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ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Alternative Arrangements is a series of works that have emerged from my doctoral research at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL. This practice-based research asks how architectures and landscapes of the contested border on the island of Éire (Ireland) tell the stories of its pasts and presents. It uses ‘topographic practice’ – a term I have been developing through the course of my PhD building on Jane Rendell’s ideas of ‘critical spatial practice’ – to unpack architectural and landscape historiography as a form of artistic output; seeing the methods, practices and outputs as sites themselves, sites that build a multi-layered topography – a landscape of practice – to respond to the specific characteristics of each place.¹ Here I do so through ‘bordering practices’ that aim to break down the binary of the border.²

This third and final project of the PhD consists of film, photography, site-specific installation, and texts to be read in association with key locations, histories, and materials of the border, which in the process of ‘alternative arrangement’ have become intentionally ‘polysituated.’³ In each site these installations act as allegories to create uncanny double-takes that seek to reconfigure the power dynamics of the centre by engaging with architectures, landscapes, and histories of the periphery. My PhD research began with the border in sight – both conceptually as an object of study and practically in the relentless early years of the Brexit process – but ends here with the border perhaps disappearing entirely, or at least creating the imaginative space for it to do so.

1 Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), p. 6.

2 Mohamad Hafeda, *Negotiating Conflict in Lebanon: Bordering Practices in a Divided Beirut* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019), p. 21.

3 John Kinsella, *Polysituatedness: A Poetics of Displacement*, Angelaki Humanities (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), p. 18

ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENT
#1: AIRD MHIC GIOLLAGÁIN, CO.
DHOIRE (*Magilligan Point, Co. Derry*)

Aird Mhic Giollagáin marks the northern end of the border where the still contested waters of Loch Feabhail (*Lough Foyle*) meet the Atlantic. It was here in the nineteenth century that the colonial mapping of Ireland was begun by the British Ordnance Survey, in doing so violently translating the landscape from the original Irish to English.



BRIAN FRIEL

Translations, 1981

ACT ONE An afternoon in late August 1833.

The hedge-school is held in a disused bar or hay-shed or byre. Along the back wall are the remains of five or six stalls – wooden posts and chains where cows were once milked and bedded. A double door left, large enough to allow a cart to enter. A window right. A wooden stairway without a banister leads to the upstairs living-quarters (off) of the schoolmaster and his son. Around the room are broken and forgotten implements: a cart-wheel, some lobster-pots, farming tools, a battle of hay, a churn, etc. There are also the stools and bench seats which the pupils use and a table and chair for the master. At the door a pail of water and a soiled towel. The room is comfortless and dusty and functional – there is no trace of a woman's hand.

Captain Lancey is middle-aged; a small crisp officer, expert in his field as a cartographer but uneasy with people – especially civilians, especially these foreign civilians. His skill is with deeds not words.

Jimmy Jack Cassie – known as the Infant Prodigy – sits by himself, contentedly reading Homer in Greek and smiling to himself. He is a bachelor in his sixties, lives alone, and comes to these evening classes partly for the intellectual stimulation. He is fluent in Latin and Greek but is in no way pedantic – to him it is perfectly normal to speak in these tongues. He never washes. His clothes – heavy top coat, hat, mittens, which he wears now – are filthy and he lives in them in summer and winter, day and night. He now reads in a quiet voice and smiles in profound satisfaction. For Jimmy the world of the gods and the ancient myths is as real and as immediate as everyday life in the townland of Baile Beag.

Hugh is a large man, with residual dignity, shabbily dressed, carrying a stick. He has, as always, a large quantity of drink taken, but he is by no means drunk. He is in his early sixties.

Owen is the younger son, a handsome, attractive young man in his twenties. He is dressed smartly – a city man. His manner is easy and charming: everything he does is invested with consideration and enthusiasm. He now stands framed in the doorway, a travelling bag across his shoulder.

LANCEY: I see. (*He clears his throat. He speaks as if he were addressing children – a shade too loudly and enunciating excessively.*) You may have seen me – seen me – working in this section – section? Working. We are here – here – in this place – you understand? – to make a map – a map – a map and –

OWEN: It might be better if you assume they understand you –

JIMMY: *Nonne Latine loquitur?*
[Doesn't he speak Latin?]

LANCEY: Yes?

Hugh holds up a restraining hand.

OWEN : And I'll translate you as you go along.

HUGH: James.

LANCEY: I see. Yes. Very well. Perhaps you're right. Well. What we are doing is this.

LANCEY (*to Jimmy*): I do not speak Gaelic, sir. (*He looks at Owen.*)

He looks at Owen. Owen nods reassuringly.

OWEN: Carry on.

His Majesty's government has ordered the first ever comprehensive survey of this entire country – a general triangulation which will embrace detailed hydrographic and topographic information and which will be executed to a scale of six inches to the English mile.

LANCEY: A map is a representation on paper – a picture – you understand picture? – a paper picture – showing, representing this country – yes? – showing your country in miniature – a scaled drawing on paper of – of – of –

HUGH (*pouring a drink*): Excellent – excellent.

Suddenly Doalty sniggers. Then Bridget. Then Sarah. Owen leaps in quickly.

Lancey looks at Owen.

OWEN: A new map is being made of the whole country.

Lancey looks to Owen: Is that all? Owen smiles reassuringly and indicates to proceed.

LANCEY: This enormous task has been embarked on so that the military authorities will be equipped with up-to-date and accurate information on every corner of this part of the Empire.

OWEN: The job is being done by soldiers because they are skilled in this work.

LANCEY: And also so that the entire basis of land valuation can be reassessed for purposes of more equitable taxation.

OWEN: This new map will take the place of the estate-agents' map so that from now on you will know exactly what is yours in law.

LANCEY: In conclusion I wish to quote two brief extracts from the white paper which is our governing charter: (*Reads.*) 'All former surveys of Ireland originated in forfeiture and violent transfer of property; the present survey has for its object the relief which can be afforded to the proprietors and occupiers of land from unequal taxation.'

OWEN: The captain hopes that the public will cooperate with the sappers and that the new map will mean that taxes are reduced.

HUGH: A worthy enterprise – *opus honestum!* [honest work!] And Extract B?

LANCEY: 'Ireland is privileged. No such survey is being undertaken in England. So this survey cannot but be received as proof of the disposition of this government to advance the interests of Ireland.' My sentiments too.

OWEN: This survey demonstrates the government's interest in Ireland and the captain thanks you for listening so attentively to him.

HUGH: Our pleasure, Captain.

ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENT
#2: INIS BADHBHA, LOCH
ÉIRNE, CO. FHEAR MANACH (*Boa
Island, Lough Erne, Co. Fermanagh*)

Inis Badhbha is an island in Loch Éirne, Co. Fhear Manach, which is home to Caldragh Cemetery and the two-sided – or bordered – Boa Island Janus figure: a carved representation of a Celtic deity. The island is also significant as following Partition the British Army turned the island into a landbridge by building a series of causeways. This connected a geographically isolated part of the county that had effectively become an enclave – unable to be accessed without entering the then Irish Free State or a long detour around the lough – to the larger eastern part.



SEAMUS HEANEY

January God, 1972

Then I found a two faced stone
On burial ground,
God-eyed, sex-mouthed, it's brain
A watery wound.
In the wet gap of the year,
Daubed with fresh lake mud,
I faltered near his power —
January God.
Who broke the water, the hymen
With his great antlers —
There reigned upon each ghost tine
His familiars,
The mothering earth, the stones
Taken by each wave,
The fleshy aftergrass, the bones
Subsoil in each grave.

ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENT
#3: THE RAINBOW BALLROOM,
GLEANN FEARNA, CO. LIATROIM
(*Glenfarne, Co. Leitrim*)



The Rainbow Ballroom – ‘the ballroom of romance’ – lies in Gleann Fearna, Co. Liatroim on the main road from Inis Ceithleann (*Enniskillen*) to Sligeach (*Sligo*). From the 1950s onwards country ballrooms such as this would have hosted touring bands playing a mixture of country and western music and traditional Irish folk. This went into decline following the Miami Showband killings in 1975 where the loyalist paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) killed three members of one of Ireland’s most popular touring bands.

The methodology for this work (and for the wider PhD) takes the position that there can be no singular history of the border written as it is so contested. Instead it seeks to make ‘alternative arrangements’ as a way of creating a pluralist, shifting portrait of this place. During the Brexit process the Brady Amendment of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 called for ‘alternative arrangements’ to the so-called ‘Irish backstop.’⁴ This work shifts the emphasis: from ‘alternative arrangements’ for goods and services to making ‘alternative arrangements’ of contested historical, material, and spatial fragments and their operations as ‘sites’ and ‘non-sites.’⁵

4 House of Commons, ‘House of Commons Debate (29 January 2019). Vol. 653 Col. 783.’ (Hansard, 2019) <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/publications-records/house-of-commons-publications/bv_commons_vol_653.pdf> [accessed 22 February 2023].

5 Robert Smithson and Jack D. Flam, *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 364.

ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENT #4:
CLAÍ NA MUICE DUIBHE NEAR
CLUAIN EOIS, CO. MHUINEACHÁIN
(*Black Pig's Dyke, near Clones, Co. Monaghan*)



Cláí na Muice Duibhe forms a non-continuous linear earthwork along the rough borders between historic Gaelic provinces of Cúige Uladh (*Ulster*) and Cúige Chonnacht (*Connacht*). The earthwork follows the line of trees moving from the centre to the upper left of the image. This area of the border near Cluain Eois also forms the Drumully Polyp, an anomaly of the border where it loops almost back on itself, creating an island of land cut off from the rest of the county.

Five materials are taken from their original sites of extraction or production along the border: an HGV curtainside tarpaulin printed with a border crossing and building cut in two by the border; road signs (Ireland & UK); concrete blocks made using lime and clay from a mountain divided by the border, a polyurethane classical column; and Donegal Quartzite crazy paving. They were then inserted back into sites of historic or spatial significance, with one more material added each time, and texts to be read alongside each of the installations as dramaturge to the arranged architectural scenography. The materials and sites also reference a series of interviews conducted as a form of 'hedge school' – an Irish pedagogical precedent – with experts in themes from trade deals to folklore, or with manufacturers of each of the materials.

ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENT
#5: THE PARK HOTEL, Ó MEITH,
CO. LÚ (*Omeath, Co. Louth*)

The Park Hotel in Ó Meith lies at the very eastern end of the border overlooking Loch Cairlinn (*Carlingford Lough*). The hotel, now closed, was formerly an Irish college, and it was here that Irish revolutionary Pádraig Pearse wrote the last lines of the speech that would be given at the funeral of Irish republican Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa in 1915. The following year Pearse would become a key figure in the Easter Rising, a critical event in the journey of Irish independence. Shortly after he was executed by the British at Kilmainham Gaol in Baile Átha Cliath (Dublin).



PÁDRAIG PEARSE

*Excerpt from graveside oration at the funeral
of Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, 1915*

Life springs from death; and from the graves of patriot men and women spring living nations. The Defenders of this Realm have worked well in secret and in the open. They think that they have pacified Ireland. They think that they have purchased half of us and intimidated the other half. They think that they have foreseen everything, think that they have provided against everything; but the fools, the fools, the fools! – they have left us our Fenian dead; and while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Tom Keeley

Tom Keeley is an artist-historian based in Skibbereen, Ireland. He uses artistic practices to write and rethink architectural and landscape histories. This research-led ‘topographic practice’ generates site-specific outputs ranging from writing, printed matter and photography, to film, installation and performance. It studies the features of a place and goes beyond: asking how research methods, practices, and outcomes can also be site-specific. Keeley trained in landscape architecture at the University of Sheffield and architectural history at the Bartlett, where he is currently completing an AHRC-funded PhD in architectural design studying the architectures and landscapes of the Irish borderlands, under the supervision of Professors Jane Rendell and Barbara Penner. Previously he worked for The Architecture Foundation (London, UK), Storefront for Art and Architecture (New York, USA), and Space Caviar (Genoa, Italy). His work has been exhibited internationally including at the Venice Architecture Biennale, Salone del Mobile Milano, and the Istanbul Design Biennial. His writing has been featured in publications such as *Places Journal*, *The Architectural Review*, *Building Material*, *MacGuffin*, and *Domus*; and is held in the collections of the National Art Library and the School of Architecture Library at Princeton University. He is a lecturer at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, and Cork Centre for Architectural Education.

