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Architecture Ireland

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THE LIVES OF SPACES

THE LIVES OF SPACES

The Lives of Spaces, Ireland's official entry at the 11th International Architecture Biennale in Venice, is curated by Nathalie Weadick, Director of the Irish Architecture Foundation and Hugh Campbell, Professor of Architecture at UCD. The exhibition occupies the first floor of the Palazzo Giustinian-Lolin, opposite the Accademia, and the scale, character and decoration of these typically Venetian rooms provide a setting that amplifies the curators' theme. Primarily using film and moving image, the nine pieces in *The Lives of Spaces* explore the central role of space in our society, how it frames and structures the patterns and practices of our collective life, from domestic to civic, from personal to public. The exhibition involves many new collaborations and experiments, which open up new ways of envisaging, designing and understanding space. Taken together, the nine pieces provide a spatial portrait of Irish architecture, and of Irish society.

The Lives of Spaces is a Culture Ireland initiative in partnership with the Arts Council, sponsored by the RIAI and the Embassy of Ireland in Italy.

SECOND LIFE

If there was one dominant presence, one unavoidable talking point, during the vernissage weekend at the 2008 Venice Architecture Biennale — if one thing was guaranteed to stop you in your tracks and prompt uneasy reflection on your relationship with the built environment — it was not the elaborate theatricality of curator-in-chief Aaron Betsky's brash centre-piece exhibition, but rather the persistent, near-apocalyptic rain. So forceful and unforgiving were the ongoing downpours that — so the gossip goes — even some of the most illustrious starchitects in attendance were left humbled on the soaked pavements as a result of overcrowding in the Arsenale prior to the Biennale prizegiving. In hindsight, it seems curiously apt that the drenched, well-dressed hordes were scrambling to gain access to an exhibition entitled *Out There: Architecture Beyond Building*.

At the Palazzo Giustinian Lolin, on the morning after the opening of *The Lives of Spaces*, Ireland's 2008 exhibition at the Biennale, the strengthening torrents had begun to transform the elegant ground floor hallways into a series of exquisitely adorned paddling pools. Upstairs, where the Irish show had been sensitively installed, a quite un-Italian gale was ruffling the curtains of the canal-side windows. The obvious, immediate impression was of this Baroque relic suddenly bursting into unruly life. Such uncanny unsettling of the perceived fixity of the building, such Gothic special effects, would have made sense, perhaps, as planned, playful features of *The Lives of Spaces*, since this was a representation of recent architectural practice that in many ways sought to go beyond representation, or to at least circumvent the orthodoxies of how the work of architects is captured and communicated — curators Hugh Campbell and Nathalie Weadick instead seeking to suggest something of the multi-layered and often mysterious experience of buildings, preferring movement, memory and imagination to static images of designed perfection.

Of central importance to this ambition was a proposed engagement with the medium of film: participating architects being invited to explore possibilities for reflecting on their work in a format that is fundamentally durational and that facilitates rapid relays between divergent visions of space; allowing, potentially, for fluid and plural articulations of architectural phenomena. The neatest, most precise expression of this filmic promise was perhaps McCullough Mulvin's contribution *Real/Unreal* — a contemplative pairing of contrasting images from their Waterford Library scheme that allowed us to compare still-life photographs of the building in its pristine, unpopulated, just-completed form with scenes of the quietly unpredictable near-present: instances of ordinary, routine public activity within these gracefully re-imagined interiors. In an eloquent text included in the Irish Pavilion's handsome accompanying publication, Niall McCullough noted that *Real/Unreal* "deals with the unfurling, constantly changing zone between the architect's ideal conception of spaces and the raw reality of their subsequent lives." How McCullough asked, does the "exotic circus of real life affect the visionary original?" It may take an especially generous openness to the diverse stimulations of everyday existence to see the day-to-day goings-on in Waterford Public Library as an "exotic circus", but the twinning of these sets of anxiously complementary images was nevertheless engrossing.

Other exhibits such as Grainne Hassett's film of Brookfield Youth and Community Centre in Tallaght and O'Donnell + Tuomey Architects' innovative model of their as-yet-unfinished *An Gaelaras* project in Derry (an Irish language cultural centre) were equally meditative in tone, and similarly intrigued by how the passing of time impacts upon architectural 'presence': turning the solid 'being' of a building into a flow of constant 'becoming'. In Hassett's case, the focus remained most fully on aesthetic potential: a series of lingering views of the changing light around and within this new social hub (expertly shot by artist Mark McLoughlin) highlighting sophisticated formal relationships, the camera concentrating on the building's careful patterning of strong colours. (Indeed, abstract values were

by Declan Long

quietly asserted over context and community in this determinedly modernist document.) O'Donnell + Tuomey's presentation was both assuredly physical — an intricately detailed scale-model — and, more importantly perhaps, highly suggestive of immaterial elements: this was a highly poetic, 'haunted' construction, employing light and sound effects to evoke the spirit of a space's life-to-come (the future is, as Vladimir Nabokov once said, merely "a spectre of thought"). In the context of Weadick and Campbell's proposed filmic parameters, O'Donnell + Tuomey's contribution might be viewed as an instance of para-cinema: the obscure but fascinating strand of post-conceptual art practice that argues for a type of cinematic work that does not depend entirely on the familiar apparatus of cinema — and perhaps such openness from categorical constraints, such transformative possibility, is fitting in relation to the cultural and social aspirations of the Gaelaras centre.

It was instructive to compare O'Donnell + Tuomey's newly imagined space of free encounter with the ruins of an infamous space of confinement in Northern Ireland: Dara McGrath's absorbing photographs of the derelict Maze Prison showed the wretched leftovers of a grim architecture of segregation and regulation, allowing us to dwell both on scattered historical fragments and on the possible 'afterlives' of such spaces. McGrath's photographic archive of this charged environment was one of a number of works that dealt — very diversely — with the intimate bond between memory and space, though in other cases, the enduring presence of the past was more poignant than traumatic. TAKA's intelligent take on representing domestic architecture involved the creation of what the philosopher Gilles Deleuze called a "crystal image" of time: glimpses of the past, present and projected future of a family home being creatively brought together in the flickering frames of a specially constructed zoetrope. Space, in this instance, is justifiably deemed inseparable from subjective and collective experience.

Similarly, Simon Walker and Patrick Lynch presented an atmospheric tribute to the more private projects of pioneering Irish architect Robin Walker, concentrating primarily on *Bótharbuí* on the Beara Peninsula in West Cork: a cherished family home and artists' haven that gives a sense of the less-seen, subjective and intuitive side of this prominent Irish modernist. The short, lovingly nostalgic film of *Bótharbuí* showed us a place apart from the world, a treasured sanctuary, but tensions between separation and connectedness, and between contrasting conceptions of place, seemed vital, allowing for further correspondences to emerge. A specific form of sanctuary was, for instance, of direct interest to GCA Architects, who reflected on their work for (and on the history of) the Sisters of Mercy Convent at Cork Street in Dublin — registering the continuing challenges faced by such a space of retreat in the context of a transforming city-scape.

Incidental connections could also be made to the elliptical, sculptural presentation by dePaor Architects, whose immediate focus was the urban sanctuary of the cinema. At the heart of the de Paor work (which drew on research for their Picture Palace cinema in Galway) was an investigation of the position and experience of the viewer — a crucial thematic strand of *The Lives of Spaces* that was dramatically extended by Grafton Architects' interconnecting films of two recent projects: for Bocconi University in Milan and the Department of Finance in Dublin. Here, extraordinary ease of movement was imagined between two relatively distant terrains, the eye gliding from images of Ireland to seamlessly interwoven scenes of Italy (and vice versa) in a way that encouraged the vertiginously dislocated viewer to identify points of regional distinctiveness while also, arguably, celebrating the exhilaration of cosmopolitan possibility. Let us hope that this entire — hugely successful — Irish architecture exhibition will find a similar ease of transition from Italy back to Ireland where it richly deserves to be seen once again. A second life for *The Lives of Spaces* now seems essential.

Brookfield Youth and Community Centre

Hassett-Ducatez Architects

The Brookfield Youth and Community Centre and Crèche sits in an area of strong social deprivation on an open tract in Tallaght on the edge of Dublin city. Its long and irregular rhythm communicates a slightly inchoate but perhaps beautiful spatial and even social order born out of a desire for 'specialness.' This is expressed through colour, light, structure and movement. The creation of the building was played out in a difficult economic and constructional environment amidst desultory disinterest and with a pervading sense of the possible ultimate destruction of the new place. Yet it has, like a survivor, persisted to give rise to a new phase of dialogue in that place on the nature of the inclusive institution. The exhibited film documents the character and purpose and the fledgling life in use of this new institution.

Filmmakers: Bang Bang Teo in collaboration with Hassett-Ducatez Architects



Bótharbuí - Patrick Lynch & Simon Walker

This exhibit tells the story of the house Robin Walker built for his family and friends on the remote Beara Peninsula of Cork, from 1970-72. Called *Bótharbuí* (meaning 'yellow road' in Irish), it comprises a settlement of three ancient and three new structures, on a steep wooded slope of several acres, facing across the salt-water Kenmare River to the Reeks of Kerry. In the 1970s and 1980s, *Bótharbuí* was a country salon, where the worlds of Dublin politics rubbed shoulders with the artistic community in an informal yet grand manner. The exhibit presents *Bótharbuí* not as an objective, geometric composition, but as a happening, a confluence of physical and perceptual phenomena. A film of the house is displayed centrally, while parallel screens chart its lineage, its influence and its legacy as an exemplar of the Irish villa.

Film Directors: Sue Barr and David Heathcote



REAL-UNREAL - McCullough Mulvin Architects

This exhibit deals with the constantly changing zone between the architects' idealised conception of spaces and the raw reality of their subsequent lives. Do architects ever dream of their spaces in use? If they do, are they visions of control rather than open-ended acceptance of flux? How does the exotic circus of real life affect the visionary original? Can they be weighted against one another? Can they be read in unison? And what might be learnt from the comparison? A pair of screens displays a sequence of spatial episodes from Waterford Library. Nine still images — which together capture the episodic nature of the work — were filmed again to make living but static images. These are then set against the exact same shots taken in real time, capturing the ordinary existence of the building in progress and the architecture framing that existence or being framed by it.

Filmmakers: Bang Bang Teo in collaboration with Valerie Mulvin and Niall McCullough



Sanctuary + Congregation - Gerry Cahill Architects

Religious life in Ireland has gone through huge changes in the latter part of the 20th century. Situations long considered immutable – the power and influence of the Catholic Church, the central role of the religious orders in education and health – have altered forever. Buildings of great significance to communities are being abandoned by those who can no longer care for or support them. Divested of all traces of their previous meaning, they became mute symbols of a lost tradition. The efforts to maintain a congregation and a continued sense of sanctuary at St Patrick's Convent, Cork Street form the focus of this exhibit. One film charts the historic continuity of the site and in particular its central garden. A second film focuses on a mature copper beech tree within the garden, which, almost miraculously, has survived the vagaries of social and economic change to stand as a symbol of enduring life.

Filmmakers/Photographers: Alan O'Connor and Ciaran O'Brien



Anchor and Animation - Grafton Architects

This exhibit compares the spatial experience of two recently completed urban projects – one in Milan and one in Dublin. Multiple sequences of film, split across two screens are used to explore the ways in which each building frames its occupants' relationship to the city. While the spaces of the Department of Finance Building are held behind a vertical weave of limestone, the Bocconi University makes a horizontal weave of spaces, a labyrinth, a city in miniature. The two buildings anchor themselves into the bedrock of their city. Both are geological outcrops: each is of local stone, limestone and ceppo, stone carved from the earth. Each building becomes embedded into the weave of its city. Buildings are static, the city is static, and life enters in. Buildings and streets lie in wait. What does the building see? How does the citizen see the building?

Filmmakers: Bang Bang Teo in collaboration with David Chandler and Grafton Architects



Delay - dePaor architects

Delay is a small research piece; an over-simplification and an entertainment. The material of the study is time – cut and continuous, sound and vision, real and artificial. Delay identifies with the forced intimacy of the cinema and amplifies the uneasy proximity of audience. Its subject is the act of cinema, focused on the in-between. The object is a compression of the space between a door and a window, a portrait and a landscape, scaled by the viewer. It is both monument and toy. Cinema suggests that a window may be the "indecisive combination" of projection and screen, inverted by day or night. The fixed nostalgic aspect ratio – "an oblong opening" – offers order and economy while releasing the potential for continuity and montage within the Galway Picture Palace to rewind and fast forward time and space.

Film Director: Peter Maybury



Mnemonic Tectonics: Constructing Space through Memory and Ritual - TAKA

Architecture can offer spaces in which memories are born, remembered and re-enacted. This display follows the journey of a Dublin family moving from their life-long home to two new homes, one for the parents, another for a daughter and her new husband. A method of meaningful place-making is pursued through an architecture based on memory and social ritual. Generic domestic space becomes a landscape of psychological significance, imbued with the past lives of its future occupants, yet ready to be appropriated as a new start. A triptych of films charts the past home, enduring present lives and future spaces of the family. This anachronistic group faces each other as contemporaries in an introverted viewing space of reflection and layering. The object is conceived as a zoetrope, an early precursor to film, but one where the persistence of vision is replaced by the endurance of memory.

Camera, editing and sound: Ealiona ard na Geise teo – Genevieve McGill, Philip Mahon



An Gaeláras - O'Donnell & Tuomey Architects

An Gaeláras, a cultural building for the Irish Language in Derry currently under construction, has a glass-roofed trapezoidal courtyard that is carved through the four floors of the building with stairs, bridges and platforms crossing and overlooking the central space. Light spills into the central court through an inverted roof light and the different functions of each floor plate are made legible by the complex overlapping geometries of the structure. The exhibit consists of an abstracted model of the courtyard space with an inbuilt light and sound installation. The visitor approaches to observe the life of the space within through deliberately placed apertures framing events. On engagement with the model, a light and sound sequence is triggered, casting shadows across the interior which illustrate the passing of day into night to the accompaniment of a projected soundscape.

Lighting: Nicholas Ward
Sound: Jürgen Simpson



Deconstructing the Maze - Dara McGrath

(in association with Robinson MacLwaine Architects)

The Maze/Long Kesh Prison has for over 30 years been a symbol of the Troubles in Ireland. Recently it was decided to demolish the former prison and to build a new national stadium on the 360-acre site. Through an extensive photographic survey of the prison during demolition, Dara McGrath explores what happens when space comes to the end of its life. Does the process of deconstructing and destroying the architecture of containment also erase the memories, or are they intimately wedded to the space that is being left behind? What happens to a space when its people, in this case its prisoners, are no longer needed there? And can a deeper understanding of the voids rather than the container, also inform our understanding of the creation of architecture?

Photographer: Dara McGrath

The Lives of Spaces runs until 23 November at the Palazzo Giustinian Lolin, 2893 San Marco, San Vidal, (Vaporetto: Accademia). Open daily: 10.00—18.00 www.thelivesofspaces.com



The Office of Public Works Architectural Service

(The New Wexford Opera House, Wexford)

The Office of Public Works Architectural Services is the premier State architectural practice, and provides the full range of architectural services in connection with the portfolio of existing State property holdings, historic and contemporary, and with new construction projects, both directly for the State and for bodies promoted or assisted by the State, as in the case of the new Wexford Opera House. Klaus Unger, Assistant Principal Architect, has been involved in works carried out to most of the major cultural institutions of the State over many years; Ciarán McGahon, Project Architect for the Opera House, has had wide experience of involvement in a variety of building types for the OPW.

Keith Williams Architects Architects

(The New Wexford Opera House, Wexford)

London-based Keith Williams Architects is multi-award winning design firm with a fast growing international reputation. Williams and fellow director Richard Brown have been active in Ireland since 2001 where major projects in addition to the Wexford Opera House include the multi-award winning Athlone Civic Centre 2001-2004 and Clones Library & County HQ, 2004-2008 just completed. Elsewhere, in *inert alia*, the Unicorn Theatre, London was completed 2005, The Long House, London in 2007, whilst at design stage the firm is working on the new Marlowe Theatre complex in Canterbury, and the new District Museum in Chichester. The work of the firm has been published worldwide.

DTA Architects

(Lighthouse Cinema, Smithfield, Dublin)

DTA Architects are Derek Tynan, Niall Rowan and Colin Mackay. The practice was established in 2005 and has successfully realised numerous projects. A commitment to quality and design underpins the work of the practice in tandem with a proven ability to deliver complex programmes within existing urban contexts. Current work includes urban design and masterplanning; educational, residential and commercial building design; interior design, fit-out and domestic projects.

O'Donnell + Tuomey Architects

(Trinity Irish Art Research Centre, Trinity College, Dublin)

O'Donnell + Tuomey Architects are currently engaged in the design of cultural buildings, schools, housing and mixed use buildings in Ireland, the Netherlands and the UK. Sheila O'Donnell and John Tuomey have taught at schools of architecture in the UK and USA; currently Sheila is a studio lecturer and John has been recently appointed Professor of Architectural Design at University College Dublin. They represented Ireland at the Venice Biennale in 2004 and won the RIAI Gold Medal in 2005. A monograph *O'Donnell + Tuomey Selected Works*, featuring fifteen projects from 1991-2004, has recently been published by Princeton Architectural Press.

Newenham Mulligan and Associates

(Tullamore Courthouse, Tullamore, Offaly)

Newenham Mulligan and Associates are a progressive practice of Architects, Project Managers and Interior Designers with offices in Dublin and Limerick. Tullamore Courthouse is one of a number of Courthouses they have completed.