

Time Compression_ The City + the airport

“747 – Dublin airport – 16 mins”, My eyes have become fixed on the dot matrix time board, as I stand here on upper O’Connell street awaiting the airport bus on this mizzely sodium lit winter Friday morning, with the crepuscular ⁽¹⁾ amongst us are still milling about their business. The streets are cleaned and the windows washed of last nights events, the lights of the rows of business at street level begin to flicker on, with the arrival of early morning staff. Behind me I hear the fabric faux “facade” of the adjacent empty lot move in and out of the street in a staccato fashion ^(figure 1). Again I strike my eyes to the time board, experienced in the art of waiting, to no surprise it still registers 16 minutes. I draw a long sigh and stare down O’Connell street, beyond the GPO and the spire, toward the Bridge only to for it to be obscured by the monumental John henry’s statue of Daniel O’Connell in the distance ^(figure 2), all in the hope that I may see the green shape of the airport shuttle bus break through the mist and lift my dwindling spirit. The anxiety of waiting for a bus is not helped by the fact that on this morning I’m running late. Which made my walk from Stoneybatter much more brisk than usual, so much so in fact that in the haze of my early morning barely awoken state I don’t seem to remember much of it, which is surprising, even if it is quotidian in nature to me, it still requires some thought to pick out an unobstructed route through the city. Mostly I chose to walk along the Luas line, which is somewhat out of my way, but upon reaching the line has a clear route walking route ^(figure 3). How I came to be in this predicament was through the simple mistake of forgetting to charge my phone, an object which is supposed to be innately smart and aid my every need in life has let me down, through the basic tenant of needing to be plugged in for four hours the night before. All I’m left with is a well designed object. I angrily tut when I dare to think about it now.

A rumbling noise approaches me from my left side, a group of tourists, with luggage in tow come to a halt in front of the bus stop, one of the party takes out a generic tourist map, the ones which have large cartoon drawings of the mainstay buildings and sights of Dublin he beings to unfold it, I imagine he is looking for some sort of genius loci which can indicate him to his position on the street, he first points out the spire then moves his hand toward the building across from us, the Gresham hotel, locating himself on the street , he now knows that this must be the place. I turn back to look at the bus stop and notice that the bus is now 15 minutes away, I think “how has only one minute come to have passed? “, a bus appears on the horizon of the street, I stare to try and make out the information on the front of the bus , only for it to come into range with the soul sinking information; “Sorry - Out of service”, a statement which just reflects and reminds me of the current state of my phone. At least if I had a distraction the anticipation of waiting would somehow be dulled by whatever podcast or album was in my playlist, which ironically I had spent two hours compiling a number of nights before.

[1] - crepuscular - occurring or active during twilight ; Winn, Philip (2001). Dictionary of Biological Psychology. Taylor & Francis. ISBN 0-415-13606-7

I look around me again and I notice that a crowd has started to build, a French couple are in conversation and suddenly I remember an interesting proverb, “L’avenir appartient à ceux qui se lèvent tôt” [2] which loosely translates to – the future belongs to those who rise early. I imagine this proverb has become emblazoned on my mind due to the numerous time it has been said to me, in reference to my poor punctuality to French classes when I was at school. How the times have not changed, given my current situation. Suddenly everyone’s attention is perked by the bus time board changing to two minutes, people move closer to the stop, in the fear that the bus may already be full and the last thing anyone wants is to miss the bus and therefore their connecting journey. I follow suit and move shoulder to shoulder with the aforementioned group of tourists. The bus appears and things start to move up a gear, people are organising themselves, shuffling around, moving bags and assuming the readied position for getting on the bus. It finally reaches us, and comes to a slow halt, the doors open. The sequence of events for people who don’t know the service and the city is quite similar, they get on, ask is this the bus to the airport, how much and then rip the ticket from the machine. In my mind I start to calculate if everyone does this how long will it take for each individual to do likewise? Will it make me late? Will these lost seconds and minutes be the cause of a missed flight, a lost weekend in Berlin? These thoughts run through my mind as I cross the threshold of the bus and pay for my ticket. I move upstairs in the hope that I can get a window seat, again with the thoughts that I have no distraction with me to hold my attention for the duration of the journey.

I get to the top of the bus stairs, and take a look for an optimum seat, I pick one out and move toward it, I slump down quickly and look out the window. I notice the last person getting on the bus closely followed by sound of the coins dropping into the ticket machine. The bus closes its doors and we move off in the direction of the rotunda hospital at the top of the street. I hear the mutterings of various conversations on the bus, some tourists some native tongues, but all posing similar questions to each other. They are projecting half a day into the future, to where they will be, what they will do and what they will see. There is no thought to the journey from where we came from to where we are going, there merely now exists a pipeline which takes you from O’Connell street to Berlin in my case. Time has now become compressed and like many others I sit back anxiously and hope the journey will be unhindered by traffic and delays, for ahead of me are the suburbs of the city, the outer fringes where the motorway is king and where the airport is merely a quick transfer point to my weekend in Berlin.

[2] - french proverb - Unité de linguistique française, Faculté de lettres, Université de Genève, 1988



Figure . 1 a



Figure . 1b



Figure . 1c



Figure . 2

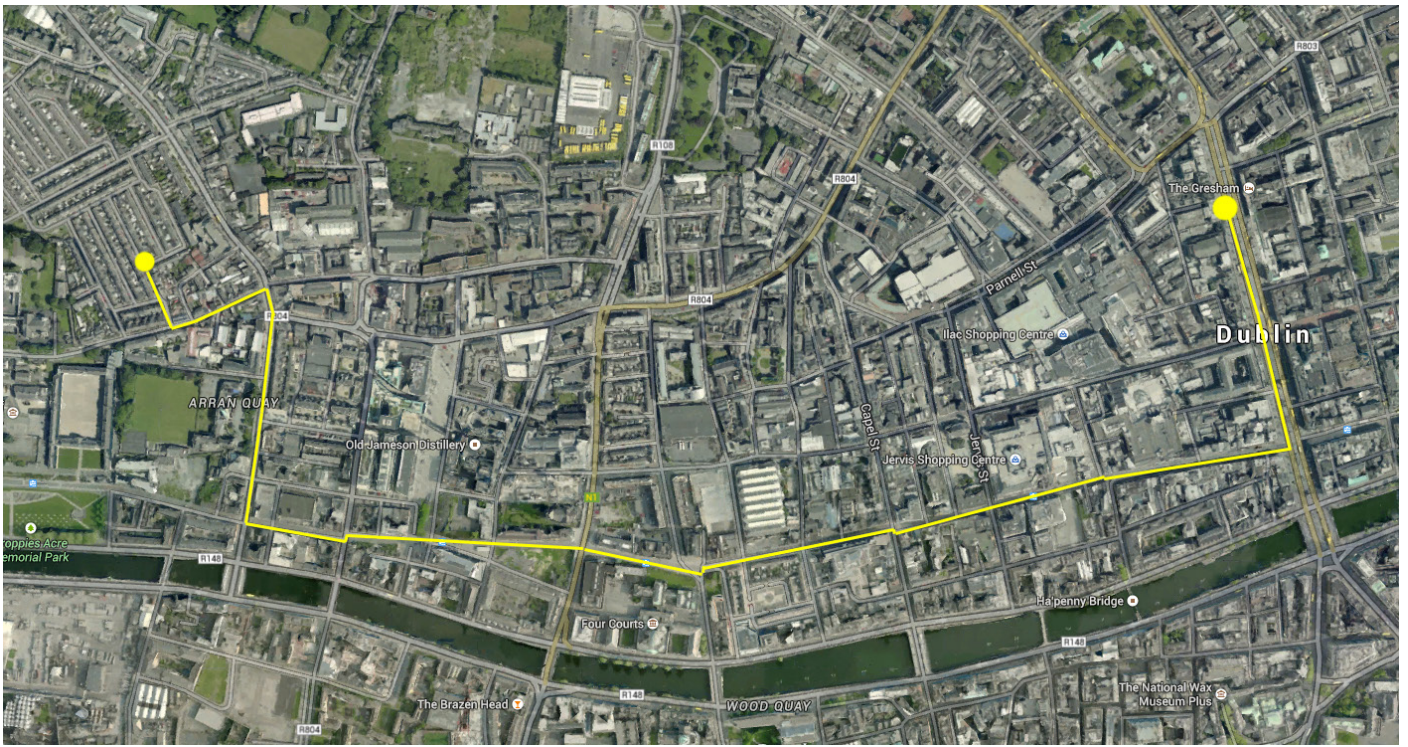


Figure . 3 - Slow travel zones via walking through the fabric of city

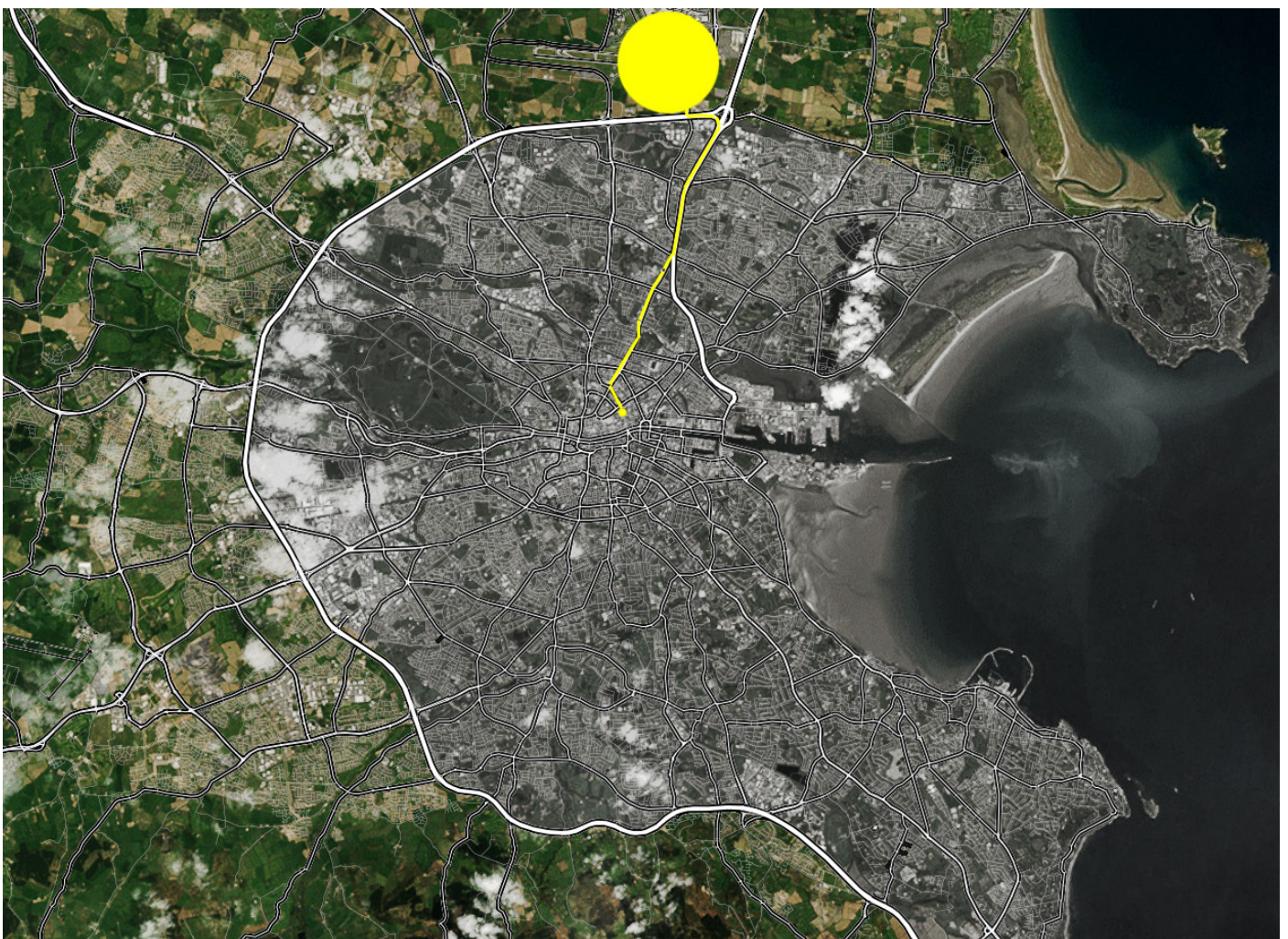


Figure . 4 - Quick travel zones via wheeled transport - to the fringe of the city

Introduction

When I lived in the suburbs of the city, I used to walk a lot, I found it cathartic, walking through streets upon streets of rowed houses allows you to understand the area in which you live^[3]. Walking is unique in the modern fast paced world, it is one of the few times where you have the possibility to have a continuous narrated linear journey in real time, in many ways it is the antithesis to other visual mediums, film for instance is jump cut, with a non linear narrative, space and time are meaningless with little to no regard for true narrative lineage. The passage above which opens this essay examines the nature of time compression and the urban setting in a short period of time, but more specifically the persons uninterest in the “interspaces”^[4] which link the urban and the rural. Dublin, much like London has a very specific urban topography, in that it has an escarpment which has been shaped over thousands of years into a river valley, which when viewed from a distance, for instance when one drives along the west link bridge you are afforded a a glimpse of the true rural shape of the land, the Liffey valley, these moments become portals to the past on an otherwise ambiguous stretch of road. The road in question being the M50, much like the M25 in London, it forms a clear boundary between the urban and the rural. The airport finds it self situated in this zone also, connecting the ends of the M50 and the M1 it has rendered it as a time condensing network designed to reduce travel time and increase efficiency of the modern city planners holy grail “traffic flows”. These interactive zones between the man-made and nature allow for an unlocking of the landscape^[5]. These direct transport linkages have no doubt reduced the time it takes for one to get to a shopping district, business park or simply to traverse the city, but what I am most interested in is the transport link which connects the homo-urbanus^[6] of the cities fabric to the penumbra^[7] of the suburbs where the airport is situated. This essay intends to investigate the nature of time compression in “fast” transport and its relationships to these interspaces which link the cortex^[8] to the city and draw comparison to the idea of the derive^[9] and the Flaneur^[10], which focus upon a slow peregrination^[11] through the city and its fringes onto the airport. By removing wheeled transport it allows one to create a linear narrative, to gain hidden knowledge of the city thus giving it a sense of depth and dimension.^[12]

[3] - Papadimitriou, Nick - excerpt on walking from “The London Perambulator” - 2009 - Film

[4] - Self, Will - Interspace is a term which Will Self has been using to describe the periphery of a city since his early long walks in 1988

[5] - Papadimitriou, Nick - excerpt on place in modern suburbia from “The London Perambulator” - 2009 - Film

[6] - Self, Will - Homo Urbanus is a term used to describe human beings in the modern lexicon of the city - Retrieved from a 2008 interview on airport walks

[7] - Penumbra - a surrounding or adjoining region in which something exists in a lesser degree - merriam-webster definition

[8] - Cortex - the outer or superficial part of an organ or bodily structure - to describe the fringe of the city as such - merriam-webster definition

[9] - Derive - A term describing an unplanned walk - Debord, Guy - Internationale Situationniste #2 (December 1958)

[10] - Flaneur - refers to the act of strolling, with all of its accompanying associations. - Charles Baudelaire - The Painter of Modern Life (1863)

[11] - Peregrination - to travel especially on foot as the relatively typical means of locomotion - merriam-webster definition

[12] - Papadimitriou, Nick - excerpt on the subject of truly understanding the place in which you are in, from “The London Perambulator” - 2009 - Film



Figure . 5 - West link bridge cuts through the escarpment of the city formed by a river valley

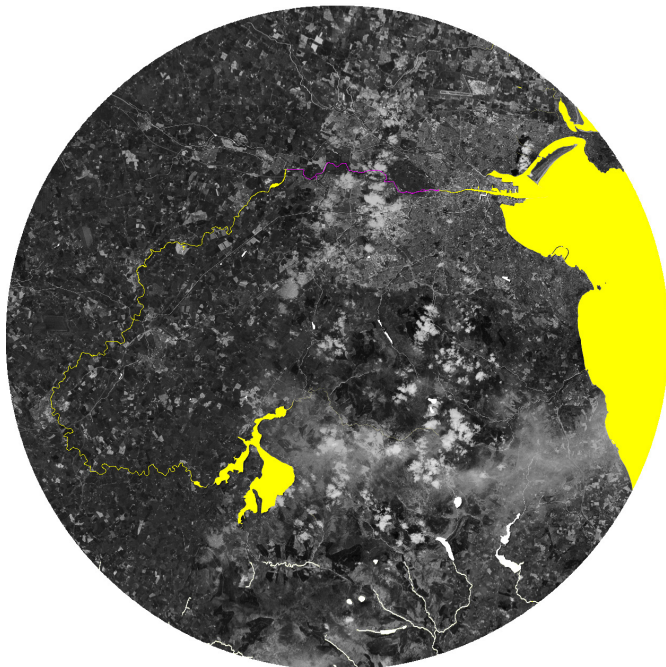


Figure . 6- The scope of the city and it's river valley



Figure . 7- The history of the city and its environs topographical nature mapped

The Derive and the city

“In walks you draw in the stored energy of places and transduct it into the field of words, these words, or rough maps compressing the regions mind into folds of language.”

Nick Papadimitriou is what he calls a deep topographer, he is best known for his research works he undertook for Authors Will Self and Iain Sinclair, both of whom have a deep interest in the field of what is universally now as psycho-geography, this term has its origins in the late 1960s of France where the events of the May 1968 protests in France had spawned a new way of thinking about how we move through the city. Guy Debord and the Situationist International influenced by post modernism theorised that modern cities are constructed around commercial imperatives, suitably described by Belgian philosopher Raoul Vaneigem, another principal theoretician of the Situationist movement ;

“Work to survive, survive by consuming, survive to consume; the hellish cycle is complete.”

a sentiment which has become diluted to – Work , Consume, die. In many respects it has a lot of truth for Dublin city centre, we have areas which focus short linear narratives of; work, shop, entertain, home. Therefore we never really see the city as a whole anymore, we don't exist in the city as it was truly planned out to be. To counter this theory, Debord and his group of friends would drink wine and then acting as flaneurs, create a derive through the city, from north to south with no real objective, thereby disassembling the edifice of the capitalist society. These are the basic blueprints for modern day perambulators, such as the aforementioned Will Self, Nick Papadimitriou and Iain Sinclair. Self has a particular interest in the liminal states of the city, these transitional spaces between urban and rural have a relationship to a sensory threshold, it allows one to find the overlooked and describe it. These areas are steeped in their own time system, a time system which is even desynchronised from that of “*in urbe*” settings of the city.

“The fact is that the city is sublimated by its natural setting, or rather its natural setting rises up and the city becomes as nought.”

The architecture of memory

To revisit places and spaces, to instigate the activation of memories after long periods of absence is vitally important to the nature of the derive. In describing a piece of architecture or ritual it allows one to retrieve memories which have been physically left there, as if it were a tangible object as opposed to its true nature which is a chemically encoded process. Which relates to the theories of the psychotherapist Carl Jung who theorised that we may have access to a universal consciousness, that relates to topography, time and space. The scrapes on the granite slabs which pave the street, the chip out of the column at the GPO, empty lot behind the bus stop. Spaces, places and moments left behind by the passage of history. They allow us to access memories of a place in time, even if we are fully disconnected from them. A sentiment which is beautifully described by Jeremy Till in his work *Thick time* he says of time, space and ritual;

“I will let time enter my spaces, but only that thick time of the everyday. It is a time which will disrupt the iconic, perfected autonomy of the frozen building, not just in terms of weather and dirt, but in terms of those repetitive, habitual, actions so overlooked by architects clinging to illusions of a detached monumental time.”

Policy, bureaucracy and planning will with time make the navigation of a passage through the city much more difficult. As roads are built, empty lots are filled and necessary infrastructure completed the narrative and memory of a place will disappear. The spaces which are eventually left behind will become the oxbow lakes of the urbanus. A relic which without context becomes what the anthropologist Marc Auge would describe as a “non-space”. The non-space which has succumbed to the intensification of supermodernity, where humanity seeks to control and manipulate all aspects of the human experience. J.G Ballard best describes this as the death of affect, where by we can avoid caring for an object, space or place through the guise of modernity.

This is especially true in with respect to the relationship between the airport and the city. We get on the bus at O’Connell street, we get out to the airport as quick as possible without so much as a thought for the route we take or the places we pass through, to arrive at a transition zone which is a true non-place in every sense of the word, as it serves no purpose but to redirect passengers to their onward journeys in a policed, designed and controlled manner. For obvious reason. The nature of quick modes of transport goes against the grain of the city, in the sense that travelling in a bus is essentially travelling in a sealed hermetic unit, one where you are somewhat caught in a reverie, it passes in a blur. The stream of natural consciousness is broken and it no longer allows you to embrace the detail of the Liminal. It means that nobody truly physically understands the process of moving from the fabric of the city to the fringes, everybody is simply leaping the liminal state by wheeled transport. The reason we don’t walk to the

airport is that were all so obsessed and bored by time and travel, we surrender to the idea that we can leave the office at lunchtime and be in Barcelona by dinner time, all without having the experience of a linear journey. An experience which examines an area in meticulous detail step by step. An experience that will go unnoticed. László Moholy-Nagy on transport in modern cities;

Motion accelerated to high speed, changes the appearance of the objects and makes it impossible to grab their details. There is clearly a recognisable difference between the visual experience of a pedestrian and the driver in viewing objects. The motor car driver or airplane pilot can bring distant and unrelated landmarks into spatial relationships unknown to the pedestrian. The difference is produced by the changed perception caused by the various speeds.

In Conclusion

The truth is that we are all now living in the Debordian society spectacle, even if we choose to accept or ignore it, we have built our urban environment in such a way that all the topographical organic and visceral landscapes have been lacquered in brick steel and stone. It has set the city and urbanity on a terminal course, the terminal being the airport. There is the everlasting knowledge that we all one day will undoubtedly understand the city for, we are all the city embodied, when we die, to the city we will return, of Dublin made matter we shall return to Dublin made land, therefore becoming the city. We shall reside the crevices of loosening masonry, the dust on the window sill and the staining of the limestone walls of the GPO. The vat of memory and time will continue to fill and still the beat goes on.

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