



Ruanne Hunt
“Architectural Entropy”

Architecture and Time
Research and Innovation

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Transgression

“It appears that there is a certain point in the mind where from life and death, reality and imaginary, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable cease to be perceived in a contradictory way” - Andre Breton *The Second Manifesto*.

Architecture and Time. Over the ages many famous architects, thinkers, philosophers, artists etc have argued their opinions on the meanings, fundamentals and driving principals of architecture. Form over function. But what truly is architecture but the marking of time? It is a brief glimpse at history, a very particular moment of a very particular thing. It is a very physical embodiment of an era, of life, death and inhabitation.

Architecture as a whole is a transgression. It is a paradox between conceptual aims and a sensual reality. The concept of architecture is in reality absent from the actual experience of the space. Yet the experience of this space is completely dependent on the questioning and conceptual thinking behind it's design. This leads me to believe that architecture is made up of two interdependent yet mutually exclu-

sive terms.

This then begs the question of what is architecture? Is it a mere concept or is it the reality of the space? This would lead us to believe that architecture in-fact manifests itself at the junction of these two concepts. It lies in the moment between concept and reality, the moment between the ideal and the real, the moment between life and death. The moment of architecture. This is when life begins it's descent to death, where the weathers of time tarnish the new. It is this in moment of the human touch, this interaction with life that architecture becomes more than a concept but a vessel to house habitation, life and history. Architecture then captures a moment in history and is molded by the physical and social accolades of time, while it per-sues it's transition from life to death.

“Society expects architecture to reflect it's ideals” - Architecture begins at life, at the ideal imposed on it by it's creator. It is rapidly cast into transition to death, to reality. The moment of habitation, of weathering and rot takes over and the architecture is

given a true meaning and a true life. (Where life after all is a mere transition to death). It is this putrefying building that is detested. It is not the ideal and therefore is seen as obscene and an eyesore. However, it is this moment when the building is transcending into ruin that it is most honest. It is at this point that the troubles of an era, the mishaps and misfortunes, the regrettable truths become most apparent. It is at this point that architecture becomes palpable. A powerful physical force that records the traces of history. Relics that stand as physical reminders until descending into 'ruin' where they become a romantacised memory of days long gone.

Take the modernist movement for example. These buildings are designed as timeless. Buildings with no age or situation. They sit on the landscape with no claim to an era or typology. This was brought about by new technologies, the invention of structural concrete and the ability to set oneself free from the constraints of traditions. The promotion of hygiene and the want to detach oneself from the grime of the landscape. As a movement these buildings strove for architectural purity, cleanliness and timeless-

Valerie Anex "Ghost Estates"



ness. They declined decay and opted for purity. At the moment of creation these buildings may have achieved these ideals but through the onslaught of time and over the life of this architecture these values have been undermined. Due to the lack of sensitivity to moment, place and situation, this architecture has firmly grounded itself in history. In its strive for timelessness modernism has cemented itself in one small moment in history and given itself a very 'timed' architecture. An early 20th century explosion of technology and transition into modern living. It has caught itself in a time-warp where the ideal mirrored the romanticised ruin. These buildings are 'timeless'. They cannot decay therefore they cannot become the pure bones that are so widely celebrated. In an attempt to create the immediate ever-lasting ideal it caught itself in a never ending warp of rot. Through this they have become steeples of their time. Powerful symbols of an era that people identify with. These timeless pieces of architecture have become fixed in history. This architectural movement remains stagnant in history yet the effects of time are still developing as it realizes its transition to death.

Valerie Anex “Ghost Estates”



Erotic Architecture

“Architecture is the ultimate erotic object, because an architectural act, brought to the level of excess, is the only way to reveal both the traces of history and it’s own immediate experiential truth” - *Architecture and Transgression* Bernard Tschumi

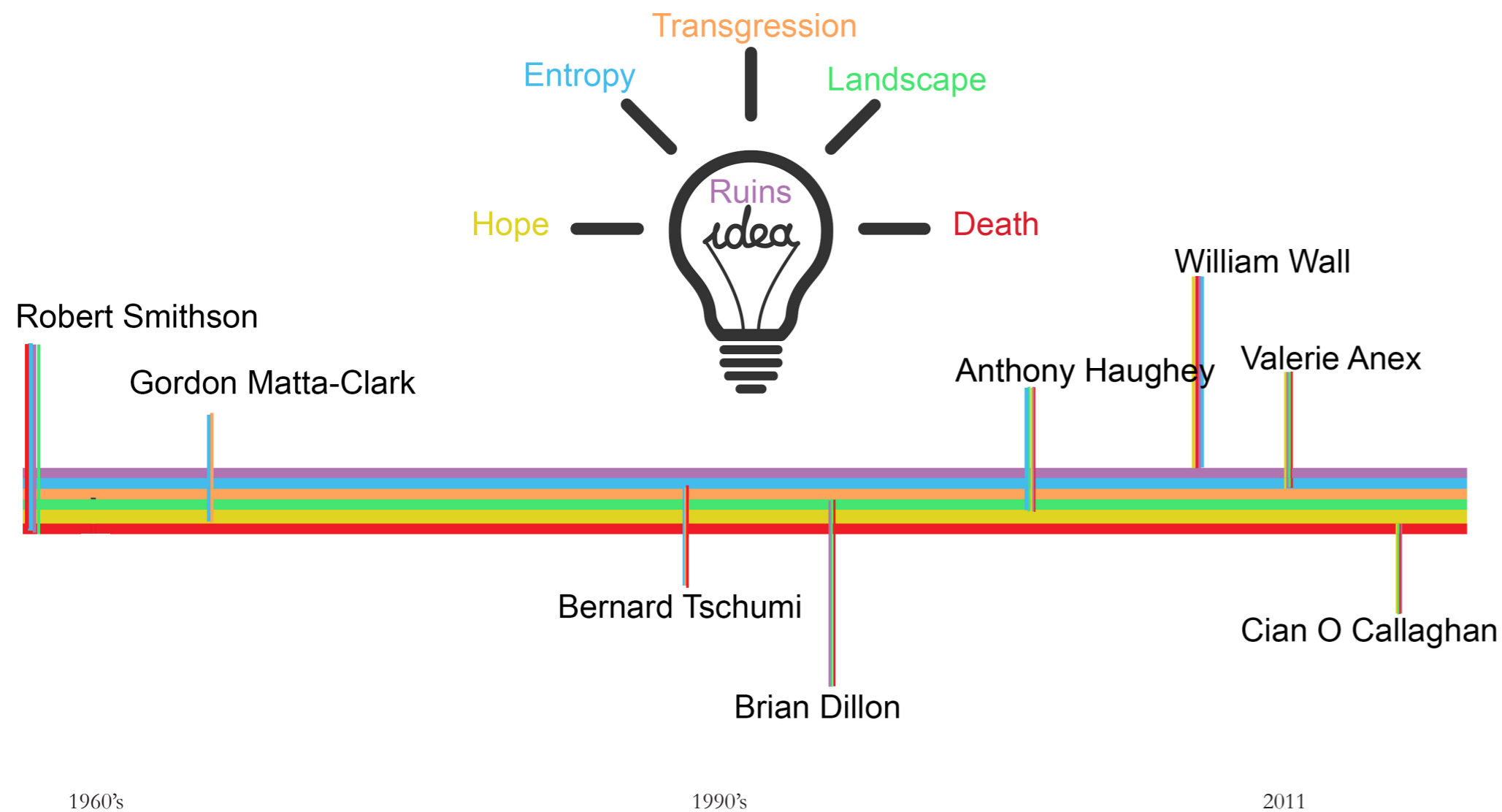
The erotic excess that was brought about by the Celtic Tiger took root in architecture in Ireland. This architectural manifestation of the obscenity of excess took the form of copious housing estates littering the Irish countryside. Many of these housing estates now abandoned are referred to as ‘Ghost Estates’. When the Celtic Tiger tipped the scales of this erotic balance and the economic crash occurred, architecture was one of the most powerful documentations of this. These ghost estates in there transition from life to death missed a key step in this journey. There was never life. These buildings were never finished, they were never inhabited. There life never began. They began as bones and remained as such when beginning their descent into rot.

“One of the most basic human requirements is the need to dwell” - *In Praise of Shadows* Jun’ichiro Tanizaki

The ghost estates in Ireland are a steeples of a societies unexpected wealth which resulted in excess. These estates, intended to create more wealth and to be inhabited by the young and prosperous, now lie idol. They have seen no life. They have not been altered by habitation. A house without occupation is like a body without life. Their windows are black cavities on the facade like the vacant stare of the recently deceased. Can these buildings be called architecture? These buildings that have never seen life? Or are they not buildings but relics of a lost future?

“Estates are the relics of the collapse of the property market, a topology of economic disintegration of the country” - Valerie Anex

These ghost estates stand as a constant reminders of the mistakes made and of the greed of a nation. They are an architectural expression of ‘from boom to bust’. This architecture is a very powerful glimpse into the economic downturn, to the bleak empty outlook that swept the countryside. Through the transition from life to death of this architecture a very pivotal moment in Irish history has been recorded and physically manifested.



Ruins

“Architecture is the only art in which the great struggle between the will of the spirit and the necessity of nature issues into real peace, in which the soul in its upward striving and nature in its gravity are held in balance”

“Romanticism turns the ruins into a symbol of artistic creation, the literary or painted fragment is more highly prized than the finished or unified work”

- “*Fragments from a History of Ruin*” Brian Dillon.

The Irish landscape has become a sepulcher of ruins. A graveyard of ghost estates. These estates are abandoned and left in a state of ruin and decay. They are without doubt ruins. Yet they are not what we perceive ruins to be. They have not been lived in. They deny the romantic attachment of a ruin. Yet they bear the scars of time. Due to their accelerated transition to ruin they are too young to be seen as “pure bones”. Yet in many cases they do take the form of the mere skeleton or structure of the building. It is in the moment that time once again

comes in to play in a major role. These ghost estates are seen as scars on the landscape. Wounds that need fixing. Yet this is the perception that people have portrayed upon them. They embody the wounds that society carries from the recession. Wounds that are not yet healed and that are too vividly felt to be seen objectively. They do not carry the advantage of time.

Ruins, or the perceived idea of ruins, the pure white stones of Greece and Rome, evoke a romantic notion of a great era. An era of classical power where life was simple and glory was sought. The idea of a ruin is the ideal version of what that ruin once was. These ‘typical ruins’ travel far back in time and are disconnected from their current viewers. We impose an ideal concept of what once was. This is not only of classical example. Take the Belfast docks for example. Many buildings that have been abandoned show the promise of a once world-renowned dock. A prosperous venture that is no longer seen as negatively as it once was closer to its dereliction. So what can be said of Irish ghost estates. Can we readily judge their existence? Or are we too close to

the underlying break in society?

How do we perceive these estates? We do not experience them first hand. They are avoided. Their lack of habitation and sense of a future unfulfilled leave those who enter feeling ill at ease. We do not experience them. Yet we see them from a distance perched in the landscape like unwanted squatters. Our perception of these ghost estates comes directly from the media. From a persons chosen view of these sites. They are portrayed as unfinished, dirty, derelict and scary. They evoke ideas of a dead society, abandonment and lack of hope. Emotions that strike cords too close to emigration and the common situation of the youth of Ireland and their view of their homeland. These ghost estates are a metaphor for the crash in the construction industry. A metaphor that is physically seen and felt on a daily basis.

Anthony Haughey “Settlement”



fig.1



Anthony Haughey

As it is the power of architecture to embody a moment in time, a glimpse of history, it is the privilege of art to capture these moments. It is art that is free from transgression, that contains no paradox but allows oneself to be detached from spatial constraints and to freely question the concept and moment in question.

It is therefore an artistic endeavor to address these ghost estates. To address the perceptions of these estates, the emotions they transmit across the country and this marking of an era. Across Ireland many artists felt the responsibility to address the matter of ghost estates. 2011 being known as ‘the year of ghost estates in Irish art’. Many have instilled installations or re-imagined the spaces but the piece of work that seems to strike a cord is the piece *Settlement* by Anthony Haughey.

This series of images captures the essence of ghost estates across Ireland. The composition of each image is carefully chosen, all of which contain some natural landscape (trees, grass or rolling hills) and traces of constructs or the empty shells of aban-

doned houses. This chosen composition records the physical remnants of the excess of the Celtic Tiger on the once picturesque landscape of Ireland. All of the images in the collection were taken at either dawn or dusk. Haughey uses a manipulation of half light and artificial light to evoke a powerful image of the current state of Ireland. These spectral images evoke a sense of Ireland’s past. The artificial light highlights the lush green of the landscape that has been encroached upon. This powerful imagery laments the mystical past of Ireland. A stereotypical view of the country as a shimmering isle of ancient traditions and unspoiled lands. This landscape is often found in the foreground of the images. The bare remnants of the construction industry then rest on this landscape. These traces of the construction industry’s collapse are overlaid onto the idyllic symbolism of Ireland. This depicts the struggle of the Irish people to acknowledge the drastic shift of a nation’s values, identity and history.

There is no hint of habitation in Haughey’s images. The abandoned houses are caught in a time warp. Their eerie atmosphere stems from the sudden

collapse of the construction industry. They remind us of a promised future, a future that is far out of reach, never to be realized. Anthony Haughey has successfully captured the “trauma” that is attached to these sites. They stand for the abandonment of the country by the nation’s youth and the death of a prosperous future. The presence of this frozen moment allows for one to step back and analyze the situation. These images portray strong emotions of death, trauma and despair but they also convey hope. They mark the collapse, but with collapse comes rejuvenation. These images of estates both embody the excess and greed of the Celtic Tiger but simultaneously embody the hope for a re-newed future with stronger morals than the hollow future promised by the Celtic Tiger.

In the fig.1 we can see the bust of the Celtic Tiger encroaching on the romanticized history of Ireland. What is also powerful is in the foreground we can see the fresh growth of the landscape. The lush, green, rolling hills of Ireland are beginning to reclaim the land that was demolished. This regeneration shows the passing of time. This ghost estates

Valerie Anex “Ghost Estates”



fig.2



Valerie Anex

are Architecture of their moment. They mark this pause in history. The architecture may be caught in a warp but time is not. It leaches forward stitching the wounds of the past. The life of these estates begins to become apparent. Their merging with the landscape and the softening of the up-turn dirt causes their presence to settle into the countryside and into the pages of history.

This controversial moment in Ireland’s history did not go unnoticed by those beyond the bounds of the Emerald Isle. Valerie Anex, a German artist, published a book in 2011 titled ‘Ghost Estates’. This book is a photographic series of the abandoned ghost estates across Ireland. Many similarities are evident between both Anex and Haughey however, the difference in perspective of each artist is apparent. Valerie’s Anex provides a more objective series of images. Yet they somehow lack the powerful emotions transferred in Haughey’s images.

Anex’s book comprehensively addresses the issue of the ghost estate. She captures the image of a country haunted by its demons. In fig.2 she depicts

the estates as lurching in the background. A forever present reminder of the excess and greed of the Celtic Tiger. These vacant houses left lingering on the subconscious of the minds of the populous. They hover with a zombie like presence. Anex powerfully captures the embodiment of the death of an ideal future with the aftermath scattered across the landscape. In fig.2 we can also see the emergence of a new landscape with fresh growth. We can see the scared land being claimed back into the folds of the surrounding landscape.

Many of her images are of roads leading to nowhere. A strong symbol for a country projecting its future of wealth forward only to be cut off and to be left standing idol, confused and tarnished.

Haughey manipulated his images to create powerful emotions. He portrayed the trauma and desolation that the economic downturn left on a nation. Anex is detached from the repercussions of the Celtic Tiger. Her set of images vividly show the architectural capture of a moment in history. Anex’s images document the abandonment of a country and a

series of dwellings that have been left vacant. These images address the lack of habitation. This relationship to humans reoccurs beyond Anex’s work. The poet William Wall also identifies the issue. “women inherit / the ghost estate / their unborn children / play invisible games / of hide and seek /in scaffold frames / if you lived here/ you’d be home by now” (*Ghost Estate*). All humans have a fundamental need to dwell. Abandoned houses show a failed attempt to dwell. A failed movement of habitation. This solitary concept of lacking human interaction has strong architectural presence. These buildings have not seen life. They never been inhabited. They no longer have a meaning or architectural concept. They skeletal forms lost in a landscape with no claim to service, with no worth. Anex’s captures the blank stare of darkened windows with no movement behind. These dwellings or shelters or relics wait in the background of our landscape in the background of our minds waiting to be born. Without the merit of use this architecture has begun its transition towards death. It stumbles forward with time allowing the landscape to re-stake its claim and waiting for a nation to forget the wounds that it represents.

Conclusion

From poets to artists and photographers a reaction has occurred to this moment in history. How does architecture react? Once again we are faced with the transgression of architecture. Artist and poets are free to explore and mark this era and question it's meaning and existence. Architecture is this moment in history. Architecture is the house left idol and the window that nobody has ever peered from. It is the unrealized concept and the lack of habitation. The art of architecture is that it cannot directly address these issues as it's life is not a mere moment but a transition. This architecture has just begun it's life. The "moldy traces of time" are beginning to unfold. This architecture can inform what is to come but cannot address the issues of a moment passed. Architecture has marked this moment in time. It remains as much a relic of a lost future as it does remain in transition. It is altered by the flow of time, just as society has been alter. Architecture reflects the immediate world around it. Weither through it's concept or it's life, architecture lives in the present. What may seem static is forever changing and evolving with time until it is subdued to mere memory and all that is left is the artists perception of the

architecture of that moment.

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