had gone, along with others, to undertake further studies under Mies Van Der Rohe in Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) in the early 1960s and had worked for a few years afterwards as an assistant in Mies' office in Chicago before returning to practice and teach in Dublin. This Miesian heritage linked him to Ireland's foremost architects at the time - Michael Scott and Partners, who had developed an

Irish Modernist school, as well as other notable architects like Peter and Mary Doyle who were applying Miesian and structuralist principles to low budget schools in a manner reminiscent of the early work of the Smithsons. Another Irish group had studied under Louis Kahn in Penn State in the 1960s and had returned home to teach the values of a situated modernism. By the early 1980s the teaching staff of UCD included alumni of Penn State, IIT, the RCA and Cornell University where Colin Rowe held court, and the older generation of modernists were gradually giving way to a younger generation of revisionist rationalists.

THE VENICE ARCHITECTURE BIENNALE 1980

A crisis had also beset the Venice Biennale, and in 1968 it was assaulted by demonstrators protesting that the event was "the receptacle of the commodification of art mainly intended to please the dominating class." This was part of a wider crisis in art which sought throughout the 1970s to redefine itself (O'Doherty B. 1976) and in 1973 the Biennale decided to reform its structures. "The new *modus operandi* tried to respond to the agency of the time by fulfilling many of the protestor's demands, including the abolition of the biennale's sales office and awards. A "new" and more "social" Biennale, renovated both conceptually and in its core organisation, would come to life, and among other things, would open its doors to architecture." (Szacka,L.C. 2015: p.100). In 1976 La Biennale appointed the architect Vittorio Gregotti as director and his Biennale was dubbed *"Biennale Anno Zero"*. For the first time architecture was introduced into the biennale in three separate places. While two of these were historical, the third was an exhibition titled *Europa/America: Architettura Urbane - Alternative Suburbane*, which "if not memorable as a curatorial act, laid the ground for many of the ideas that later resurface in the 1980 exhibition The Presence of the Past, by bringing together a group of twenty-five of the most pre-eminent figures of European and American Architecture to share and discuss their recent work and ideas - fostering the discursive turn in architecture." (Szacka, L.C. 2014).

In 1978 a major political crisis occurred in Italy with the assination of Christian Democrats leader Aldo Moro by the Red Brigade. After 1978 Italians found themselves ideologically orphaned, and there was an abandonment of faith in any collective form of liberation and a turn towards pleasure and hedonism that was termed riflusso verso il private (return to private life). That same year an exhibition titled *Roma Interotta*, *(Rome Interrupted)*, curated by architect and historian Paolo Portoghesi, was held in Rome. This exhibition featured interventions by twelve leaders of the emerging postmodernist movement in architecture in Nolli's famous eighteenth century map of the

city. The following year in response to the surge in hedonism, the long gone Venetian carnival was revived and the lagoon was invaded by people dancing in piazzas, something that had not happened in two centuries (Szacka, L.C. 2015). That year Paolo Portoghesi was named director of the inaugural Architecture Biennale to be held in 1980. Portoghesi believed in making the biennale a media event, and he curated the central exhibit titled *Strada Novissima*, a scenographic street of facades built inside the Arsenale building. It was the manifesto and launch pad of the postmodern movement. He invited Aldo Rossi to design a floating theatre, *il Teatro del Mondo*, that was brought along the Grand Canal on a barge and tied up at the Dogana to add to the spectacle.

The exponents of postmodernism practiced an ersatz architecture which celebrated its own scenographic tendencies, so that the paradox of representing architecture somewhere else was sidestepped by an architecture of pure representation that only really existed inside the chamber of aesthetics of the biennale (Jencks; 1980). Subsequent Venice architecture Biennales struggled to ignite, and the event was held intermittently over the next two decades until it became established as a regular event in 2000.

BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME: DUBLIN IN THE 1980S AND 90S

Irish Architect John Tuomey fondly recalled his visit to the 1980 Architecture Biennale; "We were in Venice when Aldo Rossi's *Teatro del Mondo* was towed in and tied up in front of the Dogana. We saw it arrive and being tethered, and we saw Rossi stepping out of his taxi and going into the *Teatro*. We were architecture tourists if you like, and we saw this little pageant going on. So we know what happens in Venice." Tuomey and O'Donnell were returning to Dublin after spending five years in London in the offices of Stirling & Gowan and Colquhoun & Miller, and they began teaching in UCD along with a group of their peers. Together they spread the gospel of anglo-Italian postmodernism and in a short few years the school was largely converted to this movement. Student projects modelled on *Strada Novissima, Roma Interotta*, and other exhibitions coming out of Italy and Switzerland proliferated, and the focus of many of them was Dublin city which at that time was suffering from vacancy and urban blight. In applying the Anglo-Italian model of postmodern urbanism to Dublin the young Irish figurative architects insisted that rather than it being a fashionable import from abroad, they were in fact rediscovering "Irish architecture" which had been lying dormant and unrecognised. Tuomey recalled that "We had to lay claim to, and also, actually, to invent. By calling something "Irish Architecture" we had to say that there is such a thing." (Tuomey, J. 2004).

The academic exercises practiced during the long economic recession of the 1980s gradually came to life in the post recessionary Dublin of the early 1990s. The young Irish rationalists formed a collective to build a *Strada Novissima* in 1991 which, though the project was never realised, laid the ground for their winning entry for the framework plan for the regeneration of the historic Temple Bar district as a new cultural quarter in 1992. Over the course of the 1990s, these practices got to build their vision for the city and won recognition for their work. In 1997 when a number of the new buildings and public spaces in Temple Bar were submitted for the annual AAI Awards, Kenneth Frampton was invited to lead the jury. In his report he commented "I knew of course that there was a strong architectural culture in Ireland, but I had no idea what this culture had been able to achieve in recent years; above all I had only the vaguest notion of the remarkable Temple Bar development in Dublin. Not that this is the sole story about the rebirth of Irish Architecture by any means....the vitality and skill displayed in this year's AAI Awards are surely exceptional by any standards, particularly when one has a "minor culture" as Milan Kundera would put it." (Frampton, K. 1997).

IRELAND AT VENICE ARCHITECTURE BIENNALE 2000 - 2010

Ireland had been a regular participant in the Art Biennales from the 1960s onwards so with the appreciation and public awareness of architecture growing in Ireland in the 1990s, Raymund Ryan was asked to commission a pavilion to represent Ireland in the 2000 Architecture Biennale. The budget was small and he selected a very young Tom de Paor to do it. De Paor's pavilion played on received ideas by making a small corbelled structure out of turf briquettes: "I am really interested in the cliché, that there's an underscoring of stereotypes or that there can be something in those national pavilions that's kind of cod but also potentially very profound.." (de Paor, T: 2013). The first outing was deemed a success and in 2004, O'Donnell and Tuomey presented their furniture college in Connemara in collaboration with commissioner Shane O'Toole. "We wanted to make something which in itself was representative of the architecture we have made in Letterfrack...its quite difficult because you do come into areas where you are beginning to overlap a bit with stageset." (Tuomey, J. 2004). In these and subsequent pavilions, stereotypical images of Ireland were introduced in order to represent a "minor culture" on an international stage.

The desire to create or invent a regional culture that these pavilions expressed was a strong feature of architecture in the second half of the twentieth century, but by the millennium it had begun to run out of steam. Even those like Alan Colquhoun who had advocated this approach in the 1970s,

were now openly critiquing it: "Modern postindustrial culture is more uniform than traditional cultures because the means of production and dissemination are standardised and ubitiquous. But this uniformity seems to be compensated for by a flexibility that comes from the nature of modern techniques of communication, making it possible to move rapidly between codes and to vary messages to an unprecedented extent. This greater freedom, this ability of industrial society to tolerate difference within itself, however, does not follow the same laws that accounted for differences within traditional societies. In these societies codes within a given cultural region were completely rigid. It was precisely this rigidity that accounted for the differences between different regions. In modern societies, these regional differences are largely obliterated." (Colquhoun, A. 1997: p22).

The figurehead of modern architecture in Ireland Michael Scott had become known in his early career for bringing modern architecture to Ireland. He had significantly won the prize for his Pavilion of Ireland at the 1939 World Fair in New York ahead of such future luminaries as Alvar Aalto and Oscar Niemeyer. Scott had made Ronnie Tallon and Robin Walker partners in 1957 and they had taken the practice in a more Miesian direction in the 1960s and 1970s, and had designed a series of major projects for the Irish state that won them recognition on both sides of the Atlantic. Just before Scott retired in 1975, they had been awarded the RIBA Gold Medal, a major international accolade.

The work of Scott and Partners along with that of other Irish modernists belongs to the first sixty years after independence when, as Kathleen James-Chakraborty has written "The challenge of establishing nationhood in ways that would be legible abroad spurred many of these (i.e. postcolonial) new governments, for example, to eschew local precedent and experiment with styles with global reach, first neoclassicism and later modernism." (James-Chakraborty: 2014). In Ireland, and elsewhere, in the middle of the twentieth century, modernism in architecture had a role in representing the modernity of the postcolonial state and the positivist and emancipatory values of modern architecture were seen to embody the freedom of political independence.

SHIFTING GROUND - PAVILION OF IRELAND, VENICE ARCHITECTURE BIENNALE 2012

In 2011 Culture Ireland and the Arts Council made an open competitive call for a curatorial concept to represent Ireland at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2012. The call asked for proposals that addressed three priorities: A theme that was significant in an Irish Context; A theme that is both inspiring and analytical in our current culture in Ireland and in the context of global

circumstances; Current architectural thinking and issues relating to the built environment in Ireland.

I made a submission and proposed an exhibition that would look at the implications of the globalisation of Ireland for architectural culture through the work of heneghan peng architects who are based in Dublin but who were working on three continents. As a practice they had from the start used the emergence of networked digital communications and collaborative practice to develop an architecture that engages with different places through shared experiences and values.

The exhibition grew out of our reflections on these questions of architecture and representation. We particularly wanted to avoid using models or figurative drawing methods and to instead create an immersive experience for visitors. The exhibition sought to conceptually link three sites - Venice; the Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre in Antrim; and the Museum of the Pyramids in Cairo. We saw that the element that united all of these places was water, and that water periodically enters the Arsenale when Venice floods. We wanted to embody a collaborative practice in this floating world.

Figure 1: Shifting Ground: Pavilion of Ireland at the 13th Venice Architecture Biennale 2012 (Photo: Marie-Louise Halpenny).

We also wanted to spatially terminate the central walkway of the Arsenale that had once housed the Strada Novissima by straddling it with our pavilion. Biennale director David Chipperfield had made some disparaging remarks about conceptual architectural design in his announcement of the theme of the Biennale, so we wanted to subvert this in a playful way and to poke fun at his ungenerous definition of *Common Ground*. I also wanted to announce a new direction, away from selfconscious definitions of Irishness, so I called the installation *Shifting Ground (Beyond National Architecture)*.

The specific response was inspired by Carlo Scarpa's treatment of the *acqua alta* in the Palazzo Querneli Stampalia where he established a datum, below which everything could be flooded and immersed in water. We adopted this in the pavilion of Ireland where we tracked the level of the flooding in the efforvescence on the brickwork of the Arsenale building and set this as a datum line in our exhibition space. At the centre we placed a highly unstable multi-pivot interlocking see-saw designed by heneghan peng with Arup, and we placed a sticker on the floor that read: "Please sit on the Exhibit". The result was a highly performative installation where people collaborated to balance the see-saw and moved their bodies along the benches to achieve equilibrium.

The walls were covered by a giant triptych of detailed drawings of every stone used in the façade of the Giants Causeway Visitor centre digitally generated by Joseph Swann. The details were generated by grasshopper, a plug-in for Rhino and were drawn directly by the software itself. We were the only exhibitors in the Arsenale who did not block up the windows of our space thus allowing the daylight, air and water in. Peter Cook got our joke and in his review for the Architecture Review, he wrote that "for its humour alone, the Irish see-saw is worth the trip to Venice. (Cook, P. 2012).

INFRA-ÉIREANN: PAVILION OF IRELAND 2014

The following year the Biennale Foundation appointed Rem Koolhaas as director of the 2014 exhibition and he announced that he wanted to look back at 100 years of modernity in order to look forward. The idea of an architecture biennale that would look at the impact of modernity was clearly a riposte to the postmodern exhibition of 1980, and the French historian Jean Louis Cohen labelled it *"the past of the present"* as a pithy inversion of the Portoghesi's *"Presence of the Past"*. Koolhaas' Brief to Participating Countries read - "In 1914, it made sense to talk about a "Chinese" architecture, a "Swiss" architecture, an "Indian" architecture. One hundred years later, under the influence of wars, diverse political regimes, different states of development, national and international architectural movements, individual talents, friendships, ran-

dom personal trajectories and technological developments, architectures that were once specific and local have become interchangeable and global. National identity has seemingly been sacrificed to modernity." (Koolhaas; 2014). His aim was to get all of the participating countries to address this theme.

The experience of modernity meant different things to different countries, and the history of the dominant cultures was a reduction in influence after the First World War, whereas the experience of countries that had been colonised was a gradual shift towards autonomy and political independence in the twentieth century. For a country like Ireland, where major cultural signifiers like language had already been erased, modernity became a means to re-make national identity after independence from the United Kingdom.

In response to a competitive open call from Culture Ireland and the Arts Council, I submitted a proposal with Gary A. Boyd, a teaching colleague, and we were successful. We proposed to research the development of Irish identity across the century suggested by Koolhaas through the development of ten modern infrastructures, and to write a book and make an exhibition of what we found. From the outset, it was conceived as a retroactive manifesto for modern architecture in Ireland and to emphasise the tectonic and social dimensions of modernism. We invited eight other researchers to join us and over a few months researched the development of the state from the appropriation of the postal infrastructure in the 1916 rising to the construction of large data farms and networks in the current decade. The research and exhibition were conceived as a matrix and we wanted to use a spatial expression of this directly in the making of the exhibition.

We read the infrastructural making of modern Ireland by architects like Scott and Fitzgerald as, in Bruno Latour's phrase, "a gathering of objects" and the realisation of an architecture where the opposition between technology and culture is blurred so that technology becomes cultural and culture technological (Boyd, G. & McLaughlin, J. 2015). We followed Stan Allen's criticism of postmodern architecture's focus on representation and argued for architecture's agency so that it act as an instrument capable of "transforming the human condition rather than merely expressing it" (Allen, S: 1999). In giving this spatial expression, we followed Koolhaas' invitation to participants to "look back to look forward" and drew inspiration from Jean Prouvé's steel structures for Le Corbusier's Heidi Weber Pavilion in Zurich in the design of our nomadic pavilion.

We had determined curatorial strategy where we would exhibit four images of each infrastructure across different scales: territorial; building; construction detail; and the filmic. To house these we designed a rectangular pavilion to stand as an open framework of modernity inside the Arsenale. We were interested in the readings that this would lead to as different infrastructures would be read in relation to each other and the framework itself would read against the historical structure of the host building. We also enjoyed the historical reading of a building with no façade on the site of *Strada Novissima*.

MAKING IRELAND MODERN 1916-2016

In 2015 The Arts Council of Ireland asked us to look at the feasibility of expanding the exhibition for a wider audience and to show it in 2016 as part of their celebrations of the centenary of the Easter Rising that began the war of independence in 1916. To do this we added another layer of content by sourcing historical artefacts relating to each of the ten infrastructural episodes such as some overprinted British stamps that had been used immediately after independence in 1921 until new Irish stamps could be issued. The artefacts increased the emotional impact of the work and helped it to connect to a wider audience. In Dublin we erected our expanded pavilion inside the Real Tennis Court in Earlsfort Terrace. This building had once been the building laboratory of the school of architecture of UCD before it moved to the Dublin suburbs in 1980.

CONCLUSION

Murray Fraser has described design research as 'a two-fold movement [where] critical practice has to form its operations around a dialectical engagement between ideas and practices [and] a very real task as a mechanism for a wider critique of architecture itself' (Fraser, M. 2013). In pursuing the latter, the pavilion as a transitory building type occupies a privileged position. Relieved of the burdens of traditional construction, it can represent a type of speeded-up architecture able to intimately and precisely respond to and convey social, political, economic or other contexts. For Barry Bergdoll the pavilion has often been a 'trampoline for invention' (Bergdoll, B. 2009). Acknowledging this potential, these pavilions of Ireland were conceived as embodied manifestos that sought to reconnect with and celebrate lost traditions of modernism in Ireland. In their development, acts of design, curation and research continually overlapped - the author of this essay had combined roles as designer, curator, and commissioner - influencing the emergence of key criteria: the incorporation within the pavilion's form of some of the qualities of its contents and the logistical conditions attached to its delivery, siting and spatial performance.

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