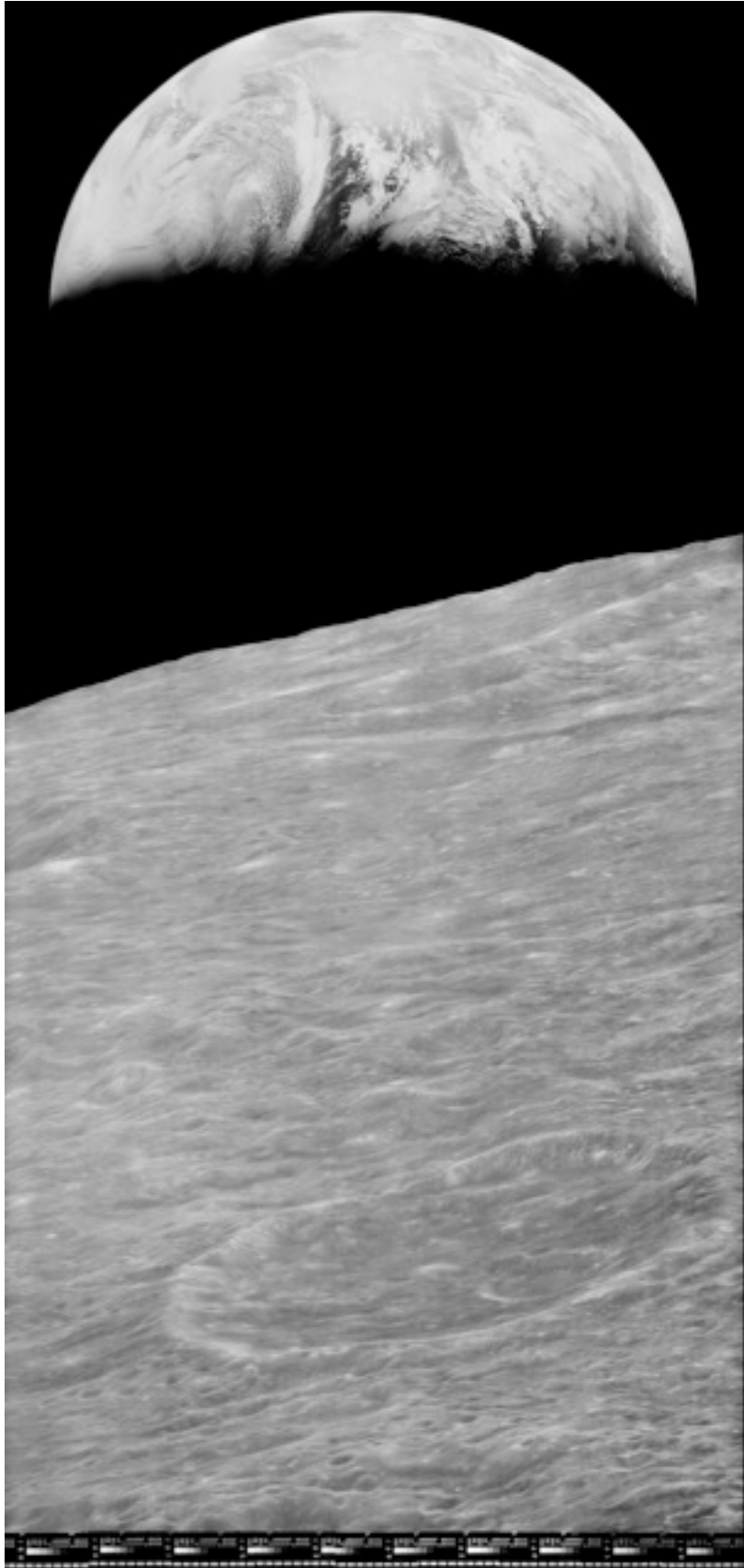


What I am going to talk about, the built environment, and the world we've created, as distinct from the natural world that preceded us and persists despite us, is clearly very complex – simply due to the fact that its form describes how we as humans have transformed the earth –the physical state of that transformation - and in our use of it, we are all involved, and our planning of it we all participate. Our transformation of earth – quite literally how we understand, use, imagine, design, occupy the environment –is so complex at least partially because it is a world that, unlike nature, we humans created, and that we almost exclusively inhabit and use.

I'd like to first suggest that we need now to think in an abstract way about this man-made earth or man made part of earth – in order to get at some concepts, in order to be able to draw new relationships, in order to look at things as they are, afresh.

Distinctions : distinguishing between nature and artificial.



This is an image of earth taken 42 years ago; that is, the earth as it was 42 years ago.
Then we found out that earth was in fact round, blue, white, complex, fragile, in a

word beautiful. This earth, this IMAGE of earth that we saw, is an entirely natural earth – it is an image of earth that we can imagine is untouched by human acts, and by human understanding. we understood it as a unity, a fragile unity.

This is also an image that has changed the understanding our relationship to nature; we see earth as natural, yet we see it for the first time after having inhabited, and worked on this nature for thousands of years. or more. In the 42 years since this photograph was taken the human population has doubled. So one imagines that this image, invisible to humans for most of *this generations'* time on earth has experienced an exponential growth in the life time of a middle-aged person. When one views the image of earth from 42 years ago, one can imagine the earth empty of artificiality, as it once was one day; in this image we allow ourselves see the earth as completely natural thing; totally outside of human action and creation – but it is not that; as we get closer we see the earth's surface impacted by man's artificial nature – societies form now so large. that it perhaps has become the fundamental conditioning factor of human existence. That is, the produce of human nature, an artificial world, as overtaken nature, as the conditioning aspect of society, and therefore the future. We know that it has not always been this way – In Ireland the landscape has been shaped by man for millennia through agriculture. This agricultural shaping was something most people shared in that existence depended upon it, however in the present day, most people share an urban experience, irrespective of where they live...] In Ireland the development of the landscape has in the past 15 years been transformed into an urban landscape – extensive, sparsely but evenly populated limited only by the fact that this is a discrete land mass. One could say that the island is now a city – a vast network of places, of highways, of green, of a nature who's difference is objectified even more strongly through the articulation of the desires of man.

We have created and formed by us; no natural process. brings our the physical landscape. we have created into form; no natural process creates houses. roads, power stations schools, hospitals., airports networks

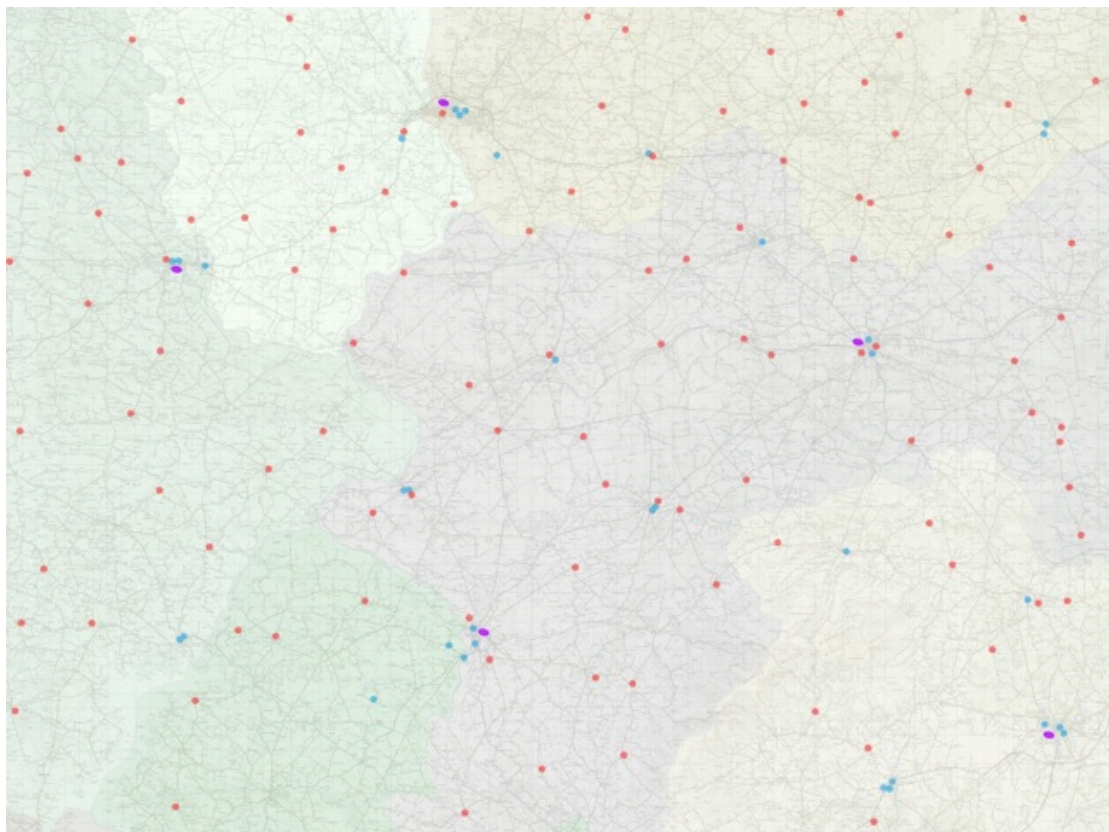
Power lines around limerick

Our awareness of any relationship we have to this earth has in fact recently been inverted, from one of dependency, the “mother earth” the protective sheltering nature

that is terrifying if not respected, and somewhat arbitrary in the pain it inflicts – to one of independency –[] we can live forever, we can develop bigger, faster, we can drill more, we can usurp resources independent of their effect on the planet – to now, the current state.

The term City has come to describe and to be that artificial condition at its most extreme– we know that most people on the planet live in them and will live in them increasingly in the future – but the city as a planned entity cannot be simply understood that way because it possesses both an artificial and natural aspects that are equally part of the human condition.

In Ireland we are only starting to get our head around the idea of this new city;



Map of primary and secondary schools across 6 counties

the colonization of the city has been a slow process; the identity which is associated with Ireland was not located in the city (Cartoon) until very recently (Counties + Schools) and we could say there is a juvenile quality about how our cities are used; virtually all of us if we don't live in a city lead urban lives; that is we don't live off

the land, on a farm. we've modernized and become urban; it is this question of the urban life, and its affect on our understanding of the and planning of the built environment, this artificial world we inhabit that I want to focus on in trying to gain an understanding about the relationship between cities and regions in Ireland

Have we had an impact on earth - ? in other words have we affected the way it looks; have we altered its appearance- certainly we have, The objects and systems we design, create and bring into existence compose and condition the present. they are both natural and artificial and there is a relatively simple and intuitive way of understanding this difference; natural things are here, we are in the process of discovering them, artificial things we create + build. The natural and the unnatural or artificial are in a relationship of balance or imbalance; entropic? What follows is a series of photographs I took from the air across Ireland. They show various forms of development.



A belief system evolves from this man-made physical reality; (Lehman Bros> Barcley) a dynamic unbalanced relationship between the spatial experience of the landscape, our visual consumption of the built, result of an ever evolving belief system, that system itself conditioned by its experience of the physical present: that society understands it this way is irrelevant : that it is this way society understands it is only proved by our cultivation of history and objects that compose it. *Eiffel Tower, street theatre 2008*

So this town (Wexford), this hotel we are in, express something of the time from which they come, but they are also conditioning elements of the present precisely in the same way that the Eiffel tower does within its city.

I've been asked to talk about the city and the region ; I come to this topic knowing very little about it and what I do know has been gained directly through my experience working in Ireland with local authorities designing headquarters buildings in Limerick – I first arrived there in 1998 to design the county council HQ –

The crescent, Limerick

At that time Limerick County Council was located in the old Georgian heart of the city on O'Connell street ; moving from the Crescent to the Crescent: the site was next to a shopping centre in Dooradoyle, The joke at that time was that the county building is going to be in the city again – in reference to the boundary extension – but by 2003 this had ceased to be a joke. We embraced this task of making a civic place in an environment who's reality challenged our basic assumptions about what 'civic' meant – a landscape of cars and shopping, the hub of a very busy county. When Limerick CoCo moved into it's new building it was I suppose a representative movement; the county was growing and strongly, the city dying and quickly – nothing epitomized more the fact that the county wanted to grow; the desire was there, the motivation the ambition, the city assumed it was going to grow on it's own terms – the terms of the historical city; the city of course it is going to grow – we know cities, we love and treasure cities don't we; but the facts belied a complacency and the city continued to decline.

When I arrived again in Limerick, this time to start a new school of architecture at UL I found a very divided place. ; a city, but not a recognizable city – a city that was divided in values, divided in populations, in its relative sense of equality and chance for the future, in an economic time that was bent on one thing : development – the sites that developed were the sites that were easy and cheap to develop; the complexity of the city only presented headaches – green fields at the edges of the city could be easily rezoned, or easily built on without the issues of the planning system within the city, the contested boundaries, the multiple agencies that are at work; so the county grew and the city shrank.

In April of 2008 we at SAUL (School of Architecture University of Limerick) invited the Limerick Regeneration Agency, Limerick City Council, Limerick, and Clare County Councils, the Midwest regional authority, and the Department of the Environment into the University to hold a forum we called : CIVITAS - this came about as we slowly realized that Regeneration was a project understood differently by different groups, it was a very wide group with whom to communicate ; facing a very complex problem in the most artificial of places.

The agencies at work in Limerick to rethink it are multiple, diverse and uncoordinated – partly because everybody feels they have been given a role in thinking about it, which is accurate, however boundaries have been drawn not only around the areas that each agency has remit over, but also the method through which the overall strategy is worked. The moment these boundaries become not limits of development and administration, but limits of thinking, they need to be lifted. That is fundamentally part of how the city has transformed – urbanity is diverse, and complicated. The city has in the case of “Limerick” the city incorporated long ago, has become an expression of modern Ireland’s problems; of inequality, of ambivalence, of a new urbanity, while the region “Limerick” - Limerick and Clare Counties, embodies a new urbanity, and has continued to grow and develop. These ways of seeing the same physical landscape are displaced by the reality of the places that compose it; Limerick has become a vast and continuous city, a centre of human development in education and thought, a tourist hub, with different characteristics and qualities, which are all valid parts of the physical and experiential reality one gets today, but articulated in language by outmoded boundaries and ideas.

The symposium was an event full of energy and excitement – views were exchanged plainly in ways not previously possible because the platform of the University offered something that did not exist within the agency of any of the governing authorities or the regeneration authority; a platform from which to discuss, to negotiate, to exchange. This was Valuable and expressed the optimism that people have about the city – not just Limerick, but the city in general in Ireland as a viable form - because our image of it is as false as our image of the earth as nature – our imagination about the city – is limited by our historical notions of it which are in direct conflict with the reality we experience daily; this city as the best expression of the common realm is

radically inadequate. Therefore we need to find new ways of thinking about it; but how -?

1. The city could be re-envisioned as the expression of life in common. The physical fabric, the network of roads and sewers and communications networks, the buildings and energy delivery systems, are simply the man-made world that we share, that we have designed, thought about, and brought into existence directly, and that has a relationship with nature, and gives meaning and identity to people.

To achieve this a new era of the common realm would need to be established; an expanded idea of what being civic means, and what the civic realm includes – The public, the civic body, is becoming more important as it gains more critical mass on a fixed territory – population increasing on the planet and on the island – and is reforming itself; discussions about a new biosphere, a new environmental consciousness are coming with the push of the next generation, but to be fully embraced they need to be simultaneously part of culture, part of economics, part of health, part of education; they are not parts of a whole, but together form a diverse assembly of the kinetics of becoming – Ireland once prepared to think differently about its physical environment and how widely it is able to consider the ramifications of how the physical environment is re-imagined, re-cycled, and re-used, without adding one more house or one more brick -

2. “Development” becomes “Design”; To deal with this new condition – no longer defined by administrative boundaries, or at least one that functions well outside of them in reality, we need to employ new strategies; I would like to suggest we re-cast how design is employed; typically design is thought of as a top down activity; creating an overview, a masterplan, but we can think of design simply as another part of our brain; design intelligence, or design thinking, that is available. design, as opposed to development offers a way of thinking about and planning the world that combines the incompatible, society and nature, and gives the dynamism of society a necessary mode of thought;. (the famous statistic that more ants live on the planet, by weight, than humans, and if all of the ants died the earth would perish, if all of the humans died it would flourish demonstrates the persistence of ants is essential and utterly without development) Design is simply a way of thinking about, acting in,

being in the world. Design thinking and Design Intelligence could become part of how we live and breath and communicate; part of education part of health, part of energy, part of culture– the specific tools that design intelligence uses; to be able to draw as a form of communication of complex ideas and intelligence to value abstract thinking, to draw embraces systems of objects and systems of society as fundamentally different, but fundamentally invaluable to each other; objects are notoriously difficult to change once made; they immediately enter in the natural cycle of degradation and decline; we have to think about how to dispose of it, be it nuclear waste or chewing gum. design offers to us a different way to see the world; not as constantly driven by the demands of a capitalist, mono-valued society where everyone aspires to the same thing (house, BMW, refrigerator, TV), but of a society where building new things is not as critical as re-inventing our understanding of the present, including the objects that exist in the present but were created in the past. The Acropolis was not designed as the one of the worlds most successful and “sustainable” tourist sites but it is; it was designed for quite another purpose which we only understand through its persisting.

The Development Plan – the development plan as a document is seen by the public largely as a tool of development; rezone a site – it can now be seen as a way of understanding the full potential of the future – not coming out of a past that holds it back nor of a present that is too constricted only by the limitations of imagination;

The County Development Plan could be renamed **the County Design Plan** – this would recognize the value of design as a way of thinking that incorporates naturally everything – bringing together the myriad of institutions and agencies vying for space on the page, not in a monolithic way, but in a discursive way; understood through design society’s physical manifestation can start to occupy the extreme flexibility that society is capable of. The inclusion of health, education, transportation, energy, movement, consumption, networks have been suggested previously within the process of local government reform, but not adopted perhaps because of the it may not have been realized at the time that drawing interrelationships between these things would be possible or beneficial, or that the method of thinking about seemingly incompatible issues was not considered; that of design.

When regarded as a design, that is not as a framework, not as a piece of a larger plan or not as one part or another's particularities, but as a synthetic and dynamic intent; the direct result of human creativity brought into a set of tangible relationships a design becomes inclusive; inclusiveness is not about being there, inside the ring, it is about forces colliding, frictions producing positive tension, and can create the potential to rethink the categories of policies we currently employ:

3. New categories of policy are formulated: New categories of policy might inform how the plan is made and how its parts are assembled; It might have for example a **policy for the development of neighborhoods:** to replace the 'housing' policy – neighborhoods are composed of houses, and of schools, and of recreational facilities, and of streets and roads and lanes, and of doctors surgeries, and of electricity networks and recycling networks. A neighborhood is more durable than a house; houses are too specific and individual; neighborhoods are civic and engaged with society. Houses are, in the end, a subset of a neighborhood, and our policies should be derived in such a way as to prefer a higher order of concept.

Or by having a **Policy to Create a City of Health:** the city through its strong communities that protect against loneliness and need, the city welcomes generations of people living next to each other, with access to a wide range of facilities and services, a city where people are living healthy lifestyles, eating well, getting exercise, a city of health is directly connected to green spaces that are the lungs and the public places of the city, places of recreation and safety comfortable for all generations.

By replacing the 'Retail' policy with a **policy for the Continuity of Urban Fabric** – the history of the city is a history of change, the city fabric outlives its commercial uses and must possess durability, persisting after the market conditions have changed. The durability of urban form is frequently under planning laws identified as one of its greatest nuisances; NIMBYism, Conservation legislation – both embody thought the durability of the fabric which must be supported and sustained – not in exclusion of retail and other types of commercial development but with policies that support equally both in balance.

Or a **Policy to Harness Knowledge, Intelligence and Creativity** – developing the knowledge infrastructure of the city, create strong and strategic partnerships between local authorities and Universities (by having them sit on the SPCs etc), by concentrating other activities around existing knowledge zones that are spread across

the city fabric; this already happens ad-hoc through a myriad of organizations; why not make it part of the development plan. Such a policy would recognize the centrality of creative culture, to drive enterprise and employment ; the existing creative community needs strengthening, coordinating and connecting, Creativity follows low rents – make it easy for art to thrive through imaginative use of the transient ness of art –through the strategic use of derlict buildings and empty lots, People who train in the city need to remain in the city; fashion designers, artists, architects, graphic and product designers, engineers, and other creative professionals need to cultivate and grow within the city – establish enterprise and knowledge transfer centres for the creative professions within the city.

A Policy of Shared Identity; (Culture and Sport) the city is a single artifact that is used in single moments differently; when in Limerick the city is taken over by Rugby, or when parts of the city are used as space for people to gather and meet, or move within to get to school, or to work, or to buy meat at a butcher shop; these things are also part of our identity.

And replace transportation and energy with a **Policy for Natural Infrastructure;** articulating the important relationship between man and nature, understanding the role of balance within that relationship and the need to re-balance our policy from a need driven policy to a policy driven by understanding.

4. Catalyst for new thought; research within the University To do this, to change policies effectively we need a catalytic device that can give pragmatism access to intelligence and knowledge? We need to be able to connect in a creative manner people representing different disciplines and different interests to invent through their interactions a new way of working, living, educating. I believe this exists within our centres of higher education – our Universities and Institutes of Technology are now more relevant as partners in a much more strategic sense for understanding the build environment and planning; one that is closely linked to the ethos of the University in it's service to society – of helping to expand the idea of what is included within the 'common realm', helping to precise and articulate the civic values that underpin society, and what they are capable of inventing. We have an opportunity to apply our best research, our brightest and best people to the problem of how to imagine and recycle our understanding of the built environment, cities, energy, movement systems, educational systems, health, etc. Our siloed ways of thinking are routed within

competing or separate and non-communicative sectors; the ESB, CIE, HEA, Dept of Education & Science, we need to find ways of bringing these institutions together on the way in which we construct the physical us – one way we can start to do this is by creating new strategic partnerships between the University and the Local Authority specifically concerned with the culture and understanding of the built environment.

At SAUL we believe there is no such thing as a school without consequences – and we want to connect directly with the implementing arms of society – with government, with bodies and groups that decide about infrastructure, about education, of health, of movement, of energy, of culture, because we believe that ideas are necessary, and an environment where the power and beauty of ideas is the primary is the motivation, is urgently required to think through the very challenging problems of our time.

At SAUL we aim to provide a forum for negotiation – we can inform local government by providing a platform, Intelligence, Knowledge and ideas – and to be relevant and to be consequential this has to be framed within the context of Local Authority actions. Because the prescriptive spheres within local governance do not exist at the University, a strategic partnership is possible that builds the idea of the local, out from the roots of the local itself : connected directly to the people, the issues, the problems, and the solutions that are available as part of the common domain – not imported.