

THE 2021 TAKSHILA LECTURE ON ARCHITECTURE & SOCIETY

Níall McLaughlin

The Takshila Lecture on Architecture and Society is delivered by an eminent professional / academician that addresses growing disparity between the practice and pedagogy of Architecture in India, and the realities of our social, cultural and economic contexts. The lecture and the following dialogue aim to challenge the status-quo with a conviction that an open and honest conversation on the state of practice will instigate positive change. The 2021 Takshila Lecture on Architecture and Society was presented by Prof Níall McLaughlin on January 26th, 2021.

Níall was educated in Dublin and studied architecture at University College Dublin between 1979 and 1984. He worked for Scott Tallon Walker for four years and established his own practice in London in 1990. He designs buildings for education, culture, health, religious worship and housing. He won Young British Architect of the Year in 1998, received the RIBA Charles Jencks Award for Simultaneous Contribution to Theory and Practice in 2016. Níall was elected an Aosdána Member for Outstanding Contribution to the Arts in Ireland and as a Royal Academician in the Category of Architecture in 2019. In 2020 he was awarded an Honorary MBE for Services to Architecture.

Níall exhibited in the Venice Biennale in 2016 and 2018 and has been shortlisted for the RIBA Stirling Prize in 2013, 2015 and 2018. Níall is Professor of Architectural Practice at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London. He was a visiting professor at the University of California Los Angeles from 2012-2013 and was appointed Lord Norman Foster Visiting Professor of Architecture at Yale for 2014-2015.

Níall McLaughlin speaks about architecture fundamentally being a representation of time and society through his work over the past few decades and understand architecture as a part of a longer continuity.

Building Time

Hello, my name is Níall McLaughlin. I am an Irish architect practicing in London. I am going to talk to you today on the subject of building time. I am interested in the idea that architecture is fundamentally a representation of time.

I am invited to talk in another country. It is interesting the way in which we view distant places from abroad. We have had news coming from India in snippets, which give me a very partial picture of the development of the country. In each of these, there is a sense of the super accelerated rate of development and the way in which still a relatively new nation is coming to terms with all sorts of issues about identity and development.

It is not my position to comment on these things today, but to really reflect on it from my own position and to limit myself to the experience of my own practice. It is difficult, set against a colossal scale of what I witness, both in this country, in Euros (Europe), and around the world. To think about, other small practice like ours made of a relatively modest and dedicated group of individuals, working on individual projects, often of quite a small and intimate scale - like this little chapel for a monastery. What is it that we do in the face of the huge scale of development that comes with social modernism? What is the role of the traditionally educated architect, with the values that we have learned and imbibed from our education and from our peers in practice? [02:32]

I think sometimes of the story of the great Roman Emperor Nero, who was accused of fiddling while Rome burned. What we look at out and see in terms of building culture, is

so comprehensive and so substantial, that the small projects that we are doing and in particular the values that we bring to those projects seem to be like moles of dust in the air - very little and tiny and perhaps too introspective to deal with the scale of change that we are witnessing in society. What I want to do, is to pause and think a little bit about what architecture really is and what a practice like mine for example, would say about that.

The first thing I think is that is it possible for an architect simply to give witness to the world that they inhabit and to the communities who they serve. If that witness is given with an appropriate level of integrity, it does stand for a kind of public reasoning that happens within the social realm that has an impact that perhaps is bigger than the projects.

But on this slide here, I want to move towards the very origins of architecture. I am fascinated by the fact that whatever parts of the globe you look at, modern, anatomically and cognitively modern humans have lived far longer without buildings than they have with buildings. So what made them about ten or twelve thousand years ago start making buildings? And what is it in the origins of architecture that we could find out that tell us what architecture is really for? Clearly, it did not serve a merely practical purpose because people were getting on very well without it for a long time. So, what was it doing? [4:26]



This is one of the most ancient structures in human history and it is in the near East. It is a simple dwelling. What I am interested in here, is that it seems that the primary purpose of the dwelling was not simply to shelter people, but to hold representations of their ancestors. I find these very beautiful. There are human skulls that have been plastered and the plaster has been put on, I presume, to create some kind of likeness to the living individual. You have the deep bone structure and a kind of plastered enflishment which represents the living individual. In one of the houses, the floor of which you have just seen, beneath the floor of the house, we find the selected bones of generations and generations of ancestors. If I can point down to the bottom left hand side of the image, a head like the one you have just seen, fully plastered, is held or cradled in the arms of a woman who has been buried. The interesting thing about that head, is that it has been excavated and re-plastered four times. It seems as though every time somebody was buried, it was re-plastered again.

In that sense, we might imagine that she is an ancestor of the woman who is holding her, perhaps her great-great-great grandmother. Within the house, contained within the house, within the house are all of the ancestors. My suggestion is that buildings were as much about holding these histories as they were about serving what we would think of as being functional or practical purposes. The real job they were doing, was extending our sense of time. That is why I titled this lecture, 'Building Time'. Because I think the impulse behind the first architecture, be it houses or temples was to extend what I would call our 'cognitive temporal horizon'. In other words, the amount of time that we can internalize or witness as individuals or as groups.

Because if we are able to consider ourselves as having a deeper or longer history, it incentivises us to think beyond the span of our own life as a community, and to make plans for generations who do not yet exist. Therefore, the increasing complexity of human society required individuals to think more about themselves not just as one increment existing in a short period of time, but as part of a longer continuity. That continuity was represented through buildings. And it is that seam of architecture as a representation of what I would call 'temporal depth', in other words, the idea that we can understand and see deeper time by visiting buildings and inhabit them and therefore understand ourselves as part of a longer continuity, that seems to me to be central to the task of the architect. In that light, I would like to begin with my first project. [07:22]

Auckland Castle

This project is at a place called Auckland Castle. It is in the North of England and the castle overall is just over a thousand years old and as much as we know about it, it may have been a sacred site for far longer than that. It is on a promontory overlooking a river and surrounded by a steep wooded valley. It's like an amphitheatre, a very beautiful sight. You can see the old sandstone of the castle and the iron ore within it.

The interesting thing about this castle is it was developed over time and built and rebuilt in lots and lots of different ways. In the 19th century, the people who owned the castle who were Bishops, who are religious leaders, bought these paintings which had been painted two hundred years before showing the twelve tribes of Israel. They have been in the castle for two hundred years. But recently a wealthy financier from the city of London, bought the whole castle and is going to open it up as a public museum containing these paintings.

Here is a plan of the town that the castle is in and on the right hand side, you can see the castle and then the middle and just to the left of the drawing you can see the marketplace of the town. The town has grown around the castle over time and the market square now forms the entrance to the castle.

I am fascinated when I look at projects to try and think about how we see the buildings now and how they may have been seen in the past. It was a lovely opportunity to look and find every single representation we could discover of this castle over a one thousand year period. Here in the 16th century, it was very important to depict it as a fortress, as a bastion against

the invading Scots who might come down to England and so it was seen in a completely martial sense, as a fortified outcrop.

By the time we come to the 18th century, there is a much more genteel description of the exact same buildings and the same typography. Now, they are parkland and the gentle rolling hills have substituted for the fortress we saw in the past. Although it is all the same landscape. In the 19th century, we see the extraordinary democratisation of a landscape, where people from the town have obviously covered the grounds of the castle and our picnicking. It is no longer a place apart or a place to be feared but a place to be inhabited by everybody. Finally for the first time in the 20th century, we get early photographs, the first time we ever see the castle from the town. There is a sense in which the castle thinks of itself and what other people think about it has changed and the way in which it has been represented has changed along with it.

I love this drawing here. It is produced by an archaeologist. This is a kind of drawing an architect would really love, for every colour on the code is a different phase of construction over a thousand year history and we can see that there are whole bits of the castle that have more or less entirely disappeared and you are able to compare each fragment of the building with different layers of development over a period of time. It is really beautiful than when we went to excavate the foundations of our bit, that the thing that the archaeologists suggest would be there, turned up as soon as we got below the ground level. We can see this old gateway being uncovered through the process of building our building. [10:44]



The two buildings I am going to describe, I hope you can see my cursor but the cursor here is showing a building which is going to be a museum. The purpose of this museum is Five Thousand years of religious faith in these islands. Its is a history of everything from the Stone Age, through to a modern multicultural society and the different religions that have worshipped in this island. It is made of half of a wing of the old castle and half of a new building which we have designed.

The second building is in the market place, at the gateway to the castle and it is going to be a place for ticketing and visitors. The castle itself, you can see here in the background which is being restored as part of the project. Our building is relatively simple. On the ground floor, we have a way in from the old castle into a series of exhibition rooms. Up a staircase, to the upper floor. Where the staircase arrives, there is a big hole for architectural fragments associated with religion, and there is a singular space at the end, which is a contemplation space, which is the only real window in the building which looks out over the beautiful view across the valley. We can see the section simply here with the basement as being storage and curation space, and the ground floor - Black Box, Exhibition galleries and the top floor has been one single space. I love this old English barn. I was thinking, a barn is a storage building as much as a museum is and would it not be nice to make something that is like a great tithe barn beside the castle. I felt that the architecture of this had a kind of natural monumentality that came out of its function. We began thinking that our building might have some of this character to it.

I was looking with my students, on a separate project which is looking at ideas of time through two buildings that I was fascinated by. They are two opposite ends of the Eurasian continent. They were both built in the 8th Century. The to the people who built them had no contact whatsoever with each other. Yet they had these strange similarities that I would like to talk about.

The first is on an island off the west coast of Ireland, the very west of the European continent. What we see here is a stone building which was used as a chapel. There are two interesting things about this stone building. When the Christians wanted to turn Roman basilica's which were secular buildings into sacred buildings, they started pushing the sidewalls forward, to frame the gable. This is because Roman temples used to do that. Something from a Pagan temple, was attached to a Pagan building type, to make a new Christian building type.

The monks in Ireland saw this through visiting Italy and decided to create their own version of it on an island. They built it from timber and we know that they built it from timber because there must be an older building than this, because that has a timber detail coming up and crossing at the rafters. The stone building was copied in timber and the crossing of the rafters was a practical construction detail. The beauty of its profile meant that it was made into a symbol of Christ, who is a principal Christian deity. Therefore it was retained. Even when the building was rebuilt in stone, the timber construction detail had required such symbolic significance that it remained and was copied in stone in the building. [14:03]

In contrast, here in Japan, at the other end of the Eurasian continent, on the East end of it, on an island, we have the *Ise Shrine*, also from the 8th Century, built from timber. Here, the



timber buildings are rebuilt every 25 years or effectively every generation. It is really interesting that when you speak to Japanese people in the area about the building, they say the architecture is not the object, the architecture is actually the community around it to have the skills to rebuild the object. I think that is a very beautiful observation.

But look again, at the crossing of the rafters. It has produced a beautiful profile which has come to stand for the Shintō goa, Amaterasu. It is kept long beyond the jointing details that would have rendered it insignificant. What we have here is the two building types, completely disconnected, in which practical constructional details have come to take on symbolic significance.

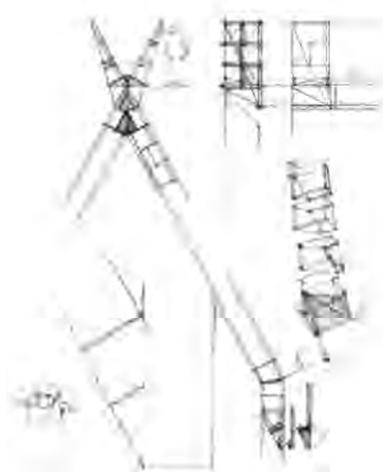
So our building here, what we wanted to do is to make a stone building which would embody those ideas in a representative way in the architecture. Our building which extends out from the castle wall, has got the framed gables of the pro nails and also has got the fins projecting above it and stone which represent what we would call a skeuomorph, or something which is built in one material, which represents an older technology in another material.

The best modern example of that, if it sounds obscure, is when you pick up your iPad and turn pages on your iPad. Clearly it is not a paper book, but you are still turning pages on it. These buildings are doing the same thing. They are holding older technologies into themselves for the purposes of temporal continuity. Here is our CGI of the building, where the constructional details not only represent truth to construction in the way that architects or modern architects would typically think about it, but also represent a deeper kind of truth, which is about the way in which older technologies are held into newer building forms for symbolic and sacred functions. [16:06]

I really like this drawing here, drawn by the stonemasons, which shows the crossing of the finials and you suddenly realize how big they are. That is a person standing beside one of them. The fine high-technology details we produce now for a high-performance roof. Then the six stone cladding on the outside which produces, what we felt our wanted, will be a quality of being almost Ingus or a solid lump.

We had designed this house in the west of Ireland many years ago from load-bearing stone. I was really interested in that relationship between sharp edges and really dense thick walls. The stone that we have here and the north of England is really beautiful. You could almost put a spoon into it and eat it. The iron oxide and the way in which it is weathered over time creates this lovely painterly effect as the buildings age.

Here are the kind of construction technology we use them to build a building now from this beautiful Sandstone or Iron stone. The building is not finished yet. This is a photograph from the construction site just after the rain and I love the way it feels like it could almost be a geological or a natural outcrop. Here it is from a recent file for site photographs taken last week. You can see the stone details and the way in which the crossing of the rafters has been remembered in the new stone technology. There is that detail again in close-up. Bear in mind a person standing on the roof would not be as high as he is.



We wanted by contrast to play a little game of expectations, to tell you that this is all after all a representation. We made the roof on the inside as fragile as it could possibly be. These are pieces of steel are much smaller than a racing bike frame. They are very tiny. You can see them here with their protection on them before the roof went on and this recent site photograph is giving you a sense of how they will be when they are finished. There is our Ingot with the new stone looking very orange against the old stone which has been there for maybe five or six years. [18:05]

The second building is the one which looks onto the town square and we wanted this to be much more of a timber building and this is the site that we had for it just at the gateway to the

castle. We found an old pencil drawing which showed a tower which had once been on this site. We use that to try and persuade the conservation protection agencies to persuade them that we could once again build a tower on the site. It took us a year of working to persuade them that we possible to build a tower, because the building is so protected. It will be like building a new timber tower in the yellow fort. The idea of this is that we had to go through and persuade them that a new building of that kind of boldness would be acceptable or possible. Here is me with my team preparing in the office. We made a cherry picker to show the planning and historic officers will be like to be up there. It was so windy that they came down absolutely terrified, but these are the views that you would have got over the town.

And here we are in long meetings - ten of these meetings over a year to persuade them. 'You could build a tower'. I like this photograph because the painting on the wall of the castle behind you, clearly shows a tall tower about the same size as ours, which I was able to use the prop in our conversations. Bit by bit we were able to persuade them that this would be acceptable. This image here is one of our sketch models that we brought up to these meetings and you can see that the towers are like soldiers who have collapsed at the castle walls. There are lots and lots of them lined up along the castle walls. Each different versions of the tower that we are trying to produce. The way we eventually persuaded them was to look at medieval warfare technology and to say that every castle used to have these timber towers called Siege Engines, that will be pulled up to them, and that our tower could be like a Siege Engine or a provisional temporary structure. We also compared them to the mining technology that was used around that area at the time.

These are the final model that we agreed with the planners and then we were able to take it away and turn it into something that we liked ourselves in the office. It is seen as a timber building that really enjoys timber framing technology. The other thing that these are just images of the model that we made at that time. Here is a very simple plan of the building. There is an area that you arrive into, for arrival and ticketing. There is a courtyard. There is the tower, there are toilets and so on. The next floor up, there is a big exhibition space, which is also attached to the tower and looks out over the town. It can be used for exhibitions or for weddings and events in the town. It is like it a market square building. You can see that height of the tower here with the building beside it and when you get to the top of the tower, you can look down onto the courtyard and see a map of the castle which is laid into the paving. You can then compare that to the landscape that you are actually looking at.

I like this. We think of pastiches being a modern thing. But, this is a 16th century pastiche. It is the 16th century trying to be the middle ages and I like the kind of almost school child project quality about the paint work. I was interested in the fact that this castle is always trying to renovate itself and revive ideas of what it used to be. The timber buildings that were built in this part of the country, most of which have been lost, are best known through objects, which are representations of buildings. [21:22]

You can see that the royal chamber was always incredibly coloured in these objects. The most famous one here, The Book of Cows, has got a drawing of a church with the figure of Christ the God over it, and then you can just see it each end of the church those cross rafters that I have spoken about before. That was obviously a typical detail.

Here on the right is our building on the castle is closed and all the shutters are closed, and on the left on the castle is open and the shutters open up like hanging out flags. Like the library in Paris, we can put writing on the buildings and the building becomes something that has a conversation with you.

I am very interested in what I call the silence of modernism. Modern buildings often speak about nothing except themselves and their own internal language, like a classic bore at a dinner party. They talk about nothing but themselves. I wanted this building in a way to be something that would illustrate ideas about the whole landscape and about the whole history of the castle. You can see here on the right-hand side are these brightly coloured shutters. This is one of the drawings that we would put on the shuttered panels. You can see the castle in its landscape. You can see the face Museum which we have built here and you can see our own building, which we are talking about with the Town Square.

Here in the corner is a little café being designed by a Japanese practice called Sanaa, which is due to be completed in two years' time. All of the panel's taken together go from the first century, to the 20th and the 21st century. On the top left, you can see a Roman Fort all the way through to the 19th, 20th, 21st centuries. The closer you get to these images, the more detail there is. This is people hunting in the castle grounds in the 14th century and these are minors coming to speak to the Bishops in the 19th century to try and break a strike that was happening in the local mines. On the ceiling of the building, we were going to illustrate it completely with trees and fauna from the local parkland.

We made this model to show the illustrator the way in which the building is, maybe like a timber scaffold that is bedecked with these coloured images of the landscape around it. You can see here the shutter is open, and the timber model and then the ceiling with the trees and the animals on the ceiling looking down that space with the shutters closed. Here is the building itself finished with the tower beside it the tall hall and the shuttered panels.

This is the interior space looking down over the town and then looking from that towards the tower. We wanted the journey up the tower to be something that a child could do while shouting to their parents on the ground, 'look at me here, look at me here, I am on my way up!' . From that you get different views out or framed views out of the door over the town and the local landscape. People can pause, see and be seen as they climb up to the top. As you get higher the views change and develop. It becomes like a scaffold or a stage that you can climb up and down and eventually ascend up to the very top where there is a major viewing platform, which gives you a view out over the landscape. [24:17]

Magdalene College

The next project I would like to talk about is Magdalene College, in Cambridge in England. I suppose I was particularly interested in talking about this because I heard so much coming from India recently about the controversy about the Louis Kahn buildings at the Indian Institute of Management campus and I was extremely concerned about that and fascinated to see how that argument was progressing.

I think you will see why I was so concerned. My education was conducted by people who had worked for Louis Kahn and the influence Louis Kahn has had on my life was enormous. In Ireland they say, 'give me a boy for the first seven years of his life for I have the man'. Certainly in architecture, the first five years of my education turned me into someone for whom Louis Kahn was the most important figure. We are all watching closely to see the development of that that that subject in relation to those amazing buildings in Ahmedabad.

This building, a college is a university college in Cambridge. When you walk into this Courtyard, the first thing you are aware of is the most extraordinary and beautiful brickwork. What is particularly beautiful about it is that it is been repaired and changed so often that it is like a carpet or a tapestry and you walk up close and look at the walls. Generations and generations of individual bricklayers, piecing in and repairing, renewing the brickwork, so it becomes like a living carpet. It is on the side of the river, with the famous pumps that they have in the river in Cambridge. The college edge is right above the river.

At the back of the college, there is a famous library, which is the most important building on the college, which was created by a man called Samuel Peeps for his collection and is a very significant building. It is extremely austere brickwork and we had to build a new library beside it. You can see the plan here entering in from the street, the river where you saw those photographs is here. Entering into from the streets, that beautiful courtyard that you saw that with the brick work. Under an archway, into the second courtyard where Peep's library which you saw in the photographs is here. Through a gateway, an ancient tree, many hundreds of years old looking out onto a mature lawn with trees and the river.

Our building is going to sit here, picking its way carefully through the trees, so as not to disturb any of the older trees. It is a three-storey library building. Anybody who knows Louis Kahn, who knows the Trenton Bath house, who knows the idea of served and servants spaces, will immediately recognise the architectural strategy here. The idea of these square room spaces that climbed through the building. The whole of the library, naturally ventilated using these tall chimneys. Illuminations at the top using these square roof light elements to bring light deep down into the section and the long bit of the building here with chimneys facing it is then facing across towards the river.

The plan then on the ground floor with a long Gallery looking over the lawn. The entrance to the library at the top into a squared space. I was really amused by the idea that the building is three bays - one, two, three. What you would do is make a triple height space in the first bay. Here is the image of that that - gives you the whole height of the library. The second bay has the main reading room in the middle. The triple height spaces is one bay, the double space is two bays, and you can have a single height space which is four bays. The things slowly rotates around as it goes through the section.

Here is the idea of a double height space, which is both overlooking the triple height space and being on to the left and being overlooked by the single height space to the right. On top of the floor plan, you have this long reading room, on the very here at the bottom of the plan which overlooks the river. You are right up in those roof lights and quite close to them. On your right hand side, you have desks which look out over the river. [28:30]

If anybody was in doubt about my county and education, I think you would understand well enough where my architectural DNA lies. If you look at this plan, the AB - AB Tartan grid and the rhythm of served and servant spaces in the roof plan, which is finally demonstrated in all its crystalline clarity when you get beyond the surface of the roof. In those the small spaces, you can have tiny little reading niches. That desk has got two wooden shutters which open out to fresh air on the left and right. This is just an image of the building. A CGI image we did at planning stage, with the ancient Yule tree, the important listed building, and our new building on the right hand side with chimneys.

One fascinating thing then was to look at ancient brickwork and say how do you match it? You match what it looks in that looks like now, or do you match what it would have been like when it was built in the first place? A huge amount of work was done to try and find a sympathetic match to that brickwork and to go to different manufacturers around the country to find bricks that completely matched it. It is extremely rare in England to have handmade bricks. Brick-making is dying out as an industry with more industrialized building products coming in. To work with people who make real bricks with such a pleasure.

Laying those bricks out, was like a cook, looking at your ingredients before you start to prepare your meal, talking to everybody about it and agreeing it with the bricklayers. I love the names of them. The places that they come from, different parts of the country, the colour of them depending on where they were burnt in the kiln. 'Lindum' 'Hamblton' and so on. Going to the brick factory and seeing how all the bricks specials are made. Perhaps that is something that is more familiar to you as Architects, but it is almost a completely dying art here in Britain. The specials come out of all these special casts.

One of the things I really enjoyed, was the project architect in our office who makes some of the most beautiful technical drawings that I have had in my office. This is each of the different bricks that went into making the chimney stacks. Each one with its own colour coding, which then produces a drawing like this, where each brick is identified and its bonding is discussed and lots and lots of these drawings to produce these objects here which are the chimneys as they rise above the roof.



Taking those bricks out onto the site and making that AB-AB baseline of the kind of Kearney plan with brick piers on the ground and seeing how that grid rises up. That is a Kearney sense of the building and the ruin. It is very nice to see the construction site as a kind of reverse ruin here. You can see the structural plan is equally rigorous. Using Glulam Beams resting on precast concrete brackets, as a hits the brickwork. Using the least possible concrete but using it where it is really doing a good job.

You can see that idea here of the very logical knotting together of the structure with the Glulam arriving on to the precast which arrives onto the brick. Bit by bit like weaving and making a tapestry, that builds up into a really logical order. This was a bit of the building that we call 'The Knot'. The younger folk called it 'The Hashtag'. It is where the construction order comes together into one detail at the centre of each bay - where the things collect together.

On one of the lovely things about glulam is that you can make whole bits of the building and just crane them on. Here is one of those roof elements like a little ballerina being lifted up and dropped on tiptoes on the top of the brick work. They sit on top and you can see that order of the plan coming out really clearly from the from the roof. Here is the sense of the plan coming through from this this drone shot, we can just see this image here the new building and the old building it is not finished yet. Not properly photographed, but I went up last week and took a panorama to show the two of them together.

This is the sense of the external constructional detailing with oak windows held up on these brickwork cradles and the roof lantern sitting above them. Here is that triple height space. The first one bay triple height space that takes you right up like snakes and ladders to the top of the library. That brings you up to the reading room, the double-height space, which looks down over the triple height space, and then up to the top of the building the single height space, that looks down over both of them. It is full of these little niches.

This one hangs out over the triple height space with one desk. My colleagues call it the 'flirting desk'. You can see these little corners here where you can sit and feel like you are a part of a bigger organization, but feel quite protected and contained yourself within the library. Here is a sense of all of that being brought together. You can see the builder still doing work on it or the librarians are loading in the books. That gives you a sense of what would be like that when you are looking down from the bottom up towards the sort of pure geometry of these brown roof light elements. Here it is and looking over the old walls and there it is again by the river. [33:20]

Low Cost Housing

My next project I want to speak about is a housing project. It is by far the most inexpensive project we have built. It is probably as cheap as you could build a building in London at the moment. It is done for a low-cost housing and while I am quite pleased with the architecture, I do not really want to talk so much about the architecture as about another aspect of the site that I think is central to the broader subject of architecture and society. I became aware as we were building this building that the site has an extraordinary history. It is in a part of London,

that was used by immigrants for the last probably five hundred years. People coming into Britain for the first time who are landing in London either from the countryside around the rest of the island or more likely from other parts of the British Empire and they have fallen onto hard times.

It becomes a kind of a temporary stage in place, for people. One of the reasons for that is, it is built to the east of the city and it was originally glass works. The reason it would have been glass works is, as most of the wind and Britain comes from the west so anything which was poisonous, its fumes had to be blown away from the city. The poor lived downwind of these glass works and the rich lived on the Western side where the noxious fumes would not reach them. We look at the names of the streets, although the vast rocks have long gone. There is names like 'Glass House Square' and so on.

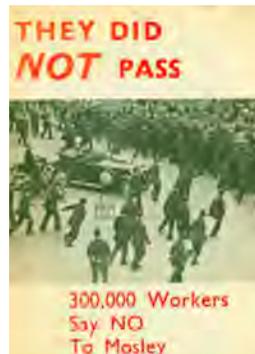
It is really fascinating for me as an Irish architect to look at this history,, because these would have been Irish people coming into this part of the city fleeing the Great Famine that occurred in Ireland in the mid-19th century. Over a million people died and that famine and the most destitute people came in and lived in appalling conditions. It was not simply that their conditions were appalling, but in a sense that degradation of their situation meant that they were looked down upon by almost everybody in this city. There were anti-Irish riots when they arrived because they were undercutting labour-costs. I want to read from a contemporary representation or a contemporary piece of writing which is describing these people. The person who is an Anglican priest describes it as follows - "it is the most offensive place ever to be encountered, it is wretched and dilapidated, fish, soil, awful, and refuse of various kinds are strewn about". It is occupied by poor Irish. Many of them street sellers and dredgers, ballast heavers, coal whippers, water-man, lump-man, and others whose trade is connected with the river as well as shop workers and sweaters. There are crowds of dirty children who grabbed and wallow as if in their native element.

You can see the city at this time, with these incredibly dense slums being built up around the back of the Tower of London. The first photographs of the 19th century revealed the lives of these people living in extraordinary density, in squalid conditions. What starts to happen in the 19th century is, various charity organizations start coming in and rebuilding housing at the same time as they are building the railways. You can see the railway lines being driven through the struts lumps as they are the slums are cleared. When they are replaced, they are replaced with new housing which relates to ideas of air and sanitation and so on. [36:44]



The new tenants who come in are poor, but the what the Victorians would have called 'the virtuous poor'. It is not the same people who had lived there before hand, I'm sure. There are people who could have afforded to pay their rent. These people are living beside the new railway lines in these new developments and 'Block K', which you can see at the centre of this plan is where our building is eventually built. But 'Block K' is already built from the remnants of the glass works. This is now the third level of development that we can find.

We can see the buildings here in this image, these barrack like blocks with these strange gaps in between them which allow light through into the courtyards. The next generation of people were Jewish people coming mostly from Russia and from the East, where there was persecution, coming to England, and creating new communities in the East End. The sense that both mingling with, and beginning to replace the poor Irish. You can see the combination thereof Jewish on this obviously Irish group here passing by the building which was on our side, with the Irish flag hanging off that in the background. This is obviously a Catholic ceremony with Irish people.



I am fascinated by one of the most important events in London in the 20th century, which was the 'Battle of Cable Street', which was a night when England was moving towards fascism. Mosley was the person who was leading them at the time of the Nazis becoming ultra-nationalist, ultra-protective. Groups of fascists were beginning to march in the city and the local people agitated and got together to resist these fascists. This famous march, turned into a riot. It was one of the most famous events of the 1930s, where local working people resisted the fascist who are marching through, who were protected by the police. We can see these scenes here, of in a sense class action against fascism at that time and the way in which local immigrant communities were agitating against them. [38:37]

After that in the Second World War, I find this picture incredibly sad and moving. This is a photograph from a Dornier bummer, of a German bomber, which is bombing the Germany's along the London East End beneath us here, we can see our site and what is very sad about this photograph is it is taken on the 7th of September 1940. Just we can see our building 'Block K' down there. The plaque on the wall of the building now shows that on the 8th of September the next day, the whole building was completely destroyed and everybody killed in the bunker beneath it. These are the kind of people who would have been sheltering on the bunker. We find our block has completely disappeared and is left for sixty years as an empty



site. This is the empty site as it was. What happened then was that Jewish and Irish people moved in and Bengali people started to move in. They were originally last cars who worked in the merchant navy, who are associated with the docklands. They came in and soon they were followed by families, and generation after generation came in. There was a great struggle in the 1970's between the national fronts who are an anti-immigrant movement who wanted them to be out. You can see their logo on the wall with immigrant people walking past. The sense of that time of social movement, these people needed protection and needed respect. It was an extremely important movement in London at that time. It is part of the tradition. Almost a tourist area, where if you want to go for Bengali food, you would always go down to 'Brick Lane' and that was a very important part of the history of the area.



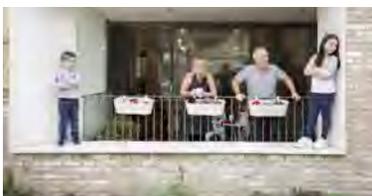
A Bengali writer wrote about the area, something that I found really interesting. Where you said that, 'White Chapel is always been a holding area, a temporary inter-zone for immigrants who have not yet fully settled in England. Whose lives are defined by the past, that of themselves or of their parents. But who wish to seize the future, who wish to become consumers, rather than hunched back toilers. The clever ones, those would contact, those who strike lucky, move away following the suburban lines out to the suburbs. The others are not going anywhere fast.'



This is our site in the building we designed on. The building is really very simple and all it does is use very direct common sense. Every sitting room has got at least two aspects. Every balcony has got a large blank wall on it, so you can you can beat your carpets, you can put your fridge out there and you are not going to ruin the architecture. Every circulation space has got air and daylight. Every lift has got a window opposite the entrance. Very simple things that create not just the quality of inhabitation for the people in these buildings, but also by extension create the grain of the city because only buildings of a certain size can produce those kind of conditions.



I was fascinated by these drawings by Giorgio De Chirico, the great Italian artist, which looks at that housing. The ordinary stuff of the city has been like an enduring framework around which the lives of people can interweave the sense of the melancholy and the great duration of some of these ordinary bits of the city. We made a drawing of our own housing in the manner of De Chirico, to suggest the idea of different lives and all of the variety moving through it.



This is a little gap, we have reinstated back between our new building and the old blocks. You can see the city of London with Richard Rodgers, Gherkin, then the Cheese Grater and the Norman Foster building - all very close by in the background, but that poor immigrant community living cheek-by-jowl by it. You can see, the sense that the balconies are things you can really use.

Often when I am feeling a bit down about architecture, I go and sit here. There is an old Afghan man who I sit beside, and I watch the parents who are looking at the kitchen windows shouting down to their children playing football in the courtyard. I got my friend Kristen who is the photographer just to photograph some of the newer generation of people who have moved into version 5 of this building on the same side. [42:38]

Houses of Parliament

The next project I would like to speak about is actually a little essay that I am going to insert into this lecture, so if you do not mind I will pause and I will play a film of a little ten-minutes essay I have done.

This is an organization called 'Drawings Matter' who are based in the UK and who collect architectural drawings. You can see the curator, Ellis Woodman and Niall Hobhouse. These are three architectural curators who have put together the exhibition is called 'Alternative Histories'. It is looking at the idea of architectural drawings that were made and the buildings that they may or may not have developed into. Could a modern architect take these drawings and perhaps reinterpret them in a completely new way?

The drawing that I was given to reinterpret as part of a kind of a group of 40 European practices was this drawing of the iconic Houses of Parliament of the Palace of Westminster in London. It was interesting for me after I did not particularly like the drawings by Sir Basil Spence and it shows an extension to the houses of Parliament that he was thinking about.

These are the sketches that I began to make around that which is looking at a model that I would make as an alternative history of the houses of Parliament or an alternative history of his sketch and bringing together a lots of layers of the story. So I am going to pause now for a few minutes and play this film. [44:19]



Video: Alternative Histories

Good afternoon. My name is Niall McLaughlin. I am an Irish architect practicing in London. I will be speaking about my response to a sketch sent to me by the 'Alternative History' project. I was asked to make further sketches and a model developing on the theme suggested by the original drawing.

The drawing is a pencil sketch made in a meeting of the Royal Fine Arts Commission in 1969 by Sir Basil Spence. It appears to depict a substantial steep roof mounted on top of the Houses of Parliament to provide additional accommodation for MP's. The roof sits symmetrically over the long river elevation, and the existing spire of the octagonal crossing is

centred behind it. Regular ducts on the sketch of the roof presumably indicate apertures for light and air and the offices. The manner of the sketches, warm and tentative. The rooftop edition appears very large yet somehow ingratiating and differential. It suggests an exercise in contextual shoehorning. The drawing should be compared with sketches and proposals made by Spence for the extension to the New Zealand Parliament building in Wellington at around the same time. By contrast, his work there displayed a hearty indifference to the existing context.

'Alternative Histories' issued an interesting provocation by asking an Irish architect practicing in Britain during the breaks of process to respond to a drawing of the Palace of Westminster for an exhibition in Dublin. In framing my response, I have gone back to that great Irish thinker Edmund Burke, who lived in Britain as a time of remarkable political change at the end of the 18th century. In the celebrated dispute with Thomas Paine, he advocated the primacy of gradual political change, based on customs and institutions that are evolved naturally through social processes. He contested Paine's enlightenment ideal of pure reason producing irreducible laws and rights applicable to everyone. The exchange between these two men is embodied in their great text, Burke's 'Reflections on the Revolution' and Paine's 'The Rights of Man'.

I argue that Burke's position is a foundational interpretation of British social and political history that creates a clear distinction with developments on the European continent. Its thoughtful exceptionalism has framed the British view of their own position. With all its lively contradictions, it is embodied in the architecture of the Palace of Westminster. The old houses of Parliament have evolved over centuries around the palace and the Abbey at Westminster. Generations of buildings were grafted onto each other. It is notable that the House of Commons had a layout based on the antiphonal organization of a cathedral choir or a Chantry Chapel. MP's sitting in stalls faced each other across an open floor. This building was burnt down in 1834, leaving the remnants of St. Stephen's Chapel and Westminster Hall. They would be incorporated into a new building.

Designed and built between 1835 and 1860, the 'Houses of Parliament' were already a monumental fudge. Charles Barry, the classical architect paid Augustus Pugin to tart up his competition entry to fulfil a requirement for the building to be in the Gothic or Elizabethan style. In the time of famines and revolution, it was deemed prudent to mollify the country with a reassuring image of tradition and continuity.

Contemporary commentary called for a building adapted, I quote, "a building adapted to the gothic origin and time-worn buttresses of our ancient constitution. A telling piece use the then-current architectural Theory of Association by calling for an aesthetic style from a quote, 'The tales that charmed our childhood'. The great chain of associations that bind Englishmen to their country. Given Barry's own planning instincts and the huge scale of this modern administrative building, there was always going to be a conflict between the organization of the building and its architectural representation. Gothic revivals are an English business. They embody a yearning for a prelapsarian hiddle, a childhood of the national community. English builders were already reviving the gothic manner before it fully expired, and they have been doing it ever since. [49:46]

This is the architecture of innocence and achieves the primary purpose of all public building. It establishes a fictional temporal depth, serving to bind citizens together. For Pugin, whose book contrasts railed against the abstraction and deracinated of the industrial age and offered pure Gothic as his antithesis, this commission must have felt like an inner betrayal during design development and construction. MP's mercilessly bullied the architectural team to comply with whims and revisions. It was a brutally pragmatic process where Barry ground out the wishes of the ministers while they sprinkled architecture of fairy dust onto this hybrid creature. The combination of real politics and delicate fantasy seems peculiarly British. From the outset, the designs were the subject of hot debate and pamphlets, articles, essays and cartoons. They were contested because the image of the country was at stake.

I love this cartoon proposing a fresco for the new buildings - Father Thames introducing his offspring to the fair city of London. They are diphtheria, scrofula, and cholera, staggering out of the water to take their place in the new complex. This sense of the building has been constantly haunted and undermined by man's darker side is persistent and political cartoons since the emergence of parliament itself. It is an aspect of British visual culture that I relish. It points to a realistic understanding of democracy. Not as the idealized version, but as a representation of the human, social, animal and all its nobility, complexity, and debasement.

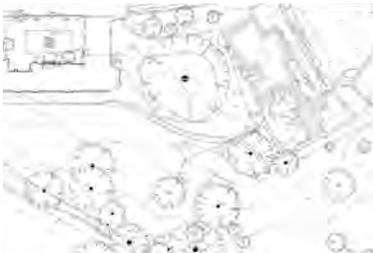
Here George Cruikshank shows a stream of billion on rotten boroughs filling the red velvet trough, from which MP's feed greedily. Here is the master James Gillray. His fashionable contrasts exposing one of the great illicit Affairs of the age. Or Gerald Scarfe, who has brewed in portrait of Churchill captures a pugilist spirit of the heart of the institution. Churchill himself resisted a plan to create an expansive circular commons chamber, demanding that it be kept under provisioned with seating to heighten the intensity of big occasions. If the politicians needed any goading there was always the British press, blazing loud, polemical, rhetorical and competitive. If this is society - red and tooth and claw.

Here in this image, James Guillory shows Napoleon himself dancing in maniac ravings at his depiction in the London Press. "The English newspapers! Revenge! Revenge! Diablo, Diablo, Diablo!". The British Houses of Parliament have been in the world news and recent years. Everyone watched with the degree of schadenfreude, as ministers tore each other apart in a gruesome public spectacle. They witnessed the fated dignity of the British Parliament crumble in front of their eyes. The prim, patrician mask, was ripped away.

I would suggest that this representation was fundamentally flawed in idealising the development and character of British democracy. In contrast, I would suggest that the visceral bonfires of recent years demonstrates the essence of British politics. Modern principles of communal democratic representation were hammered out here in the long sequence of similarity chaotic and unedifying spectacles.

Laws, as Bismarck would have it, are like sausages - better not to see them being made. Just as the premature death of the British Parliament was being discussed in opinion pieces, the government announced plans to refurbish the Houses of Parliament. This 'never new, never old' building was already crumbling away. Our proposed architectural model envisages the long refurbishment, as being like a public autopsy or an excavation.[54:30]

As in Van Meer vaults the anatomy of lesson of Dr. Willem van der Meer, the peeling back could become an edifying spectacle, and a public process. Visceral human and rational human in dialogue. This could be witnessed and contested. My model shows the Palace of Westminster as a balancing device with the fulcrum over Saint Stephen's Chapel and the houses of Lords and commons suspended equally on each side. It is also a body opened up to inspection and interpretation. The sides are pierced with tiny pins to suggest an older idea of the body as an effigy or a puppet, a place to direct wishes and desires for fulfilment or revenge. We proposed a public space on the roof covered in lightweight into a woven wicker, in homage to the putative origins of Gothic. When the restoration is finally finished, the wicker cage could be taken down and put on a bonfire along with televised press briefings from the Prime Minister. His proper place is back in the house. [55:59]



Ripon Chapel, Oxford

The next project I would like to speak about is a chapel that we designed just outside Oxford in England. It is an interesting historic set of buildings that were built in the 19th century for the education of Anglican priests. The beautiful mature site on a hill with woodland around it. We have generations and communities from around the world coming for education for the priesthood. It is interesting to design a place for the education of priests. It is almost like the still centre of the turning wheel. It is the place where their vocation begins, and then they move out parishes all around the country and indeed all around the world.



The site had a very beautiful tree just at the top of the hill which we can see in the image here, which was considered to be the biggest Beech Tree in England. We were only allowed to cut down one tree on the site, which is the one I draw a circle around we had to put a chapel into the space here. And so immediately we thought that the chapel should be given character by the light coming through the leaves of the trees. The first model we made was very simple a piece of plasticine with a thumb mark on it to suggest the idea of making a sacred space in the ground, is very primitive act of conferring the idea of place onto a piece of Earth. We made a drawing of the Beech Tree with this mark in the ground, a little depression or a little area that you could sit in, and create the idea of a community coming together for worship under the arms of the great Beech Tree.



The idea is that the structure of the building could be almost like a 'wood within the wood' or a 'thicket within the thicket', but the structural columns could be in some way like woodland. Finally a Christian idea that is a very ancient origin that a chapel or a church is somehow like a ship, and that the people together in it would feel as though they were sitting in a boat or in a ship.

The kind of chapel we were dealing with is used in all of the Oxford and Cambridge colleges. It is the same as the Houses of Parliament, where the community sit facing each other across the central space and they pray back and forth to bid in response. We made a drawing showing the community sitting at the side and the two key pieces of worship - the Eucharist, which is the blessing of bread, and the word, which is a region of the gospels position between these two groups of people. [58:31]

Since we are drawing that, the priest said, 'Would it not be nicer if we could have some sense of community or drawing together?'. I noticed that his hands made that shape as he said it. We took this photograph and used it as an idea for the project.

Once you draw two lines coming together like that, you get an ellipse, which is an extraordinary powerful architectural form. An ellipse is a section of a cone. The key thing is that the eccentricity of the circle as you move through the section of the cone becomes more and more extreme, until it becomes a line. Therefore, for a Christian place of worship, it is particularly interesting because you have the idea of the line which represents time's arrow or man in time.

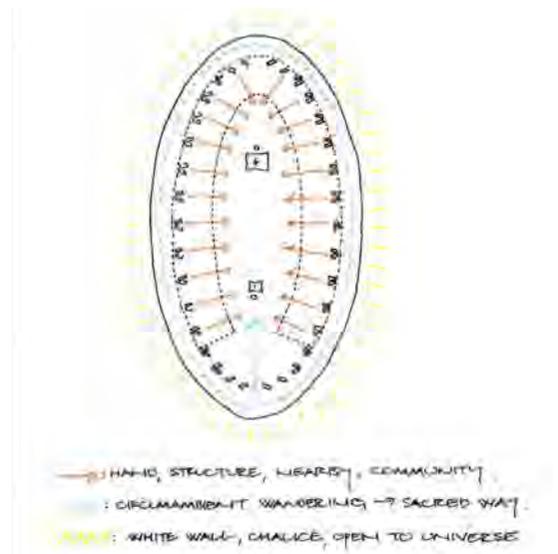
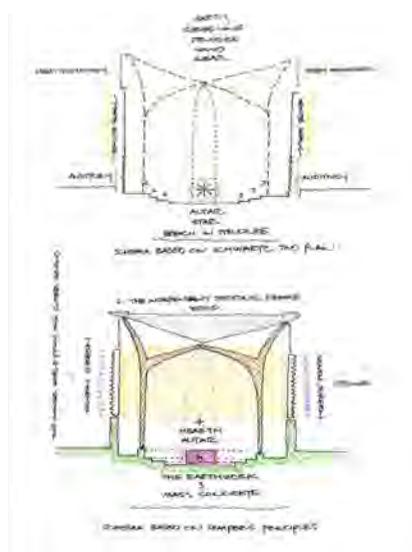
On the top left, you have a church by Rudolph Schwarz, which was built in the mid 20th century in Germany. Clearly, so many of the ideas from that plan are borrowed across and Peter Zumthor's chapel. Then you can see in our plan on top right hand side, which takes the relationship between the walls and the columns of the two previous plans, and plays a variation on them. The idea that these are conversations that occur across history and that were borrowing forward time.

On the line below, some very ancient structures, on the bottom left and right, some of the first Christian churches, with an ambulatory around the outside of an empty Central space. Here is our plan sitting inside the trees beneath the great beech tree. We can see the crystalline form of the perfect ellipse which forms the sacred worship space in the middle. Around it accreted onto the outside, there are all the things that are different are required to be special. A place for a tabernacle, a window to look out at the view in that gap, a place for a group to sit and pray quietly, a place for the priests to rest themselves. Differences pushed to the edges and the sacred ritual space is kept perfect in the middle.



The section which is borrowing from a Kahn'ian' idea, that you separate the structure from the envelope and you create a space between the two and you bring light into the gap in the middle. In a sense, almost all of the architectural effects of this building are created by the gap between the external envelope and the structure, which allows light to play around to enclosures, which interacts with each other. You can see the long section here that the two points of the ellipse which are the altar and the lectern beneath them this line here and this line here are also the point of which the roof parts company from the structure, to create this sweeping space around the outside. This drawing by our engineers showing the relationship between the timber structure and the stonewall. [01:01:47]

What is lovely is that a load bearing masonry ellipse is extremely stiff and the timber structure takes a vertical load of the roof. All the vertical load is taken by the wood and it stands stiffened by the elliptical wall. The acoustics in particular are an extremely important. So we played a digital model of the actual acoustics. The computer model of the actual acoustic condition of the chapel has played into a physical model of the space, and you can wear it on your head like a hat. We could take that up to the clients and let them play with the idea of the building and take it out into the space between the trees to help them to understand what they would experience once the building is built.



We end up with this very simple idea. The external load bearing form is a kind of cup or a chalice, with this framework on the inside, which is like a hand which holds the worshipping community. The section you can see, these ideas brought together into the idea of the earthwork with frame, encircling wall, which is treated like a tapestry and the altar which is treated like a hearth. [01:02:52]

In a call between designing and building this building, we made a drawing from my old college at University College, Dublin. John Tomy invited us to make a drawing for a lecture. We had heard about medieval masons who drew in Plaster of Paris on the floor of the great cathedrals, and we asked a builder we knew to take a room in the university and to pour lime plaster onto the floor and that is what we drew on. My team from the office and a group of students came together and drew for a week in this space.

You can see the old pleasure for me at least, of drawing again - a physical drawing and the ache in your hands that comes from drawing day after day. It starts in your fingertips and it works right up into your wrists and it is up to your shoulders before you know it. The intense concentration of the hand. The blue lines here are all setting at the ellipse and the orange lines are the lines of the structure and the wax pencils went beautifully down onto the plaster.

Just enjoying all of those old drawing tools that many of us had not used for so long, sitting at desks with computers. The sense of making a mark on the surface. The mark is actually a physical material that you put onto the surface. Who remembers flexi curves? They were quite a thing, were they not? The student here is learning how to use a flexi curve for the first time.

The sense of drawing together as a community of people, and just dwelling in the project in the space between it being designed and being made! The way in which, the space of the drawing itself was small that people had to interact and move their bodies together around the space. You have the space that were made by the people in the space, that was made by the drawing. Finally the drawing is finished and people can walk across the surface of the floor and go into the lecture. This compound image just shows you the people drawing the room with its doorways into it and the space of the building itself.

Going back to the first slides that I showed you, I made this just two weeks after my father died. I went back to Dublin and I was making the drawing. In England, no one ever talks to you after a death. But, in Ireland, they want to stand and chat to you for half an hour, and it's a ritual. I drew for a week in that room wearing my father's watch for the first time with everybody I had known from my childhood and my education coming in and standing at the door, and talking to me about my father.

In a deeper sense, it embodied my idea about architecture being a borrowing forward in time. If you turned over on your back in that drawing and looked up in your mind's eye, this is what you would have seen the roof of the chapel where the structure interlaces together and the trajectory of the beams cross each other in the space and carry on that idea of separating the envelope from the structure and bringing light into the gap in between. I think it is very clear in this image.

You can see it at the end of the building too. It was interesting when it was being constructed that you could slap that timber structure and the whole thing would tremble from end to end. They connected it back via the spurs to the window wall and then the stiffness of the stone made it for like a bicycle wheel. This is the space that we're talking about, with the lecture and the altar together and the columns rising up in the space around the walls. [01:06:05]



These little intimate spaces that are made around the edge of the chapel, the window out to the view the place for the tabernacle under the north light, the space for small groups to pray and which looks out into the main space of the chapel. The chapel itself under the great Beech Tree with its woven wall of stone working its clerestory windows and that sense of them still work itself being like a woven tapestry that is created by using a broken and cut bond alternately.

Those little spaces that are exceptions, those little particular spaces just stick out the edge of the lips, like little cantilevers from a ship. You can see the combination thereof a clear story and the woven stonework of the wall. Maybe I will finish his part of the talk today, just with a few images of the building itself the space that is opened up between the structure and the light. The day after it was finished, we had a mass or a service and the chapel and Mariah, my project architect came at dawn and she lay on the floor at five o'clock in the morning and photographs the sun rising.

You can see on the right hand side, the night-time in blue being chased away and the left hand side the sun coming almost horizontally into the building. Every sacred building wherever, it is fundamentally a world orientation device to tell us where we are on the cosmos. And of course, to tell us where we are in time. Thank you very much indeed □



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