

BEST LAID PLANS: A photo-sculptural, embodied response to spatial and social transformation, through a study of housing-led development in Cabra, Dublin 7.

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Thesis presented for the award of PhD School of Communications, Dublin City University

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work, that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: Mandy O'Neill

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List of Abbreviations

ABP: An Bord Pleanála.
ABR: Art-based research.
BTR: Build to Rent.
CATU: Community Action Tenants Union.
DADC: Dublin Artisans Dwellings Company.
DCU: Dublin City University.
DEIS: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools.
FD1: Field Diary 1.
FD2: Field Diary 2.
FD3: Field Diary 3.
FD4: Field Diary 4.
FD5: Field Diary 5.
FD6: Field Diary 6.
FD7: Field Diary 7.
FDI: Foreign Direct Investment.
FSAS: Fire Station Artist's Studios.
GSB: Gaelscoil Bharra.
IAA: Irish Architectural Archive.
IFSC: International Financial Services Centre.
ISSLT: Irish Soldiers and Sailors Land Trust.
NAMA: National Asset Management Agency.
REIT: Real Estate Investment Trust.
SHD: Strategic Housing Development.
SPPR: Specific Planning and Policy Requirements.
TBG&S: Temple Bar Gallery and Studios.
TCD: Trinity College Dublin.
TUD: Technological University Dublin.

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Abstract

Mandy O’Neill: *Best Laid Plans*: A photo-sculptural, embodied response to spatial and social transformation, through a study of housing-led development in Cabra, Dublin 7.

In 2020, spatial transformation in the form of a new housing development in Cabra, Dublin 7, dovetailed with new directions emerging in my photographic work. Through experimental and iterative artistic processes I set out to deepen and accelerate my practice, asking how expanded photography methods could be an effective way to open dialogue about the lived experience of this spatial and social transformation.

Multiple photographic approaches were enacted through photo-walks of Cabra, including repeat photography, typologies and street photography. An impulsive, embodied response to the built environment shaped the nature of the photographs produced, as did the weather and lighting conditions. Photo-walks were documented in field diaries, with photographs and text combined as part of the research creation process. Photographic materials were then edited and constructed, in the artist’s studio, and used as reference towards hybrid artefacts. Methods of community engagement were enacted throughout the research in the form of interviews, photo-elicitation sessions and book-making workshops.

The results were manifest in a series of artefacts presented in the exhibition *Best Laid Plans*, at the Irish Architectural Archive, September 6th -November 29th 2024. Thematically the artefacts address the topics of housing-led development and the effects of planning, through a case study of Cabra, while also considering the wider historical and national context of housing. Key findings included the effectiveness of hybrid, materially engaged, spatialised practice in engaging interdisciplinary audiences, and stimulating interest around the topic of both housing-led development and expanded photography practice. The artistic processes outlined in this thesis, add valuable tacit knowledge as a contribution to the field of expanded photography practice. Informed by theories of material thinking and material engagement, the research argues for the value of praxical knowledge which emerges through interaction with materials, and the efficacy of photography-based installation to affectively engage an audience.

Introduction

It was during an artist residency in 2018-2019, at the Digital Hub in Dublin's Liberties that the germs of my PhD research project began. It was a long hot summer and the intensity of the sun on buildings and wooden hoardings, shaping forms and saturating colours, compelled me to photograph. This compulsion represented a shift from my previous approaches which had focused primarily on portraiture, to what would eventually become a more photo-sculptural and installation-based practice, founded in material engagement.

The Liberties area of Dublin was then, and still is, undergoing exponential housing and commercial building, with many former spaces disappearing and new ones emerging. In addition to my photography-based interaction with the built environment, I spoke to multiple residents about the history of the area, and listened to them speak about the changes taking place. Strands emerged, including the dialogue between myself, the camera and the built environment, public engagement through ongoing dialogue with residents, wider conversations about place, gentrification and spatial justice, and a growing interest in materiality.

Prior to this residency, I spent a decade photographing and engaging with children and young people, in the context of artist residencies at primary and post primary schools. School environments are particularly restrictive, and their bureaucratic nature meant constant negotiation. I was working extensively within the genre of formal portraiture at the time, and the desire for a more instinctual and less restrictive form of practice had been building incrementally. A growing discomfort with portraiture, engendered by my experience of photographing young people in schools, drew me further towards the built environment. Social media and image sharing platforms had resulted in increasing image consciousness among teenagers, and along with this a reluctance to be photographed by me in the school context. They also preferred to photograph themselves and retain control of their image. Additionally, I was beginning to question the efficacy of portraiture as a representational strategy, particularly within vulnerable groups.

This new interest in the built environment began to solidify and take shape during an artist residency at All Hallows, Dublin City University in 2019-2021. The residency included an artist's studio at the 18th century Drumcondra House. While my initial plan for the residency had been to engage with third level students, as a logical continuation of previous work in

schools, being in this space, I was instinctually more drawn to photograph the buildings as they were shaped and reshaped by light, weather or season (Figure 0.1). Thus, I began to take the first tentative steps toward a new direction in my practice.

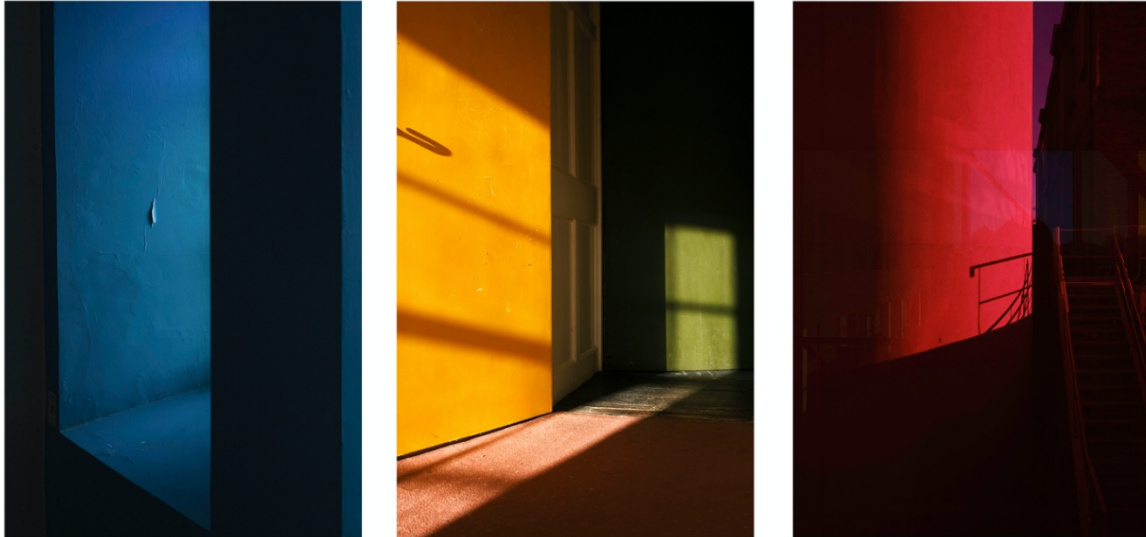


Figure 0.1 Triptych of photographs of Drumcondra House, DCU Artist Residency. Mandy O'Neill, 2019.

My residency was abruptly stopped in March 2020, when the Covid 19 pandemic lockdown began. Restricted to my area of residence in Dublin's inner suburb of Cabra through the summer of 2020, I began to walk the streets with my camera, noticing cranes appearing across the landscape and the emergence of building sites. Discussions with local residents identified this time as an important juncture in the history of the area. The largest housing development since the 1930s and 1940s was taking place, and this was highly significant in terms of its impact in a broader socio-political, historical, and geographic sense, beyond how it impacted me on a personal and artistic level.

It is important to recognise my own subjective position in relation to Cabra and my perception of this particular 'place'. In thinking about the concept of place, I draw on the concepts of geographer Edward Relph (2008 [1976] Preface), who considers places to be 'at their core, phenomena of experience'. Relph had drawn this conclusion through identifying, in the 1970s, a distinct lack of discussion within the discipline of geography on the 'meaning' of place. His seminal text *Place and Placelessness* (2008 [1976]) set out to address this omission.

I have lived in Cabra for almost two decades, in rented accommodation. My experience of living in the area, and community engagement through various projects I have undertaken have given me what Relph (2008 [1976], p. 54) refers to as an ‘empathetic insiderness’. Empathetic insiderness requires more than just being in a place, but an opening up to its possibilities. As Relph (2008 [1976], p. 54) has stated: ‘To be inside a place empathetically is to understand that place as rich in meaning and hence to identify with it’. This resonates strongly with my position in relation to Cabra. In addition the material environment, with its particular symbols and fabric, it is the cultural identification I experience and recognise as part of my own upbringing in a working-class area of Dublin. This identification is manifest in my work through the type of images I make and in what I choose to omit. Relph suggests that ‘emphatic insiderness demands some deliberate effort of perception’, which I interpret as the act of really looking. I see an example of this in my attempts to look past stereotypical views, instead embracing the granular details which make up my view of Cabra, both materially and socially.

Previous projects I undertook with the local Gaelscoil (Gaelscoil Bharra) and the Cabra Men’s Shed, also shaped my empathetic perception of the area. The first major project I undertook in Cabra, was primarily concerned with socio-economic and spatial inequality in relation to the school system, focusing specifically on the ‘prefab’ phenomenon, through a study of Gaelscoil Bharra primary school in Cabra. *Promise* (2011-2015), ostensibly a depiction of childhood and education, developed into an examination of spatial inequality in the school system, symbolised by temporary prefabricated units. Gaelscoil Bharra was founded in 1996. It was two decades before a suitable school building was constructed, with the school remaining contained in dilapidating prefabs throughout Ireland’s boom years. *Promise* was the start of a decade-long engagement with primary and post primary schools set up under the DEIS initiative (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) which considered how access to opportunities can affect the lives of pupils at these schools.

A thread of using photography-based methods to address socio-economic and political themes, through working with groups, can be identified here, as well as social consciousness which has existed in my practice from the start. Formally *Promise* comprised of a series of portraits, with interiors and exteriors of school buildings as in Figures 0.2 and 0.3. I also worked with pupils, using methods such as drawing, questionnaires and workshops, and spent time at numerous community and school events outside the school buildings. In this way I became embedded in

the wider school community as an artist, which allowed for development of long-term relationships which I would later draw on as part of my PhD research.

One such relationship was with Paul O’Farrell, the Cabra Development Officer, who would be a key figure in facilitating communication with Cabra residents throughout the PhD. In 2017 I had approached Paul about a possible project with the Cabra Men’s Shed, prompted by an invitation for new members, that I had noticed outside Gaelscoil Bharra. I then spent several months documenting their activities, attending meetings and producing a series of portraits (one of which can be viewed in Figure 0.4). Plans to exhibit the portraits never materialised and the project ended with a presentation of the work through a slideshow with music chosen by the participants.



Figure 0.2: Untitled from the series *Promise*. Source: Mandy O’Neill, 2011-2015.



Figure 0.3: 'Cait' from the series *Promise*. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2014.



Figure 0.4: Mick from the series *The Men's Shed*. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2017.

The project with the Cabra Men's Shed highlights the fact that my practice is not primarily driven by possible outputs in the form of final artworks or exhibitions. Human engagement, being with people, the activity of 'doing' is equally important and often more enriching.

Reflecting again on my experience with Gaelscoil Bharra Primary school, the ritual of editing photographs and setting them to music, to be regularly viewed by pupils in the classroom, had an immediate joy that is hard to replicate in the more formal environment of an exhibition. The purpose of briefly outlining these two projects is firstly to give some context for my position as an artist in relation to Cabra, and secondly to offer some examples of my previous photographic approaches to representation of communities in the area.

Rationale and Motivation

The rationale for this practice-based research project was two-fold. Changes happening in the built environment of Cabra dovetailed with new directions in my practice, and I was compelled to respond to these changes. Spatial transformation in the form of new housing developments was underway in Cabra as I started this research, the largest building project since Dublin Corporation's public housing schemes of the 1930s and 1940s. New planning amendments enacted from the mid 2000s had resulted in a slew of planning applications for built-to-let apartments, with 'fast-track' legislation enabling a speedy application process. As I began my research, these new developments were rising across the city and suburbs, including Cabra. There was an imperative to record and pay attention to these changes, as a way to understand the implications and possible lived experience of this new period of development.

A practice-based approach was deemed appropriate in the sense that in engaging materially with the spatiotemporal shifts in the Cabra environment, I might better understand the material experience of development, which could then be shared with others. These two converging factors, change in my immediate environment, and new directions in my practice, along with the historical significance of new developments in Cabra, served as points of departure for the research. Theoretically the research was framed by material thinking and material engagement, with embodiment and perception explored from a broadly phenomenological perspective.

In relation to the practice-based PhD, Sunil Manghani (2021, p. 379) suggests that it can be viewed as 'an opportunity to deepen, challenge and accelerate practice'. He also acknowledges the importance of defining the 'body of knowledge' as art practice itself, considering that the artist 'will likely be engaged in all number of 'other' concerns, relating perhaps to the sciences, the environment, culture, identity and technology' (Manghani 2021, p. 377). As such, the primary focus of this PhD is the development of my practice, through the processes of material

engagement, towards new methods and approaches. The process of this transformation is explored through a study of housing and planning, instigated by new housing led development in Cabra, Dublin 7.

Practice-Based Research

In advance of speaking explicitly to my practice-based methodologies, it is important to define the term practice-based, as it applies to my research. Frayling (1993, pp. 1-5) speaks of practice-based research as ‘research where the end product is an artefact, where the thinking is so to speak, embodied in the artifact, where the goal is not primarily communicable knowledge in the sense of verbal communication, but in the sense of visual or iconic or imagistic communication’. While the ‘end-product’ of my research is intended to be an artefact or portfolio of artifacts, the process is equally important. Barbara Bolt (2014, p. 1) argues that: ‘The focus on artworks, rather than practice, has produced a gap in our understanding of the work of art as process’, and proposes ‘that in creative arts practice “research” commences in practice, in our dealings with the tools and materials of production, rather than a self-conscious attempt at theorisation’. Creative practice is not only about creating something new, ‘but also by the way the making process itself leads to a transformation in the ideas, which in turn leads to new works’ (Candy and Edmonds 2018, p. 64).

Wang et al (2017, p. 6) suggest a useful ‘classification’ framework for thinking about arts-based research (ABR) which attempts to ‘create order in the messy field of artistically inspired methods of socially engaged research’. Part of this classification involves comparing traditional qualitative methods with ABR. In relation to data collection methods for example, qualitative methods are described as: ‘The use of well-documented data collection methods such as interviews, focus groups, visual elicitation, and field work involving observations’ (Wang et al 2017, p. 11). In contrast, ‘data creation’ associated with ABR is described as: ‘The use of artistically inspired methods, such as digital storytelling, photography, drawing, poetry writing, performance, etc’ (Wang et al, 2017, p. 11). They suggest a need in ‘artist-researchers’ for surprise and to ‘potentially unsettle things’ and that ABR can ‘draw attention to complexity, raising more questions than it answers and even generating more uncertainties than certainties’ (Wang et al, 2017, p.11).

The nature of the research inquiry in practice-based research is described by Skains (2018, p. 93) as ‘often vague and typically open ended to permit flexibility in the practice’ with space for serendipity. Candy and Edmonds (2018, p.63) concur in their statement that ‘research questions arise from the process of practice, the answers to which are directed towards enlightening and enhancing practice’. The nebulous nature of the research inquiry in a practice-based PhD renders it exploratory rather than direct. Exploratory questions emerge from the existing practice of the researcher providing ‘a means of exploration that extends that work in a personal sense as well as contributing to the wider picture’ (Candy and Edmonds 2018, p. 63). All of which is to say that while my research clearly addresses the topic of spatial transformation, housing, and the socio-economic, political underpinnings of such change, the main goal is an examination of my processes and the resulting outputs as a way to deepen and understand practice.

For Sunil Manghani (2021, p. 378) the practice PhD is ‘a way of defining your methodology’, of exploring new ‘ways of doing’. In comparison to the methodology section in a more traditional PhD, for example in social science, in a practice PhD focus can be on the methods themselves (Manghani 2021, p. 379). It is with this in mind that I extensively outline the process and methodological aspects of my research, offering this knowledge as contribution to the field. Visual methods are key to this research and hence the decision was made to incorporate extensive visual material into the thesis itself. In this sense the thesis is an extension of my methods, that seeks to enhance knowledge and understanding of the trajectory of practice-based research, and the resulting artefacts.

Research Questions

The central research questions are as follows:

- How effective can interdisciplinary, photography-based art practice be, as a way to open dialogue about the topic of housing-led development, and its potential impacts on lived experience?
- In what way can my practice-based research contributed to the field of expanded photography practice, with a particular focus on conditions and acts of making?

Research Goals and Objectives

The main objectives of this research are as follows:

- To challenge, deepen and accelerate my practice, through an iterative process which reveals valuable tacit knowledge as a contribution to the field of photography/art-based practice.
- To produce a series of artefacts and develop methods of public engagement, which aim to enhance understanding, and stimulate reflection on the lived experience of housing-led development.

Exhibition and Documentation of Artefacts

The exhibition *Best Laid Plans* was held at the Irish Architectural Archive from September 18th 2024 to November 29th 2024. In the exhibition the artefactual outputs of this research project were presented across two floors of the building, with site-specific considerations. Extensive documentation of both the iterative processes of making, and the final artefacts themselves are contained in Chapter Five and Chapter Six of this thesis, with photographic approaches illustrated in Chapter Three. While practice is evident throughout the thesis, with my photographs used extensively as illustration in Chapter One and Chapter Four, Chapters Three, Five and Six are the key practice chapters. Separate documentation of the exhibition *Best Laid Plans* is provided in Appendix 1. A copy of the thesis, a copy of the publication *Best Laid Plans*, and a curated series of printed research materials can be accessed at the Irish Architectural Archive, 45 Merrion Square, Dublin 2. An additional copy of the thesis will be held at Cabra Library, Navan Road, Dublin 7.

Thesis Outline

Chapter One begins with a geo-historical overview of the area of Cabra, focusing on housing developments. The primary aim of this chapter is to chronologically trace the evolution of Cabra, and the wider socio-political and ideological context of Irish housing, as a way to understand how we arrived at the current housing situation. Development of the original Dublin Corporation housing schemes in Cabra is prefaced with an outline of motivating factors for their construction, including the dire housing conditions of the early 19th century and the burgeoning town planning movement. Ideological shifts away from the provision of social

housing and towards financialisation are described, along with an outline of amended planning laws which set the conditions for new housing typologies in Cabra. Throughout, historical maps and photographs, along with photographic documentation produced through my practice-based research from 2020-2024, are utilised as illustration, and to give a sense of Cabra as a place. In this chapter I draw widely on the writings of Ruth McManus (2003, 2008, 2011, 2018, 2019, 2021) in relation to the development of Dublin's Suburban housing. The trajectory of social housing in the Irish state is discussed through texts by Conor McCabe (2013), Eoin O'Broin (2019), Lorcan Sirr (2021), Rory Hearne (2020), and others.

Chapter Two focuses on the ways in which Irish photography, in the context of documentary practice and 'art' photography, has examined the topic of housing-led development in Ireland, from the 1990s to the present day. It has done this through a selective overview of practitioners, as a way to situate my own practice within this field, offering comparisons, while identifying changes over time. The primary aim of this chapter is to critique my practice through the examination of others working in the field, and to identify conceptual and methodological shifts. Ethical quandaries in my practice have been discussed in relation to the representation of vulnerable groups, with new directions indicated at the end of the chapter where I describe more hybrid approaches to photography. The theme of housing has emerged, through the research period, as a topic of concern for many Irish artists, and this chapter concludes with a brief overview of projects between 2020 and 2024 which responded to this thematic. This chapter draws extensively on the work of Justin Carville (2011, 2014, 2017, 2018, 2019), in relation to Irish photography, and on theories of the photographic image as espoused by writers such as David Bate (2025, 2016), Liz Wells (2011, 2015) and David Company (2003, 2014, 2020).

Chapter Three considers the relationship between body, environment and camera, and the material outcomes of the acts of walking, observing and photographing in the inner suburb of Cabra. It outlines a series of methods including the photo-walk, and the use of field diaries, as modes for collecting photographic and textual data. Specific photographic approaches are described including repeat photography, typological methods, and 'straight' documentary. A series of experimental attempts to photograph people are discussed, using various street photography strategies and camera technologies. Workshops and interview methods are outlined, along with participant groups. Theoretically this chapter takes a phenomenological and postphenomenological approach, with a focus on material engagement, drawing on the work of Anneke De Klerke (2020), Barbara Bolt (2004, 2006, 2007), Don Ihde and Lambros

Malafouris (2019), Don Ihde (1993, 2016), Eve Forrest (2013) , and Tim Ingold (2000, 2011, 2013, 2021).

Chapter Four focuses on two specific Cabra sites, the Hamilton Gardens apartment complex and Matts of Cabra derelict public house. Both sites underwent significant change throughout the timeline of my research. The Hamilton Gardens development of 485 units was constructed from 2020-2022, while Matts of Cabra exponentially deteriorated during the same period. As case studies they serve as key examples of both development, and dereliction, in Cabra, and as a way to discuss the wider context of planning, property development and public space. Repeat photography methods are loosely used to document changes wrought by building and deterioration. The use of visual strategies by developers to project imagined futures is discussed, along with the notion of the urban ruin as visual subject. This chapter draws extensively on primary research in the form of interviews and photographic documentation of Cabra sites.

Chapter Five outlines the material and embodied processes of my research, with a focus on studio practice and environments of production. Different studio spaces are described, along with their influence on the works produced, and various stages of material engagement and production. The chapter also gives an overview of experiments, presentations and workshops carried out as part of my research. Theoretically this chapter borrows from Barbara Bolt (2004, 2006, 2007) and Tim Ingold (2000, 2011, 2013, 2021), in relation to material thinking, while also drawing on a range of literature on practice-based research which sees making as the central driver (Candy and Edmonds (2018), Manghani (2021), Scrivener (2004), Skains (2018).

Chapter Six describes the exhibition *Best Laid Plans* (18th September 2024 – 29th November 2024) at the Irish Architectural Archive, along with detailed description of the artefacts produced. It begins by offering a brief context for my expanded photography practice, drawing on important junctures in photo-sculptural practice. This is informed by Lucy Soutters (2016, 2018) research on historical and contemporary expanded photography practices, with reference to specific exhibitions. Questions of medium specificity (Krauss 1979), and the photographic object (Stazer 2016) are discussed, in relation to my practice. Following this, the chapter brings the reader on a walk through the exhibition, outlining the conceptual and formal decisions and processes behind production of the artefacts.

Conclusion

The primary focus of this practice-based PhD has been the development of my practice through material engagement, material thinking, and the processes of making. This development has unfolded through an exploration of housing-led development and planning, with a focus on the area of Cabra, Dublin 7. My practice has developed exponentially, from a focus on portraiture and documentary, to an expanded, hybrid, installation-based endeavour, through the experimental processes enacted during the research period. New understandings have been gained through working with materials such as timber, and construction of a modular system which allowed for new modes of display. Designing and constructing this system has opened up new possibilities for production of future artworks.

The environment and conditions, in which work is conceived of and made, have emerged as key factors. The artist's studio as a creative space, and the effects of the immediate built environment have been examined, with the importance of conditions becoming evident in my reflection on the experimental processes enacted in these spaces.

Having experimented with multiple photographic approaches in relation to representing people, I have worked through some of my ethical questions, identifying that the issue is with how I might represent vulnerable groups, and the class based connotations of particular approaches, rather than simple a turn away from portraiture. Photographs of people engaged in activities of care and domestic renovation did not incite the same ethical quandary and I will explore this avenue further in future research.

Through experimenting with various camera technologies and methods, including camera-phone photography, typologies, repeat photography, documentary, vernacular and the everyday, I have come to see photography as a set of practices, which has freed me from previous concerns about genre. This has resulted in a new hybrid practice, where photography can be applied in different modes, depending on thematic, intention, and affect.

The topic of social housing has been examined in relation to social transformation, through engagement with Cabra residents, housing experts and interviews with my mother. The sound piece *The best thing we ever did*, exhibited as part of my exhibition *Best Laid Plans* utilised

RTE housing documentaries and interviews with Cabra residents and my mother, to illustrate this social transformation.

Workshops and discussions conducted with Cabra residents have allowed them to be part of the incremental research process. Participants have enacted material thinking through photo-elicitation and bookmaking, with the exhibition adding another layer of material engagement. The exhibition itself has been successful in realising the goal stated above, of ‘stimulating reflection’ about the topic of housing-led development and its social implications.

The history of public housing in Ireland, including the trajectory from state supported schemes, to housing as a commodified financial asset have been outlined, offering greater understanding of current developments. Chapter Four has described the outcomes of planning amendments which have allowed for smaller apartments at higher density, through documentation of the Hamilton Gardens apartment complex. This documentation can now serve as a resource for future researchers and indeed can be drawn upon for future works as part of my own practice.

Chapter One: Cabra

1.1 The Early Evolution of Cabra

Known as Cabragh up to the early 20th century, translated as ‘thicket, moor, waste or bad land’ the area of Cabra today is an inner suburb located to the North of Dublin city, between the Phoenix Park and the Royal Canal (Neary, 2016, p. 65). As with many suburbs, identifying a definitive boundary for Cabra can be a difficult task, as evidenced in this statement by local councillor Séamus McGrattan:

It probably ends up on church boundaries – probably what most people would use, the parish boundaries...Then the other thing when you talk about boundaries is the Garda divisions are completely separate. There’s three Garda divisions within that boundary of Cabra...then the Council boundaries, the electoral lines, they go much wider...There is no definitive boundary as such. You’ve so many different divisions, parish boundaries, electoral boundaries, garda divisions, sporting ones...the GAA has parish lines – there is all different boundary lines so it can be confusing. (McGrattan, S, Interviewed November 2023).

McGrattan suggests that for many Cabra residents the accepted boundary is the one outlined in the map below (Figure 1.1) – stretching from the Cabra Road to the North Circular road at Phibsborough, along the Ratoath Road up to the Ratoath overbridge and along the railway/canal to Phibsborough. For the purposes of my research this is the area I have chosen to focus on. It serves as a container for the themes I explore in this chapter, including the historical development of the city and suburbs, social housing, and the history of Irish housing policy, town planning, new housing typologies and dereliction, all related back to Cabra.

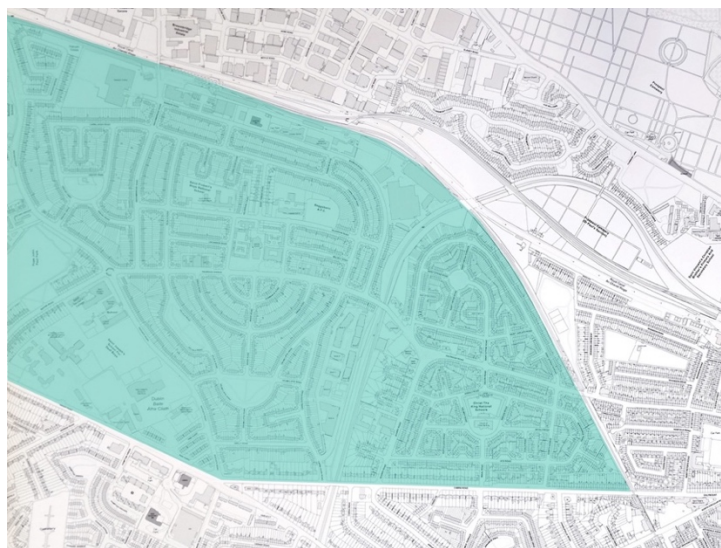


Figure 1.1: Cabra case-study area marked in green. Source: Cabra extract at 1:2,500 scale, Tailte Éireann, 2023.

Some of the earliest cartographic information for Cabra can be found in the Down Survey of Ireland (1656-1658), extracts of which are used in Figures 1.2 and 1.3. In Figure 1.2, ‘Great Cabragh’ and ‘Little Cabragh’ are named, bordering the areas of Finglas, Castleknock, Coolock and Grangegorman. Figure 1.3 provides a view of Little Cabragh within the Barony of Castleknock, depicting a house, woodland, and indications of a church presence.



Figure 1.2: Extract from *The Down Survey 1656-1658* map of Dublin, showing the areas of ‘Great Cabragh’ and ‘Little Cabragh’. Source: Library of Trinity College Dublin.

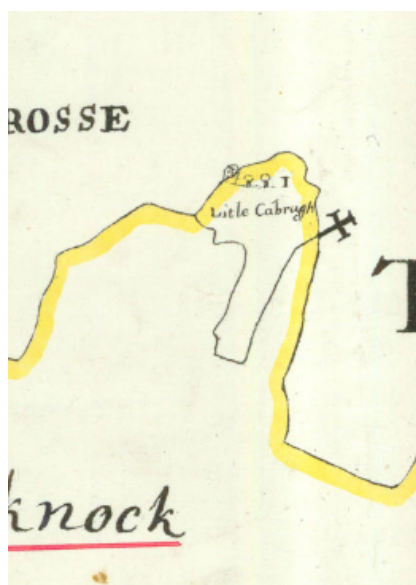


Figure 1.3: Extract from *The Down Survey 1656-1658* map of the Barony of Castleknock, showing the area of Little Cabragh. Source: the Library of Trinity College Dublin.

Through the 1800s and up to the early 20th century, Cabra was mostly utilised as farmland, for market gardening, and as a giant lairage for cattle (Neary, 2016). Most of the land throughout this period was owned by wealthy families, including the Seagraves, Begges, Keoghs and Snows (Neary 2016, pp. 67-100). Cabragh House (Figure 1.4) located at the corner of Fassaugh Avenue and Ratoath Road was the seat of the Seagraves. A Dublin Corporation senior citizens' housing development now occupies the site and Dublin City Council are currently renovating the units (Figure 1.5). The Begge family's residence, Beggsboro House, still stands on Fassaugh Avenue (Figure 1.6). Dublin Corporation purchased the Begge's 30 acre farm for housing in 1932 after which the new 'Beggsboro extension' got underway (McManus, 2021, pp. 217-218). Another farming family, the Keoghs were in possession of three large properties in what is now Cabra West - Cabra Villa, Broombridge House and Villa Park - all of which were acquired by Dublin Corporation under compulsory purchase order in 1939 (Neary, 2016). The Snow family resided at a grand house on Quarry Road (named after the nearby Quarry) called the Homestead (Neary, 2016). The adjoining land was utilised for dairy farming up to 1937 and is currently the location of the Homestead bar, Cabra Bingo Hall, a number of retail outlets and the Homestead Court apartment blocks (Figure 1.7).

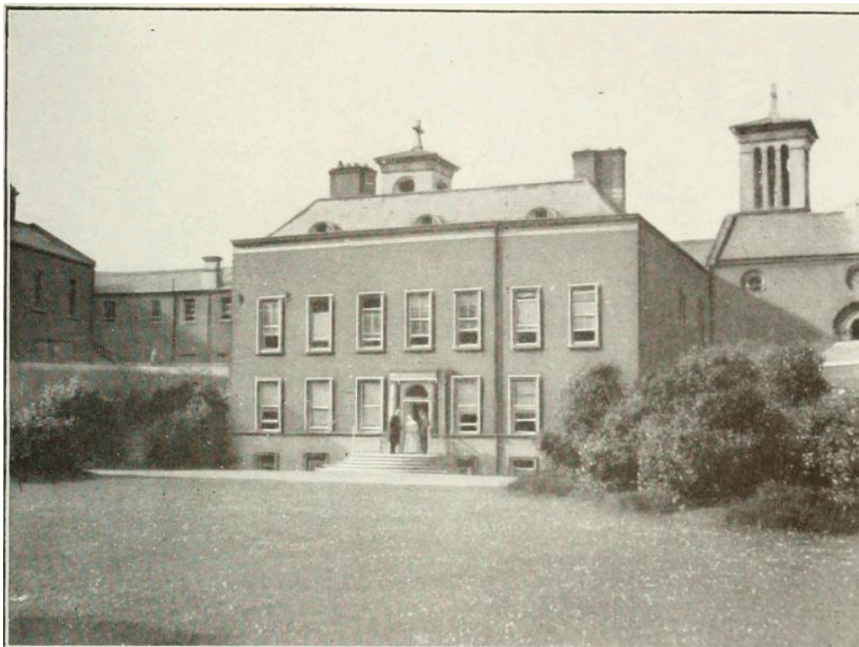


Figure 1.4: *Cabragh House*, Source: A history of the County Dublin; the people, parishes' and antiquities from the earliest times to the close of the eighteenth century, by Francis Elrington 1902-1920. <https://archive.org/details/historyofcountyd06ball/page/n82/mode/1up>.



Figure 1.5: Canon Burke Senior Housing block , Ratoath Road, Cabra. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2021.



Figure 1.6: Beggsboro House, corner of Fassaugh Avenue and Quarry Road. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2020.



Figure 1.7: The Homestead Pub (on the left) and retail outlets (to the right). Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2021.

The majority of housing development in Cabra dates to the 1930s. However there were some small developments earlier in the twentieth century, including Convent View cottages on the Ratoath Road (Figure 1.8), on what was previously Segrave land (Neary, 1983, p. 9). These are typical of the rural labourers' cottages built under a series of land acts in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. While these schemes were much needed developments, and have certainly stood the test of time, it was not until the 1930s that house-building of any scale took place in Cabra. One relatively small scheme was carried out by the Irish Sailors' and Soldiers' Land Trust (ISSLT), which provided housing for ex-servicemen, off Quarry Road (Figure 1.9) (Aalen, 1988, p. 305). However, the most significant actor in Cabra's housing at this time was Dublin Corporation, motivated by the lack of appropriate housing for a large swathe of the city's population.



Figure 1.8: Example of early 20th century housing at Convent View cottages, Ratoath Road, Cabra. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2020.



Figure 1.9: Example of ISSLT housing, Quarry Road, Cabra, Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2020.

1.2 Dublin's evolving housing problems

To understand Dublin Corporation's decision to develop Cabra, it is necessary to understand the long-standing housing problems which existed in the city and the escalating housing crisis of the twentieth century. The housing situation for the poor and working classes in late 19th Century Dublin was characterised by dilapidation, overcrowding, poverty and disease, with relative mortality rates comparable to those of Calcutta (McManus, 2003, p. 39). Dublin slums of the period have been extensively discussed with notable contributions from Cullen (2011), Daly (1984), Prunty (1998, 2004), and others, and will be briefly outlined here. Decline of the city throughout the 1800s was incremental, with the Act of Union 1801 serving as an early catalyst for an exodus of wealth to the more affluent independently governed suburban townships (Daly 1984, Dickson 2001, McDonald 2021). An influx of people to the city following the famine years resulted in an increased population, with the great townhouses of the exiting gentry gradually divided up into tenements, housing the poorest of citizens (Cullen 2011). Several small housing schemes were erected throughout the city in the late 1800s, by organisations such as Dublin Corporation, the Iveagh Trust, and the semi-philanthropic Dublin Artisans' Dwellings Company (DADC), but given the scale of the need they had little effect (McDonald, 2021, p. 29). Indeed, according to Ruth McManus (2011, p. 254), 'Ireland's housing stock remained virtually static during the nineteenth century' and by the turn of the 20th century, the situation had further deteriorated'.

By the early twentieth century, Dublin's housing situation had worsened, and photographic depictions of the same were being added to the documentary evidence calling for change. Two significant events in 1913 added to the urgency of the problem; the period of labour unrest known as the 1913 lockout, and the collapse of two tenement buildings on Church Street which killed 7 people (Kearns, 2015, pp. 16-17). Photographic images were utilised by newspapers at the time to illustrate the tragic collapse, and to provide evidence of the dire living conditions suffered by the city's poor (Figure 1.10). Something had to be done, as was clearly articulated in the Report of Inquiry into the Housing of the Working Classes of Dublin (hereafter the 1913 Housing Inquiry), which promoted the concept of working-class suburbanisation (Cullen 2011, p. 229).

The evidentiary role of John Cooke's photographs of tenement Dublin was crucial to the enquiry. Figure 1.11 shows an example, and the full set, known as the Darkest Dublin Collection, is housed in the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland (RSAI) (Corlett, 2008).

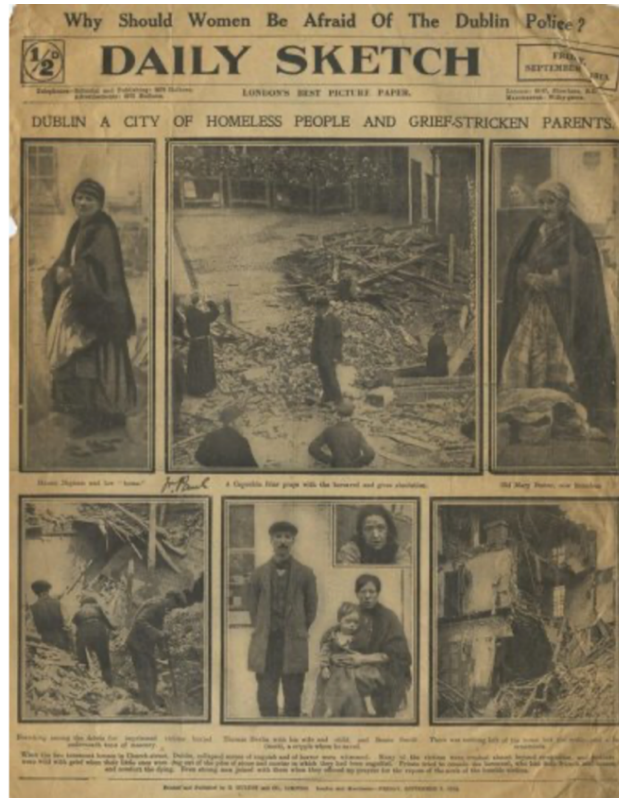


Figure 1.10: The Daily Sketch, depicting the Church Street tenement collapse. Source: thejournal.ie, reproduced from Capuchin Archives Ireland.



Figure 1.11 Image of Dublin 1913 from the Darkest Dublin collection held in Royal Society of Antiquities Ireland. Source: <https://www.dublincity.ie/library/blog/derelict-dublin-images-city-1913>.

The enquiry recognised the need for action in relation to Dublin's housing crisis and proposed a solution linked to the garden suburb idea which was then gaining influence across Europe.

1.3 Town Planning and the Garden Suburb

Town planning, which at the time was closely associated with Ebenezer Howard's garden city idea, was enthusiastically embraced in early 20th Century Dublin, echoing developments in Britain. This seemed to offer a new approach to tackling the slum problems of the city. Scottish town planner Patrick Geddes was an active proponent of the emerging movement, supported by Viceroy Lord Aberdeen and his wife Lady Aberdeen (Bannon, 2004). Geddes gave important testimony to the Housing Inquiry and was an instigator of the Dublin Town Planning Competition launched in 1914, which specifically required competitors to consider low-density suburban housing in their entries (Bannon, 2004). The prize was awarded to Patrick Abercrombie, Sidney Kelly, and Arthur Kelly for their plan entitled *Dublin of the Future*, with the authors emphasising that: 'the Housing of the people is a scandal of the worse character' (Abercrombie et al, 1922, p. vii). Plate XXV of the report shows an early proposed plan for Cabra, influenced by the Garden City model (Figure 1.12). Though the authors themselves stated the need to add a certain spectacle to their competition designs, to capture the imagination of the judges, elements of these drawings would go on to have some influence on the eventual layout of Dublin's new suburbs of the 1920s and 1930s. At Marino, built from 1924, an idealistic garden suburb approach was employed which is evident in its distinctive geometric design and varied building materials. An aerial photograph of Cabra from the 1950s similarly attests to this influence, with the distinctive shape 'following the vision of Abercrombie and his colleagues' (Figure 1.13) (McDonald, 2021, p. 35).

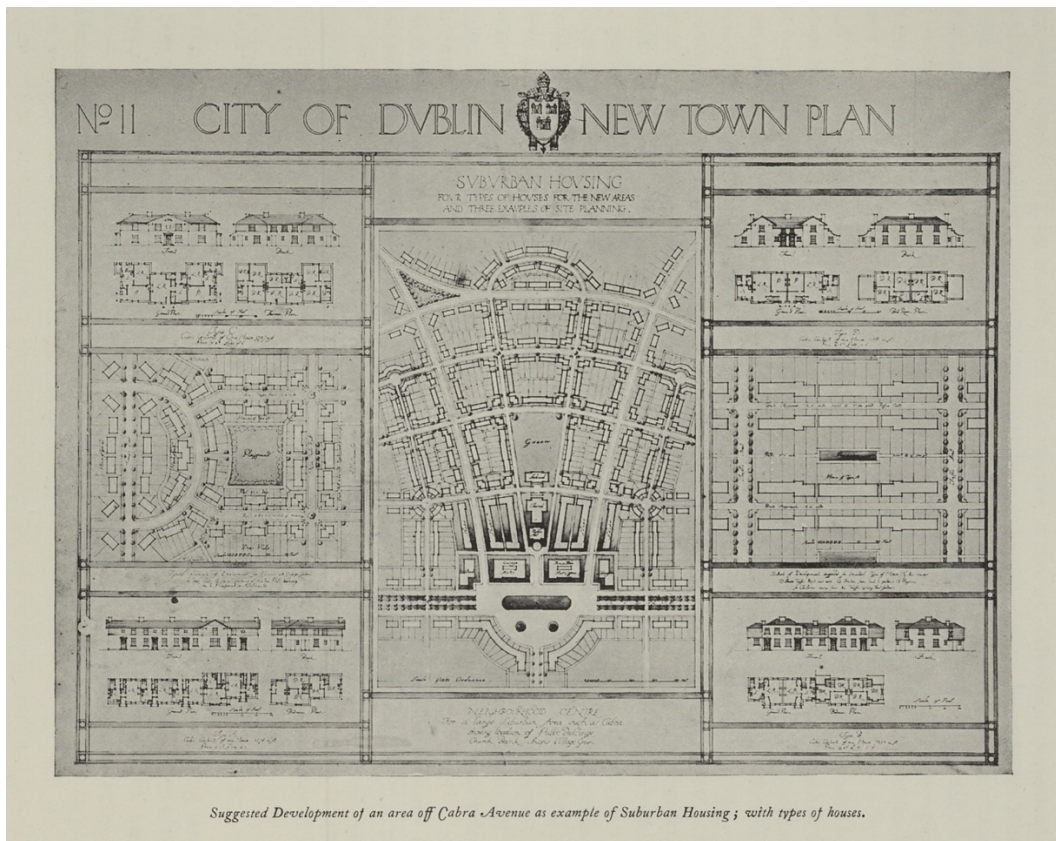


Figure 1.12: Proposed plan for Cabra, *Dublin of the Future 1922*, Plate XXV, Source: UCD Digital Archive.



Figure 1.13: An aerial view of Cabra from the 1950s. Source: Independent Archives Photo Shelter, Copyright Independent Newspapers.

1.3.1 Housing and Ideology in the 1920s and 1930s

When the new Irish Free State came into existence in 1922, it was immediately faced with a gargantuan accommodation crisis (McManus, 2019). A solution was clearly required to deal with the large numbers of the population in need of decent accommodation, and in the inter-war period there was a growing impetus to tackle the problem (Daly, 1984). The Garden City (or more properly garden suburb) model, emphasising the value of fresh air, green spaces and individual homes built at low density, was not just a pragmatic response to contemporary needs, but can also be seen as an ideological one. It can be seen as a way to ‘promote private property, home ownership and citizenship’, with the idea of the single-family house also endorsed by the clergy on grounds of morality and social control (McManus, 2003). The Roman Catholic clergy also decried inner-city flats and tenements which were considered a possible hotbed of ‘communism’, leading to potential social disorder. The provision of good housing away from the city might extinguish any revolutionary tendencies (McManus, 2003, p. 45).

Despite government efforts, most of those who benefitted from the 1920s housing schemes were better off artisans, and slum problems persisted throughout the Free State into the early 1930s (McManus, 2019). Public interest in housing conditions also increased, and photographic evidence was an important component of the Irish Press Slum Campaign of 1936. It employed photography in its efforts to draw attention to the dire housing conditions of the poor citizens of Ireland’s cities (Sheppard, 2015). The campaign decried the lack of meaningful action in relation to the housing crisis, despite multiple inquiries. Figure 1.14 shows an example of the type of photographic imagery utilised to support the campaign.

IS IRELAND BLIND TO THEIR TRAGEDY?



Figure 1.14: Irish Press Slum campaign, sourced from <https://www.theirishstory.com/2015/04/20/the-irish-press-slum-crusade-1934-36/>

New legislation under the 1932 Housing (Financial and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act allowed local authorities around the country, including Dublin Corporation to begin to tackle the housing issue systematically and at scale (McManus, 2019). While greenfield sites had been used in the 1920s, as at Marino, Drumcondra and Donnycarney, the new legislation resulted in much larger schemes specifically aimed at ‘slum clearance’. Most of Cabra was developed following this change of direction.

1.4 Building Cabra, 1929 to the 1940s

Dublin Corporation began building housing at Cabra in 1929, where the first section (Fassaugh Lane) would be its last tenant purchase scheme. The later sections were made available for rental only, reflecting the changed legislation of 1931 and 1932. The 1932 Housing Act also provided a new funding model, and the power to enact compulsory purchase orders, giving Dublin Corporation the ability to effectively tackle the housing issues through suburban development (Norris, 2018). Debates around the value of inner-city refurbishment versus suburban development were fractious. By the 1930s, Dublin Corporation had developed a two-

pronged approach whereby inner-city flats were provided in clearance areas and single-family cottages were provided in new suburbs (McManus, 2019).

Building in Cabra began with Fassaugh Lane (641 houses), and Beggsboro (684 houses), followed by Annamoe in 1934 (311 houses), and Cabra West in 1942 (2,251 houses) (McManus, 2021). The Fassaugh Lane roads were named after the lands of old Irish clans (e.g. Leix, Dunmanus), a reflection of the ideological sentiments of the new state. Roads at Beggsboro were named after saints, for example St. Attracta, St. Fintan and St. Canice, with construction coinciding with the 31st International Eucharistic Congress held in Dublin in 1932. Naming of the later developments of Cabra West was inspired by Irish bays such as Bannow and Dingle (Neary, 2016, p.108).

In terms of housing allocation, the 1932 Housing Act set out criteria based on family size, health (TB was an issue at the time) and urgent need (particularly for those displaced by slum clearance). Ability to pay was always a factor. Although Dublin Corporation tried to keep rents low, within the means of those in greatest need, there were still many for whom the new houses proved unaffordable. The houses were built to standard designs, with either three or four rooms, and all had large gardens to the rear as there was an expectation that the new residents would use their gardens to grow food (McManus, 2021).

Despite the slum conditions many people were coming from, there was some ambivalence about moving to the new suburb. A Cabra resident of over 40 years, interviewed in 2022 stated: 'I was a townie you know – born and reared, and I looked at him and I said Carnlough Road! Oh my God no – it's very far!' (Dillon, 2022). Another long-term resident describes the experience of her family arriving in Cabra as a mostly positive one:

My parents moved in, in 1937 on Quarry Road. They had come from the Liberties and my father was bringing my mother out to see the house, she said I don't want to live in the country, but anyway they moved in and they were [...] the boys, they had three boys at the time, they were delighted with the house. They said is this all our house? They ran up and down the stairs, looking out the windows. We can see everything – they were delighted. And I arrived after. I had a wonderful childhood there – it was great. (Fulham 2022)

Evidently there were mixed feelings about the move, and despite the houses providing more space and facilities for new residents, the large family size still resulted in overcrowding. Many people moving out to the new suburbs also had very few resources and were further away from

their workplace (McManus, 2003). Some of the first inhabitants of Cabra West were moved prematurely due to the North Strand Bombings, arriving to wet concrete, dirt roads and no streetlights (Dublin City Council, 2023). There are echoes here of Brendan Behan's (Behan, 1965, pp. 21-22) depiction of the new suburb of Crumlin as 'Siberia'. Dermot Bolger's powerful play *The Messenger*, which was streamed live online, by Axis Ballymun, during the Covid 19 pandemic, describes the impact on a young girl whose sister was killed in the bombed, and her experience of moving to Cabra (Bolger, 2021).

At the same time that the Corporation houses were under construction, private developers built further housing on land developed and leased by Dublin Corporation on the periphery of the schemes. These 'reserved areas' included sites at the Old and New Cabra Roads (Brady & McManus, 2020). The resultant mix of private and public developments gave the area a spatial and architectural variation which greatly enhances its dynamic today. Cabra resident Nicolas Keogh (Keogh, 2021) described the area as 'an architect's dream, and within one mile!', and for me, as a photographer, the variety of building and detail is visually compelling. Figure 1.15 shows a selection of Cabra housing comprised of the 1930s-40s Corporation schemes and of private dwellings built on reserved areas. The spatial layout, typologies and density of housing shown in this image contrasts with the density, scale and heights of new developments.

The emergence of the Cabra schemes at different periods and with varying criteria, from tenant purchase to rental and then differential rent, resulted in a social mix from the different categories of working class recognised at the time, namely those of artisans, unskilled workers and unemployed (Keogh, 2014). Private housing on reserved areas attracted a more affluent demographic which added to the mix. While it is debatable as to how deliberate this was on the part of Dublin Corporation, there is a sense of cohesion and spatial balance between these different housing typologies, with sustainable communities built up over a long period.



Figure 1.15: A series of photographs showing the variety of Cabra housing. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2020-2022.

1.5 The changing context of social housing in Ireland, 1945 to 1980s

Following the dramatic transformation of Cabra from farmland to housing in the 1930s and early 1940s, there was little significant construction work over the subsequent four decades. The changing context discussed below is important in understanding the broader context of housing, and particularly the more recent developments in the locality. During the immediate post-war years Ireland experienced a short-lived economic boom, with the 1950s heralding its decline (Brady, 2016). Dublin Corporation returned to large scale building in the 1950s, before ceasing construction for a time on the basis that the housing problem had been solved (Brady 2016, p. 27). In fact, high unemployment and economic stagnation had resulted in massive emigration, masking the significant housing problem which still remained (Newman and O'Hagan, 2014, p. 20-21).

In Cabra, the next significant change to occur was related to housing tenure. As has been shown, the majority of Cabra's houses were built for rental, apart from the very first Fassaugh Lane scheme which had been built for tenant purchase (McManus, 2019). Under the 1966 Housing

Act, tenants were enabled to purchase their homes (Norris, 2014), and this opportunity was greatly availed of in Cabra. Reflecting on some of the major changes he had witnessed as a resident, local historian Nicolas Keogh (Keogh 2021) considers that ‘the selling of the houses in the 1960s [...] was the start of people getting property [...] so if you look at our families – we have property now that we wouldn’t have got – that our people would never have – so we have gone up a level’. Brady (2022, p. 417) explains that: ‘By August 1970, there had been 9,810 applications to purchase’, and that ‘the take-up was hardly surprising since there was excellent value to be had. In older housing areas like Cabra West, the houses were valued at £1,700’. Many tenants benefited from the home ownership scheme, enabling them to prosper, however the selling of social housing meant a reduction in availability for prospective local authority residents. By the end of the 1960s Local Authority Housing waiting lists were estimated at 59,000 (McCabe, 2013, p. 32)

Political shifts from the 1970s to late 1980s were characterised by an increasing move towards privatisation and away from government intervention. McCabe outlines this shift in relation to housing stating that:

In the 1970s the State, having already secured the legislative framework to privatise urban local authority housing, now undertook to privatise house loans. It is during this decade that government strategy moves towards assisting families with mortgages rather than assisting families with houses. It was a crucial development. (McCabe ,2013, p. 32).

Rory Hearne (2020, p. 11) concurs with McCabe, indicating strong state involvement in housing during the Keynesian period from the 1940s up to the 1970s, with ‘neoliberal housing, planning and economic policies implemented from the 1980s onwards’ resulting in a shift away from state support for social housing.

The idea of housing as a speculative asset also gained traction during this period, while social housing became increasingly residualised and stigmatised. The £5,000 Surrender Grant Scheme introduced in 1984 enabled council tenants to buy new properties if they surrendered their council house. Much of the uptake was from tenants living in some of the worst-off estates, leaving behind the poorest and most disadvantaged (McCabe, 2014, pp. 38-39). The resulting residualisation served to stigmatise social housing and in retrospect the surrender scheme was widely recognised as a mistake (Fahey, 1999). Like the Ballymun flat complexes of the 1960s, many housing estates were erected on a ‘housing first’ basis, with little attention to facilities. Community efforts did improve life in some estates, indeed many former local authority housing areas are now privatised and highly desirable. Nonetheless certain areas still

suffer from the effects of bad planning, abandonment, and neglect, with ongoing social issues. By the 1980s, Cabra's housing and population had matured, so it was less vulnerable to these negative impacts, although some issues remained, as noted below. This highlights the fact that houses are more than just bricks and mortar, i.e., communities develop organically in such a way that they are both enabled and constrained by the specifics of their material reality, a reality that shapes future paths and dependencies so that the eventual consequences of the political, economic, and cultural decisions which are made at the developmental stage only become apparent in the years afterwards.

1.6 Cabra's evolving demographic profile

Through the 1990s into the early 2000s parts of Cabra suffered from social issues. A 1999 report on *Problem Drug Use in Cabra* concluded there were 'firm indications of a strong sub-culture in Cabra of alcohol use and the use of illegal drugs in social settings' (ISIS Research Group 1999, p. 69). Independent Dublin City Councillor Cieran Perry has referred to the 'anti-drugs marches' which took place in Cabra during the 1990s and this is supported by anecdotal conversations with other residents (Perry, 2023). The report also indicated a higher rate of unemployment in the Cabra/Finglas area than the national average and that 'fifty percent of the Finglas/Cabra area left school before the age of 15' (ISIS Research Group 1999, p. 11).

One interviewee responding to my suggestion that Cabra might have been perceived as 'quite rough', stated that: 'There was always an element of that, but we don't have those really sort of intense problems like other areas have, you have it in small pockets, whereas before it would have been wider' (Keogh, 2022). Councillor Séamus McGrattan (2023) considers Cabra as a self-contained area, with strong community links enabling a level of self-organisation and the ability to deal with issues at a community level. Another participant stated a wariness about purchasing property in Cabra in 2015 but has since settled well in the area (Bermingham, R., 2022).

Census data provides some insight into demographic changes in a locality. While the last decade has seen Cabra as increasingly desirable location, Pobal Deprivation Indices for 2006, 2011, 2016 and 2022, pictured below in Figure 12, show fluctuating levels of disadvantage in the area. The 2006 Index is mostly split between 'disadvantaged' and 'marginally disadvantaged' with small pockets of 'very disadvantaged' and 'marginally above'. In 2011 the

level of disadvantage has increased significantly, with the financial crash and resulting recession factoring into this period. The 2016 index records more affluence but also indicates an area of ‘extremely disadvantaged’. This area remains in 2022, with other sections showing improvement. An overview of the four indices indicates that while Cabra has for the most part improved, the majority is still bordering the ‘disadvantaged’ category with the gap between disadvantage and affluence increasing.

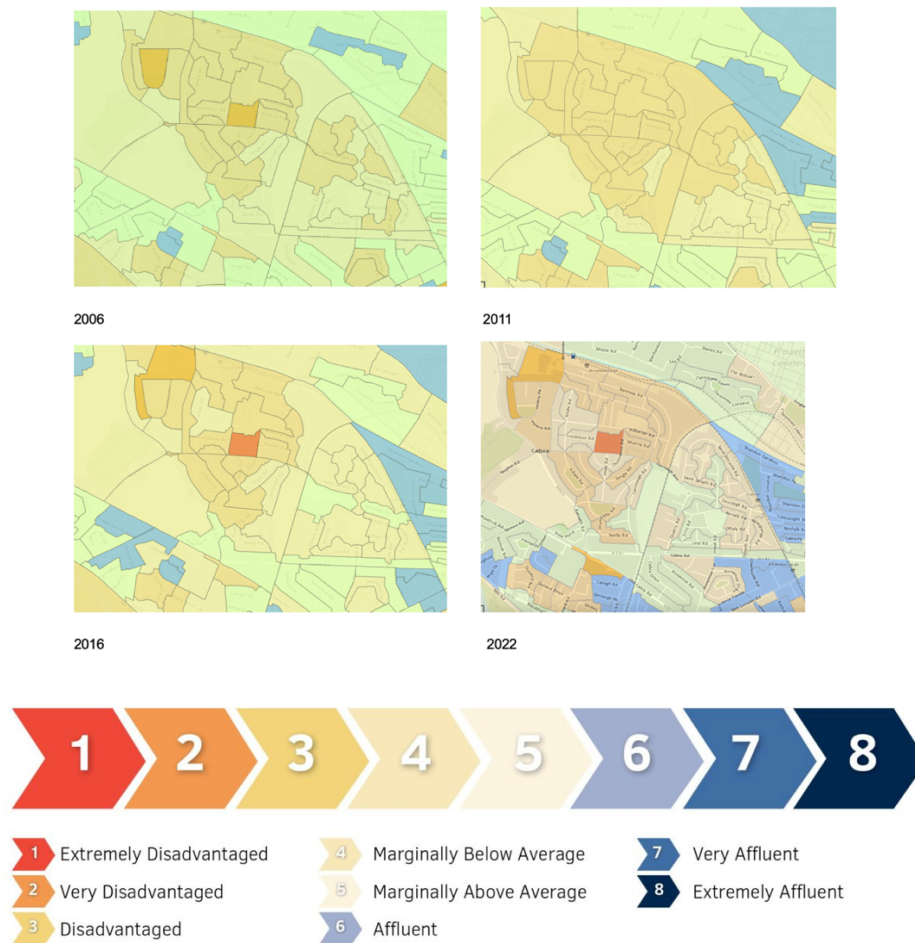


Figure 1.16: Pobal Deprivation Indices for Cabra, 2006, 2011, 2016 and 2022. Source: Pobal.ie, November 2023.

1.7 Celtic Tiger era and beyond

Tenant purchase of social housing escalated towards the end of the 1980s, helped along by a new highly discounted scheme under the 1988 Housing Act, while the perception of rented social housing had become increasingly negative (Ó’ Broin 2019, pp. 50-51). By the 1990s homeownership was widely promoted and the building of social housing was decreasing; furthermore, the private rental market was evolving. Rent supplements to private landlords introduced in 1977 had risen 1,170 percent in the decade from 1989-1999 (Ó’ Broin, 2019, pp.

64). House prices began to rise significantly in the mid-1990s, escalating further through the Celtic Tiger period up to 2005/6. The financial crash of 2008 brought the house prices tumbling down, as the building boom went bust and the term ‘ghost estate’ entered the Irish lexicon (O’Hagan and Newman 2014, pp. 200-201). Financialisation and commodification of housing, and the idea of housing as an asset or pension plan hit its nadir in the run up to the 2008 crash, with neoliberal policies ensuring a dearth of social housing being built through this period (Kelly, 2021 [unpaginated]). A growing population, unaffordable house prices and rents, lack of rental accommodation and a severe shortage of social housing have resulted in the highest numbers recorded on housing lists and in homelessness (Hilliard, 2023 [unpaginated]). New housing policies and typologies have done little to alleviate this.

Neoliberal housing policies in Ireland, which began in the 1980s have since been embraced by successive governments. Financialisation of housing, cheap credit, and highly favourable incentives for developers created an Irish housing bubble, with disastrous consequences following the 2008 crash (Sirr, 2021). This was also reflected on a material level, i.e. in the inferior quality of some of the materials used, a legacy of which is still affecting those who purchased these dwellings. Lorcan Sirr (2021, p. 47) asserts that: ‘deeply commodified housing markets that prioritise investment over users and treat housing as a financial asset engender clear dangers in housing systems while also presenting immense threats to financial systems themselves’. However, he concludes that the Irish government’s answer to this disastrous policy has been further and escalated financialisation. Housing has become part of a broader shift towards finance-driven capitalism. Housing, financial and tax policies enacted in the past two decades have been a boon to property developers and foreign investment, but have failed to significantly address a growing accommodation and homelessness crisis (Drudy & Punch, 2002, Hearne, 2020).

The seeds for recent large-scale foreign investment in Irish housing were planted in the selling of property by the state owned ‘bad bank’, the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA), established in 2009 which proved highly attractive to finance and real estate companies (Hearne, 2020, p. 132). The introduction of Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITS) to Ireland in 2012, incentivised by new tax measures, served to: ‘make real estate investment more financialised’ (Sirr, 2021, p.47). Both residential and commercial property markets became heavily integrated into the global financial system as a result. As Ireland emerged from the

crash period, large swathes of land were acquired by investment funds, which was either re-sold or held for more favourable profit conditions.

Build to Rent (BTR), which had already been introduced in 2001 under Specific Planning and Policy Requirements (SPPR), became increasingly attractive post 2011. The introduction of the Strategic Housing Development (SHD) planning policy in 2017 incentivised this further. Intended to fast-track the planning process in response to growing housing shortages, SHDs allowed developments of 100 units or more to bypass the standard local authority planning process and to go straight to An Bord Pleanála (An Bord Pleanála, 2024). The SHD policy proved controversial, with many applications challenged in the courts by judicial review (Brennan 2022). The Planning and Development (Amendment) (Large-Scale Residential Development) Act 2021 was introduced at the end of 2021 to replace the SHD policy, restoring planning decisions to local authorities (Irish Statute Book, 2021).

Alongside the overall changes to planning outlined above, shared accommodation in the form of co-living and student apartments was introduced in 2018 by Minister Eoghan Murphy. Further new BTR planning rules stipulated that ‘apartments owned by institutional investors and developed specifically for the rental market do not have to comply with minimum size standards required in homes for sale, while there are less stringent storage requirements and more apartments permitted per floor’ (Horgan-Jones, 2022). By 2022 this controversial planning regulation had been overturned by housing Minister Darragh O’Brien, but not before thousands of these units had been erected.

1.8 Cabra Today

The opportunities to purchase or avail of surrender grants in the 1980s affected Cabra’s housing stock, and gradual commodification of housing through the 1980s and 1990s resulted in an increasing private rented sector in the area. Prior to, and during this period a number of small schemes were developed. The Ratoath Estate in Cabra, off the Ratoath Road was constructed by Dublin Corporation in the early 1960s, with several small local authority and private developments added to the housing stock from the 1980s into the early 2000s. Schemes included houses at Pinehurst on the Ratoath Road, apartments and duplexes at Hamilton Square off Bannow Road, apartments at Homestead Court off Quarry Road, Rosecourt and Sycamore Court on the New Cabra Road, and Bradogue Court at Annamoe. Assisted Senior housing at

Rowan Hamilton Court was completed in the early 2000s, with additional senior housing at Broom Lodge on Fassaugh Avenue completed in 2017, by the housing body Clann Housing. Both developments are located adjacent to Christ the King Church, on church land. Figure 1.17 depicts these various schemes.



Figure 1.17: Cabra housing schemes 2000's - 2017. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.

Approximately four kilometres from the City Centre, with good transport links, and access to multiple schools, green spaces, and established community services, Cabra today is a popular location for buyers and renters, with a 2021 poll on Dublinlive.ie rating it as one of the best places to live in Dublin (Nevin, 2021). Proximity to the new Grangegorman campus of Technical University Dublin (TUD) has also made it an attractive location for students. The area has seen incremental change over the past two decades evidenced through property sales, house renovation and shifting school demographics. Seán Ó Donnale, principal of Gaelscoil Bharra primary school, has witnessed a significant increase in past pupils attending third level and has also pointed to the opening of the Broombridge Educate Together primary school in 2016, as an indication of new demographics. Having said this, the main Fassaugh Avenue shopping areas have yet to show significant signs of change or gentrification in the form of new cafes, restaurants, or shops. More typical signs of 'artisan' type groceries and cafes can be found on the peripheral Cabra and New Cabra Roads. The enactment of new housing policies introduced since 2015 has resulted in construction of the new Hamilton Gardens 485 unit apartment complex in Cabra, where a one bedroom costs €2,240 per month to rent (Daft, 2024).

As stated in the introduction, the main instigator for this research project was the level of housing-led development taking place in the Cabra landscape, beginning in 2020, and the imperative to understand this change. Table 1 provides details of developments completed, pending, or refused in the past five years. The escalation in the financialisation of Irish housing, along with amended planning laws paved the way for developments such as Hamilton Gardens, now visible from multiple vantage points across the area. The 8th Lock 435-unit build-to-rent development, bordering Cabra and the Royal Canal, is complete, while multiple smaller endeavours are either underway, at planning stages, or stalled. As of 15th January 2024, permission has been refused for development at the current Broombridge Industrial Estate. The proposed development comprises a ‘16-storey high mixed-use scheme to create a “dynamic new urban quarter”’ (Kelly, 2024, [unpaginated]). Figure 13 shows an artist rendering of the proposed development. The area, covering 5.63 acres is in a prime location, with the Broombridge LUAS providing a ten-minute service to the city. It can be expected that planning appeals and applications for this site will continue.



An artist's impression of the proposed Royal Canal Square development in Cabra.

Figure 1.18: Artist's impression of proposed development at Broombridge Industrial Estate. Source: Irish Times, January 15th 2024.

Table 1

Site	Developer	Units/Type	Planning/Construction Stage	Dates
Hamilton Gardens	Seven Cabra Real Estate	485 (484 apts and 1 house) Rental only	Completed	2020-2022
8 th Lock Royal Canal	Ballymore	435 apts. BTR.	Completed	2020-2024
Matts of Cabra	R&D Developments	117 apts. BTR	Latest planning refused. Derelict property fines pending.	2017-2022
Cabra House	Amberground Ltd	24 apts	Planning permission refused	April 2022
Kilkieran Road	Dublin City Council	46 apts. Senior housing.	Currently under construction	2023
Connaught Street	Focus Ireland	20 apts	Completed	2022
Broombridge Road	Dublin City Council	22 apts	Currently under construction	2023-2024
Bannow Road	Daly's and Haydon	69 apts. BTR.	Planning permission granted	2021-2026
Dominican Convent	Focus Ireland	95 apts.	Planning permission granted	2022 - 2025
Dublin Industrial Estate	Woodberry Printing	304 apts, hotel and retail/office space	Planning permission refused	November 2022

Table 1: Cabra developments completed, pending, or refused, 2020-2024.

As evidenced from Table 1, in the past five years 989 build to rent units are either completed or have planning permission, while 183 public housing units are completed or under construction. Most of the development in Cabra in this period has been foreign investment led, rental only, and with high rents, though it should be noted that 20% of the Hamilton Gardens complex has been allocated as public housing under Part V regulations. The allocation is welcome but has not been without controversy. This will be further addressed in Chapter Four.

1.9 Conclusion

The 1930s and 1940s Cabra schemes, while flawed in some ways (size of the houses for example), provided stable housing for a significant portion of Dublin's population, allowing them to eventually move out of dire poverty and thrive. Shifting housing policies, particularly since the 1980's resulted in a move away from building social housing schemes, towards rental supplements to private landlords. New planning laws introduced in the 2000s allowed for different specifications for apartment size, followed by the afore mentioned SHDs. These changes have contributed to the largest housing development in Cabra since the original Corporation schemes, in the form of the Hamilton Gardens apartment complex. A rental only development, these new dwellings are targeted at a possibly transient population, who can afford the high rents – with the PR framing them as a type of hotel accommodation (fully furnished, gyms and cafes on site etc) . While there is a public housing allocation, public housing tenants have in some cases been shut out of facilities, as they are not included in a deal made with Dublin City Council. It remains to be seen what the long-term outcomes of these new housing developments will be in terms of creating sustainable communities.

This chapter has drawn on the extensive collection of photographs which I have taken in Cabra throughout the research period from 2020-2024, which now serve as a valuable archive for future researchers. It also includes visual material in the form of maps, plans, tables, and historical photographic imagery. Photographs of tenement life, from the Darkest Dublin Collection are referenced along with their usage as catalysts for social change, while the Irish Press Campaign of the 1930s points to housing conditions which were a prelude to construction of the Cabra housing schemes. Chapter Two expands on the theme of photography, giving a selective chronological overview of how it has been utilised to address themes of spatial transformation, particularly housing related, in Ireland. While acknowledging that photographs have been used extensively in advertising, official documents and other areas to support discussions around housing and development, Chapter Two focuses primarily on a narrow area of documentary in the context of what is termed 'art photography'.

Chapter Two: Housing and Irish Photography

The most interesting photographic images of Ireland have been those in which the aesthetic frequently picks up what politics have left behind (Carville 2011, p. 15).

Through photographs, we see, we remember, we imagine: we ‘picture place’ (Ryan & Schwartz 2003 p. 1).

The geographical Ireland, the bounded island, is a place that can be pictured. It can be captured and presented, albeit problematically, as the result of a given past, as the present form of an innate and immemorial Irishness. The second demographic Ireland is a place that cannot be pictured but must be imagined. And because it must be imagined it could be imagined otherwise. Existing, as it does, imaginatively, it is always open to the possibility of being reimagined (O’Toole 1995).

Since its inception, photography has been utilised to support particular views of place. Ryan and Schwartz (2003, pp. 3-6) argue that: ‘Geography has long been an enterprise centred on the visual representation of the world’, and consider how photographs make ‘imaginative geographies’, that is, ‘how photographs shape our perception of place’. The relationship between photography and the geographical imagination was forged from the very inception of the medium, and it is ‘through photographs that we see, we remember, we imagine: we ‘picture place’ (Ryan and Schwartz, 2003, p. 1).

In the first two decades of its invention, photography was utilised as a means to survey the landscape, ‘to survey remote regions of the world and to make scientific observations’ (Wells, 2021, p. 85). In doing so, photography served as an aid to the geographical imaginings of place, and the construction of knowledge in relation to remote landscapes. It could be argued that our sense of place emerges in and through this two-way conversation between photographic image and lived environment. This operates on a number levels, i.e., artistic, socio-cultural and historical, and accordingly, it is clear that the ‘geographical imaginings’ of Ireland and its landscape have been significantly shaped by photographic imagery (Carville, 2011, p. 7). Carville speaks of a particular interest in ‘how the concept of the geographical imagination can contribute to understanding how photography has been mobilized to project an image of place that reflects the cultural transformations of Irish society’, (Carville, 2017, p. 428). Our sense of identity and our experience of self, weave together with our experience of space and our sense of place.

2.1 Historical Overview

In March 2023, Irish artist Adam Doyle, better known as ‘Spicebag’, re-issued an artwork entitled *Eviction Print* (the artist originally produced this print in 2021), following the lifting

of an eviction ban in Ireland, implemented as part of the Covid 19 pandemic measures (Figure 2.1). The print was a reworking of Daniel Mc Donald's 19th century painting *The Eviction*, with Doyle's version featuring images of Gardaí and bailiffs at a Fredrick St eviction (Burns, 2023). The image was retweeted by Sinn Féin councillor and housing representative Eoin Ó' Broin (2023) and promptly went viral, inciting debate around both the topic of housing and how artists were responding. Doyle reproduced the print for sale, with the proceeds going to a homeless charity. While his original source was a painting, photographs of evictions have a deep resonance in the Irish psyche, evoking 19th century battles for land, and a 'diasporic cultural memory of the famine' (Carville, 2011, p. 68).

During the late 1800s, photographer Robert French travelled Ireland creating a series of eviction images, now held as part of the Lawrence Collection at the National Library of Ireland (NLI) (see Figure 2.2). Eviction images were used to further the Irish Nationalist cause and for campaigning against punitive rents for tenants. They now serve as representative of the visceral connection to house and home, and the power struggles in terms of ownership, which are perennial concerns in Ireland.



Figure 2.1: *Eviction Print* by the artist 'Spicebag', reproduced with permission of the artist.
Source: Irish Times, April 2nd 2023.



Figure 2.2: *Eviction scene (Battering Ram)* by Robert French, 1880. Source: National Library of Ireland, Lawrence Collection.

Doyle's 'Eviction Print' serves as a response to the ongoing housing and homelessness crisis in Ireland. While the print originates from McDonalds painting, it takes a photo-realistic approach, cognisant of the underlying premise of photography as representation of the 'real' (Berger, 1995, Grundberg, 1999, Roberts, 1998).

The rhetorical power of the photograph was a key factor in the efficacy of late 19th century social documentary, epitomised in the work of photographers such as Jacob Riis in New York, Thomas Annan in the Victorian slums of Glasgow, and Henry Mayhew's Dickensian London. The use of photography in addressing Dublin tenement life has been discussed in Chapter 1 with reference to the Darkest Dublin Collection (1913) and Irish Press campaign (1930s). It should be noted that outside of this documentation of slum conditions, photography was also widely utilised to record the architecture of housing and building processes themselves.

G&T Crampton for example, one of Irelands most prolific builders, holds an extensive record of housing and other building projects through the 20th century in Ireland, including a scheme on Quarry Road Cabra, pictured in Figure 2.3. Ruth McManus (2008) has covered this extensively in the publication *Crampton Built*, with excellent photographic reproductions. The G&T Crampton archive, along with the many builders' publications such as the Irish Builder, and extensive vernacular archives such as the Lawrence Collection serve as a valuable

architectural resource. The Wiltshire collection by Elinor and Reginald Wiltshire can be accessed at the NLI, also providing extensive vernacular, architectural and building related material. Additionally, the Irish Architectural Archive holds a vast collection of photographs related to Irish architecture, building, planning and social history.



Figure 2.3 Cabra housing scheme for Dublin Corporation, Source: Digital content by Assoc. Prof. Joseph Brady, published by UCD Library, University College Dublin <http://digital.ucd.ie/view/ucdlib:46944>

While the main focus of this thesis is the Irish context, it is worth mentioning the US based Farm Security Administration endeavour (1937-1946), which Liz Wells refers to as ‘the most important example of a major state funded documentary project in the world’ (2021 p. 126). The project employed photographers including Dorothea Lange, Gordon Park’s and Walker Evans, to document living conditions in the American dustbowl during the Great Depression (Solomon Godeau, 1990, p. 178). It is an important marker in the documentary movement, as are the photographic approaches taken by the individual photographers. Walker Evan’s photographs of housing are especially relevant for this thesis and my practice, with his systematic documentation of the everyday built environment. In relation to Evans, David Campany (2020, p. 35) considers that ‘rather than a style, he had an idiom, and a disposition toward the world that was curious and generous’. On Evan’s relationship to the built environment, Campany (2015) suggests that he ‘understood that photography and architecture are related sign systems. Gathered as archives or arranged as sequences, images of buildings could be a path toward sophisticated statements about a society and the ways it pictures itself’. The photographs I have taken of Cabra housing and building resonate with this sentiment, and

offer a statement about Irish society, and the historical significance of the early state building programmes.

The New Topographics movement of the 1970s, captured in the exhibition *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man Altered Landscape* in New York is also significant, introducing new approaches to vernacular landscape, including depictions of everyday housing (Cheng 2011, p. 157). Many of the photographers championed a ‘deadpan’ or seemingly neutral aesthetic which is still influential in photography today. Lewis Baltz’s photographs of industrial parks are notable, resonating as they do with my engagement with the Cabra landscape, as is the work of Bern and Hilla Becher, referenced in Chapter Three.

2.2 Development and Dereliction in Dublin: 1980s – early 2000s

In the early 1980s in Dublin, photographer Brendan Walsh and writer Ronan Sheehan walked the streets of the ‘north inner city’, observing the ‘no go’ residential areas and the people who inhabited them (Sheehan, 2016, p. 4). Their publication *Dublin The Heart Of The City*, featuring photographs from Walsh, and writing by Sheehan, tells a powerful story of spatial transformation and its effects on lived experience.



Figure 2.4 North-East Inner City. Source: Brendan Walsh, *Dublin the Heart of the City*, 2016 Edition.

Some of Walsh's images might be viewed as romanticising working class experience through aesthetics. Figure 2.4 for example has a touch of the sublime in its composition, lighting, form, and mood, but many of his images were less aesthetically charged. He often documented political and community meetings for example, in addition to employing street photography and portraiture. This multi-faceted approach resonates with my own practice and the different layers of engagement with communities. The great value of the publication is to be found in the combination of photographs and text, in the sympathetic yet non-paternalistic approach of Sheehan and Walsh, and as a document of a contested area of Dublin which still struggles with the legacy of the 1980s.

Walsh was not alone in his documentation of Dublin's inner city with extensive archives produced by photographers such as Tony O'Shea and Colm Pierce. A recent publication by Pierce captures the changing face of Sherriff Street, from the 1980s to the arrival of the Celtic Tiger (Pierce 2024). A survey exhibition of O'Shea's work was held in 2022 at PhotoMuseum Ireland, to accompany the publication *The Light of Day* (O'Shea, 2022). Both Pierce and O'Shea have produced extensive vernacular archives of Dublin's built environment and its inhabitants. Their approach is reflected on some of the 'street photography' attempts I engage in as part of this research.

Dereliction in 1980s Dublin was an ongoing concern as epitomised in a scathing account by artist Robert Ballagh (1982). Entitled 'Monuments to Mammon: Dublin's Twilight Zone', the piece was illustrated by the artists photographs. Figure 2.5 depicts a section of North King Street, with text outlining Ballagh's thoughts on development and dereliction in the city. It is notable that part of this stretch of North King Street is still derelict in 2024.

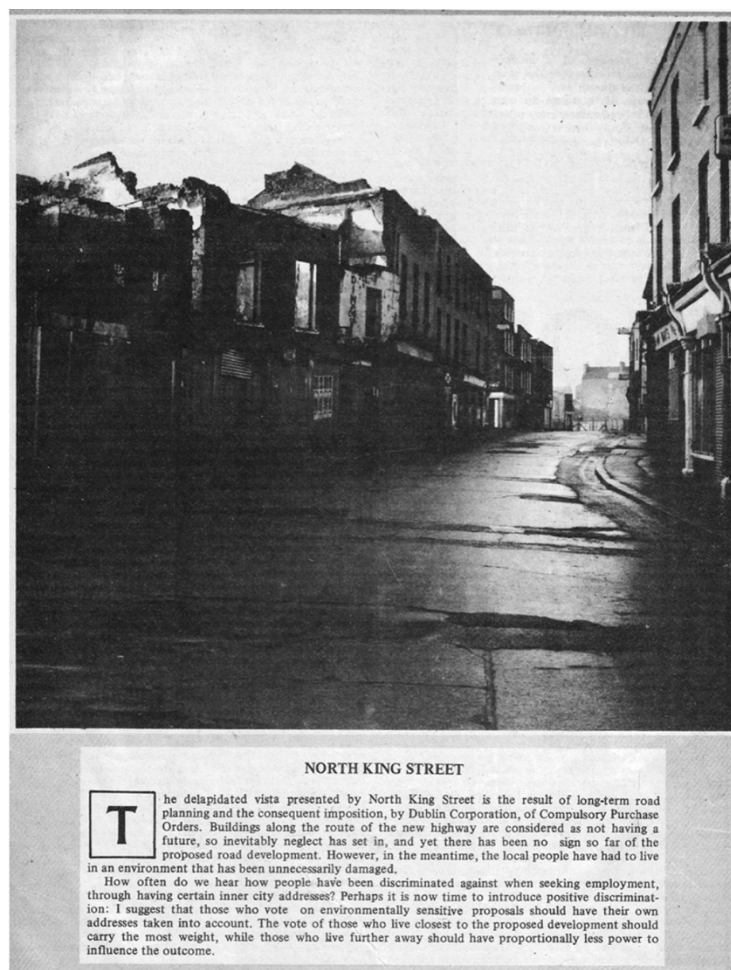


Figure 2.5: In Dublin Magazine January 1982. Photography and text: Robert Ballagh, 1982.

2.2.1 1990s

As Dublin approached the early 1990s, awash with Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), the North and South quays experienced exponential development in the form of office space and apartment building (Brady 2022). The 1990s in general saw a proliferation of apartment building along both the quays and Dublin's inner city and was a precursor of the exponential development witnessed in the Celtic Tiger era (Brady 2022, pp. 268-329). The advert pictured in Figure 2.6 uses a photograph to reflect the imagined lifestyle of the dockside apartment dweller, echoing Campany's pronouncement that: 'Photography is often at its most complicit when it is recruited to turn the constructed worlds of integrated design into promotional images' (Campany 2014 [no pagination]).

AS ANY THEATRE-GOER KNOWS, THE BEST VIEW IS FROM THE BALCONY.

Picture the scene. The sun sets on a lazy evening, transforming the river into sparkling crystal. Far below you, in another world, people mill around in a hum-drum existence. Easing back into your chair, you smile at your charming guests and watch the River dance. It could be Paris... or New York... The superb new Custom House Harbour Apartments offer breath-taking views of Dublin City and the private inner dock at the International Financial Services Centre, whatever the weather. With magnificent, spacious apartments and large, functional balconies, this development offers much more than a standard apartment. Centrally located, for City Centre shopping, DART and bus stations are only a few minutes away.

Also, being a part of the International Financial Services Centre, security and peace-of-mind are guaranteed. Prices vary from €49,950 - €57,950 for one bedroom apartments and €60,700 - €76,950 for two bedroom apartments. Spectacular penthouses are available from €89,950. The apartments at Custom House Harbour qualify for 100% Section 23 tax incentives for investors. This is an excellent letting area and is the ultimate Section 23 opportunity for your clients. In addition, they qualify for the €3,000 First Time Buyers Grant and Designated Area Tax Incentives for owner-occupiers. The show apartments are on view weekdays 12.00p.m. - 3.00p.m. and Sat. & Sun. 2.00p.m. to 5.00p.m. For further information contact: Hamilton Osborne King at 676 0251.

CUSTOM HOUSE HARBOUR
AT THE INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL SERVICES CENTRE

Custom House Docks Development Co. Ltd. are only a few minutes away.

Hamilton Osborne King

Figure 2.6: Advert for Custom House Harbour Apartments 1994. Source: <https://brandnewretro.ie/2019/10/16/advert-for-apartments-at-custom-house-harbour-1994/> Digitised from Accountancy Ireland magazine, December 1994.

Custom House Harbour apartments are less than a ten-minute walk from Sherriff Street, an area particularly disadvantaged during the 1980s and into the 90s (evidenced in the work of Colm

Pierce as noted above). The text description in the advert speaks to a utopian experience protected from the reality of its surroundings:

Picture the scene. The sun sets on a lazy evening, transforming the river into sparkling crystal. Far below you, in another world, people mill around in a hum-drum existence. Easing back into your chair you smile at your guests and watch the river dance. It could be Paris...or New York...Also being part of the **Irish Financial Services Centre**, security and peace of mind are guaranteed. (Accountancy Ireland magazine, December 1994)

Although Sherriff Street is immediately adjacent to the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC), they are separated by a 30-foot wall which symbolises the sharp socio-economic divide between them. Sherriff Street continues to experience social issues engendered by deprivation, bad planning, unemployment, and drug problems (Hosford, 2016, [unpaginated]). There is a cognitive dissonance between the imagined proposition of dockside apartment living and the financial, social, and ideological machinations which are obscured.

Responding to the effects of this development, in 1998 photographer Mark Curran began a series of research projects examining the impact of FDI on the Irish landscape (Curran 2018, p. 277). His *Stoneybatter* project involved portraits of children and young people living in that area (see Figure 2.7), questioning the impact of new developments on their future, mindful of the fact that many of them would not be able to afford to live there (Curran, 2018, p. 275). Cabra is just over two kilometres from Stoneybatter, but gentrification has not been so rapid. However recent conversations with Cabra residents have revealed a similar issue for young people living in the area who cannot afford to stay there.



Figure 2.7 Portrait 1 from the series *Stoneybatter*, 1998. Source: Mark Curran, 2023.

Curran's exhibition *Southern Cross*, at PhotoMuseum Ireland in 2002, encompassing two projects entitled *Prospect*, and *Site*, showed photographs of various construction sites, alongside images of the developing IFSC and a series of portraits (Curran, 2002). In the exhibition catalogue Justin Carville contextualises this work within long held arguments around the concept of 'documentary', citing Brecht's well know opinion on photographs of the Krupp and AEG factories as telling us nothing of the experience of those within (Benjamin [1931], 1972, p. 24). He states that while Curran's images of these spaces 'tell us nothing about the relationship between the workers and their environment', *Southern Cross* as a series, 'allows us to build up 'a critical history of social space' (Carville, 2002 [unpaginated]). I would suggest that my PhD research falls into this category, though its examination of the social space of Cabra, at a significant historical juncture in terms of spatial and social transformation.

It should be noted that amid this new developing Ireland of the late 1990s, with its exponential foreign investment and building projects, was a growing housing and homelessness crisis which was greatly exacerbated by the tapering of social housing since the 1980s, in addition to the rising costs of both rental and home ownership. Pete Smyth's long-term photographic engagement with the area of Tallaght offers a counterview to the image of Ireland's development through the 1990s, with his empathetic but stark images of housing, and the spatial layout of housing estates. Built in the 1970s, the rapid development of Tallaght housing, with a lack of planning for social amenities, transport links and retail services, along with the recidualisation of social housing resulted in the ghettoisation of particular sections (McCabe, 2013, p. 40). Smyth's image of Cushlawn Park, 1990 (Figure 2.8) depicts a sense of isolation, of a concrete wilderness surrounded by wasteland. This is not to denigrate the supportive communities which developed in Tallaght, in spite of the lack of facilities – but to point at a disconnect between a growing sense of official optimism at the time which belied the realities for many (McCabe, 2013, pp. 49-50). There is a stark comparison between Smyth's photograph and the new high-rise lifestyle suggested in figure 2.5. While recognising that both of these images represent very different values and motivations, each speaks to different ways in which photographs have been mobilised and used to shape perception of spatial environments in Ireland.



Figure 2.8: Cushlawn Park, from the series *Local*, photographer Pete Smyth 1990. Source: <https://photomuseumireland.ie/pete-smyth-npc>, accessed October 5th 2024.

2.2.2 Early 2000's

My own critical understanding of photography was shaped by the BA in Photography I undertook at the Dublin Institute of Technology from 2001-2005. The beginning of my education coincided with particular trends in Irish photography, where the documentary, or what was termed 'New Documentary' genre was to the fore (Bate, 2016, pp. 74-75). In 2001, I undertook a project entitled *Home*, where I spent a day in Dublin city with three people who were homeless, documenting the results. The ethics of my approach to the representation of poverty were questioned at the time by tutors, and I was naively unaware of the historical legacy of 'concerned' photography (Bate, 2016, Wells, 2015, Sontag, 1977, 2004). However, it speaks to an early interest in the topic of spatial justice and housing, a housing situation which has only worsened in the intervening two decades. Figure 2.9 depicts a series of postcards made as part of the project.

A series I made in 2002 entitled *Bring Back The Night* examined the demise of night-clubs and gathering spaces in Dublin city, and their replacement with more homogeneous and upmarket bars. The work involved documentation of former nightclubs, new establishments, and revellers at some of the remaining 'underground' clubs. The project was presented as a series of nightclub flyers. It is notable that from the very earliest days of my practice I sought out different modes of display for my photographs, printing on non-photographic papers and with a consciousness of photographs as part of everyday material culture.

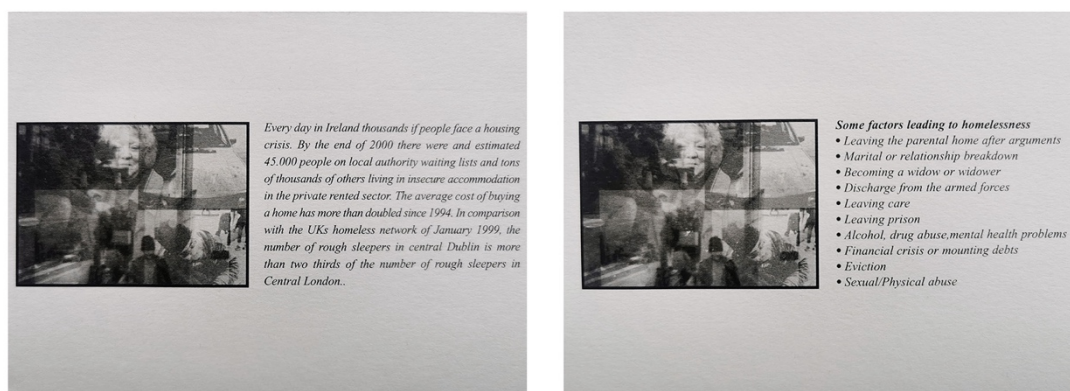


Figure 2.9: Postcards, from the series *Home*. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2002.

My approach to photography was in some ways a reaction to the 'documentary' strategies prevalent in my education at the time. While I was interested in the themes of spatial transformation, and the socio-economic, political, and cultural underpinnings of development, I resisted what I saw as 'straight' documentation, instead trying to explore these issues through more abstract, metaphorical, or studio-based practice. Three-dimensional modes of

presentation were enacted through moving image, sculptural constructions, and spatial layout. It was only towards the end of my BA that I began to embrace a more portraiture-based practice.

Marta Dahó (2019, p. 228) identifies what she terms a ‘geographical turn’ beginning in the early 1990s, which ‘started to reflect a new concern for factual understanding of how the territory was being modelled politically and ideologically’. This echoes Carville’s (2014, pp.104-105) recognition of a ‘topographical turn in Irish photography’ around the late 1990s and early 2000s, in response to the shifting material environment of Ireland, resulting from new development. An example of this can be found in Dara McGrath’s *By the Way*, which addresses the growing investment in Ireland’s infrastructure (see Figure 2.10). Examining road developments at Dublin’s outskirts, McGrath depicts the spaces which appear in the lacuna between new and old, urban, and suburban developments (McGrath 2003). Carville comments on McGrath’s project in relation to this ‘topographical turn’ stating that it shows:

[...] an orientation toward the changing topography of Ireland, not as a recurring subject or a style, but as an intervention into the visual culture of the Celtic tiger itself [...] For all its passivity in following the methodological regularity of the document...McGrath’s series had begun to expose the fractures of the Celtic Tigers reconfiguration of the Irish landscape in the uniform image of globalised space before the economic crash (Carville 2015, pp. 109-110).



Figure 2.10: N11 Kilmacanogue, from series *By The Way*, Dara Mc Grath, 2003. Source: <https://www.lensculture.com/dmcgrath>, accessed October 5th 2024.

In similar ways, my expanded photography practice has attempted to unveil the ‘fractures’ of the current stage of building/development in Ireland, characterised by large scale, investment-led, BTR apartments complexes. I have done this through a slow, incremental photographic documentation of construction at Hamilton Gardens Apartments, and through showing alternative views to those presented in the plans, PR and CGI mock-ups of such developments.

Colin Graham (2012, p. 3) suggests that the speed of ‘progress’ witnessed in the lead up to the Celtic Tiger, during, and beyond, made it difficult to comprehend, and that ‘[...] undue speed leads to a dangerous incapacity to perceive the real. It is as if history in extremis turns the landscape, that base reality into nothing but Flux’. He also cites Currans *Southern Cross* and McGrath’s *By the Way* as examples of work that attempts to address this flux and understand the real-world effects of such change. In documenting the rapid development of Cabra over the period from 2020-2024, and sharing this material in the form of artefacts, documents and public dialogue, the aim is to provide a support towards comprehension of this exponential period of change.

2.3 Celtic Tiger and Aftermath

Property building escalated in the late 1990s up to 2006, with 88,419 houses built in 2006 alone (Central Statistics Office, 2012). Three years later Ireland went from property boom to bust, with the ubiquitous ‘Ghost Estate’ representative of the downfall. The term ‘ghost estate’ was first used by economist David Mc Williams in 2006, describing ‘an estate of 10 or more housing units where 50 percent or more of units are either vacant or under-construction’ (O’Callaghan, Gleeson and Kitchin, 2012, p.5). Photographers and artists responded to this moment of crisis, documenting modern ruins across the landscape, as a way to understand and incite discussion, and to record the aftermath. ‘Aftermath’ or what David Company (2003 [unpaginated]) coined ‘Late’ photography, refers to photographs made after the event: ‘[...] traces, fragments, empty buildings, empty streets, damage to the body and damage to the world’ . He describes Late Photography as an ‘undertaker’, a ‘trace of a trace’, a memorial of shock, stating that while ‘the photograph can become an aid to memory, it can also become an obstacle that blocks access to understanding of the past’ (Company, 2003 [unpaginated]). It is interesting to ponder Company’s sentiments in retrospect. The extensive documentation of empty housing estates in

the wake of the financial crash has now dissolved into history as a type of modern ruin, while property speculation has only escalated, along with financialising of housing, with the prospects of another property bubble ever imminent.

In relation to photography and spatial transformation Justin Carville states that:

In the Celtic Tiger and post-Celtic period, no other medium has captured the spatial transformation of Irelands urban and suburban landscapes, and their cultural and psychological affects, as expeditiously and forensically as the photographic image. [It is] not simply about the documenting of the aesthetic and formal transformations of the Irish landscape', but drawing attention to the wider 'political processes and crises to which society has become blinded (Carville 2018, p. 251).

The response of Irish visual arts to crisis, including photography, has been examined by Pat Cooke (2017, p. 91), who sets out 'to ground a theoretical understanding of the nature of crisis in the evolution of an artist's work, to gain some sense of its temporal manifestation in the life-long everyday practice of making art'. Cooke (2017, p. 92) asks the question of whether 'artists have an obligation to engage with politics?', and in relation to relational aesthetics, should artists be 'capable of decisive interventions at historical moments of crisis?'. I would suggest, in agreement with Carville, that photography is particularly suited to such interventions, evident particularly in responses to the effects of the financial crash on the Irish landscape. Photographers Anthony Haughey, Valérie Anex, David Farrell, Kenneth O Halloran and Martin Cregg offer a variety of responses to Irelands transforming built environment during and after the Celtic Tiger period.

Martin Cregg's *Midlands* (2004-2014) gives a wide overview of construction throughout the Irish Midlands following implementation of the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) (2002-2020), described by the then Taoiseach Bertie Ahearn as: '[...] a 20 year strategy to enable every place in the country to reach its potential not matter how small' (Ahearn 2002 [unpaginated]). Cregg's project speaks to prospective industrial development and housing construction, as part of this NSS master plan. His use of planning as a framework chimes with my PhD research, and while his work references a more long-term strategic plan, it does, like my own practice, examine the impact of planning on spatial transformation. In terms of his photographic approach, Cregg depicts abstract close-up images of fields, concrete, hoardings, and small details of construction. Figure 2.11 attests to his approach. *Midlands* was published as a photobook in 2014, using layering and folding strategies which echo some of the processes I have undertaken taken with my practice. Cregg's project serves as a valuable body of research, charting outcome of the NSS plan (Cregg, 2014 [unpaginated]).



Figure 2.11: Martin Cregg, *Midlands*, 2004-2014. Source: <http://www.martincreggphotography.com/MIDLANDS.html> accessed October 7th, 2024.

David Farrell’s series *An Archaeology of the Present* (2010-2013) looks more specifically at the housing boom and bust, with melancholic images of unfinished housing estates and in some instances the inclusion of photographic renderings of the promised developments, which brings to mind what Carville is conceptualising when he suggests that in many ways photography prefigured:

[...] the actual physical transformation of the landscape in the form of the ‘post-photographic’ digitally generated worlds that adorned the hoarding surrounding the construction sites of urban office blocks and suburban housing developments, or illustrating brochures designed to persuade prospective house hunters to invest in future developments. (Carville 2018, p. 250).

The relevance of this perspective is further highlighted by Henri Lefebvre who, in *The Production of Space*, states that ‘we build on the basis of papers and plans. We buy on the basis of images’ (Lefebvre, 1992, pp. 75-76). Farrell’s photographs use this juxtaposition of digital rendering and unfinished development effectively (Figure 2.12). In my research into the Hamilton Gardens building sites, I note the absence of photographic and textual indications of the development to come, with visual markers only appearing after completion. Conversations with local residents lead to speculation about the reasoning for this, with the suggestion of

attempts at discretion on the part of the developer. A possible desire to avoid drawing attention to the site.



Figure 2.12: From the series, *An Archaeology of the Present*, David Farrell. Source: <https://davidfarrell.org/landscape-as-witness/an-archaeology-of-the-present-2010-2013/photographs/> accessed October 7th, 2024.

Ghost Estates (2011) is the title of photographer Valerie Anex's response to the post Celtic Tiger landscape. Anex echoes the approach of David Farrell, with her representations of digital renderings, lone houses, and deserted estates. However, while Farrell's images have an underlying melancholy, Anex's deadpan rows of houses have a somewhat numbing affect. They are not spectacular ruins but dwellings suspended in time (Figure 2.13).



Figure 2.13: From the series *Ghost Estates*, Valerie Anex, 2011. Source: <http://www.valerieanex.com/index.php/ghost-estates/> accessed October 9th, 2024.

Kenneth O Halloran's *Tales from a Promised Land* (2002-2010) offers a view from before and after the property crash, documenting a frenzy of house building and purchase, and the devastating aftermath. Outside of buying Irish property, there was also the impetus to purchase a second property/home abroad (Keenan, 2014, [unpaginated]). Figure 2.14 depicts a viewing for Irish buyers of properties in Dubai as at the height of the Celtic Tiger, the notion of owning a second property abroad (for some), appeared reasonable. In Ireland, purchasing a house straight off the plans was normalised. O'Halloran's post-tiger images stand in stark contrast to this frenzied optimism, as he too turned towards the abandoned housing estates. His photographs have more of a journalistic feel than the other projects mentioned, and O'Halloran has worked primarily as a photojournalist. In some ways the allegorical details he brings into focus, such as in Figure 2.15 hit harder than the ubiquitous lines of abandoned houses – which as viewers we have become somewhat inured to.



Figure 2.14: From the series *Tales from the Promised Land*, Kenneth O Halloran. Source: <http://www.kennethohalloran.com/tales-from-the-promised-land> accessed October 9th, 2024.



Figure 2.15: From the series *Tales from the Promised Land*, Kenneth O Halloran. Source: <http://www.kennethohalloran.com/tales-from-the-promised-land> accessed October 10th, 2024.

Anthony Haughey’s collaborative approach to addressing the topic differs somewhat in terms of methodology and the resulting images. Haughey’s 2011 *Settlement* project, in collaboration with University College Dublin Architecture students, Dublin Institute of Technology’s NAMALab (National Asset Management Agency laboratory), and Mahony Architects, involved photographing several unfinished housing estates around the country between dusk and dawn (Haughey 2018, p. 301). A combination of out-of-date film stock and long exposures resulted in a series of ethereal photographs evoking a dreamlike state, perhaps an apt metaphor for the early hopefulness of homeowners. As details disappear in the darkness, housing estates are transformed into abstract shapes of colour, light, and form (Figure 2.16).

The value of aesthetics in theoretical debates on photography emerged in the 1970s, with the argument based on a politically left view that aesthetics are not a ‘cognitive mode of being “in touch” with reality’ but are a way of ‘blocking out reality’ (Buck-Morss 1992, p. 376). Levi Strauss (2003, p. 9) challenges this argument stating that: ‘The idea that the more transformed or “aestheticized an image is, the less “authentic” or politically valuable it becomes is one that needs to be seriously questioned. Why can’t beauty be a call to action?’. Haughey, referencing Levi Strauss also asks this question, while being cognisant of Liz Wells warning that transformative aesthetics can make us feel ‘over-awed and dis-empowered’ (Wells, 2011,

p.142). This is an argument that has haunted my own practice since I began, indeed my BA thesis from 2005 addressed the question of whether beautiful images serve to illuminate or obscure the themes they address. I have since come to the conclusion that this argument is somewhat reductive, that it is how images are used, how they are contextualised and who is looking at them which can dictate their reception. In making images, much of the time (there are incidents when photographs are taken for other reasons) it is an aesthetic and embodied impulse that draws me to a particular scene. Light, colour, shape and form trigger the impulse to photograph. Haughey (2018, p. 313) justifies the nature of the *Settlement* images by suggesting that beauty can serve as a powerful entry point for an audience, and that it is how the images are presented and contextualised that can shape the message heard. I take a similar position when considering the aesthetic qualities of my practice.

Settlement premiered at the Copper House Gallery, Dublin in November 2011 and comprised a series of Haughey's prints and a selection of architectural drawings produced with students from University College Dublin and Dublin Institute of Technology, which formed part of an installation featuring building materials (Figure 2.17). The hybrid and collaborative nature of the project and exhibition is an example of Irish photography's expansion into other mediums, including architecture, installation, and sculpture. This mirrors somewhat the collaborative approach I have taken to my PhD exhibition, *Best Laid Plans*, and its focus on installation, albeit without the site-specific considerations.



Figure 2.16: From the series *Settlement*, Anthony Haughey, 2011. Source: <http://anthonyhaughey.com/projects/settlement/> accessed October 10th, 2024.



Figure 2.17: Installation image of *Settlement* at Copper House Gallery 2011. Source: <http://anthonyhaughey.com/projects/settlement/> accessed October 10th, 2024.

2.3.1 Post Celtic Tiger Photography

Carville identifies that a ‘significant shift emerged in Irish photography’ around 2009, which countered what he terms ‘Celtic Tiger photography’, which was typified by ‘abstract spatial relationships’, and ‘the politics of absence’ (Carville, 2019 p.428). This shift sees a break ‘with the representation of absence that had been central to Irish photography’s exploration of place since the mid 1990s’, towards an acknowledgement of presence and the individual character of specific places and communities’ (Carville, 2019, pp. 428-439). Visually this is manifest in a return to portraiture and to the figure in the landscape. It echoes elements of my *Promise* project which began in 2012.

There are many examples I could draw on to reflect on this notion of ‘presence’ in the landscape, including, Jackie Nickerson’s *Ten Miles Round* (2007-2009), Simon Burch’s *Under a Grey Sky* (2009) and Eoin O’Connail’s *Common Place* (2006-2009), all of which employ a combination of portraiture and topographical detail. *Common Place* was exhibited at PhotoMuseum Ireland in 2009 and is of particular significance to me in terms of its influence on my practice. When I viewed this exhibition in 2009, it was the first time I had encountered photographic images which spoke to my own semi-suburban experience, as in Figure 2.18. Valerie Morrison (2016, p.16) describes O’Connail’s work, where ‘the formal qualities of straight photography (seriality, directness, uncluttered settings and clean lines) combine with an attention paid to atmosphere, to offer images of an unpicturesque Ireland which shares very little with the iconic pristine rural sceneries long tied to the Emerald Isle’. It was the attention to these overlooked but familiar topographies, and how they were photographed, which really drew me to this work.



Figure 2.18: Untitled from the series *Common Place* 2006-2009. Source: Eoin O'Connell. <https://eoinoconnail.com/portfolio-item/common-place/> accessed November 16th 2024.

In terms of my own practice it is important to reference this time and the photographic strategies employed, as I was part of it, and continued to work in this mode over a long period. In the following section I draw on a small selection of contemporary Irish photography to situate my own practice further within the field, and to begin contextualising the new directions I have taken.

2.4 Contemporary Irish Photographic approaches

2.4.1 Jamin Keogh

Jamin Keogh's working themes are often drawn from philosophical interests and the notion of human perception (Keogh, 2021). Keogh's ongoing project *Moyross Study*, which began in 2017, is something of a departure from his other works. Moyross is a social housing estate

located on the north-side of Limerick City, which was built in the 1970s, in response to a housing crisis. Keogh describes the ‘initial years of hope and optimism’ which due to a lack of council and government support and investment ‘began to slip into a debilitating cycle of unemployment, a chronic lack of educational resources, gun and gang crime and ultimately murder’ (Keogh, 2021). Keogh also states that what ‘started as a curiosity’ ‘became a reflexive need to tell a story of displacement, oppression, intergenerational trauma, and societal inequalities’ (Keogh 2021). I was interested in Keogh’s approach to photographing the area, particularly his use of portraiture.

I interviewed Keogh in August 2021 (FD1, pp. 216-218) and was interested to hear that his initial approach to the area was purely topographical. The topography of Moyross is indeed compelling for a photographer. It is a suburban dystopia of CCTV, a large dividing wall (from the nearby more affluent estate), with burnt out cars, and strange gaps between houses, where the connecting dwelling has been demolished (Figure 2.19) (the legacy of a ‘regeneration’ project began in 2007). Keogh extensively photographed the topographical environment of Moyross, but he was also approached by younger residents to make portraits, which he initially avoided. As the work progressed, he eventually conceded, and came to know the community through this process of portraiture and embeddedness (Keogh, 2021).



Figure 2.19: From the series *Moyross Study*, Jamin Keogh, 2017- Ongoing. Source: PhotoMuseum Ireland 2024.

In 2023, Keogh took part in an exhibition *No Place Like Home* at PhotoMuseum Ireland. A series of portraits and topographic images were shown. While giving an artist talk, he discussed another element of the project, a moving image piece using Google Street View to map Moyross, cognisant of the fact that in the original mapping by Google Street View Moyross ‘was omitted [...] with only partial and restricted glimpses of the estate being offered from nearby or peripheral vantage points’ (Keogh, 2021). The piece was effective in terms of indicating the role of visual imagery in obfuscating, as much as illuminating the nature of the environments in which we live. Keogh’s project importantly sheds a light on the machinations of so-called ‘regeneration’, class and spatial inequality, and state housing policy. It can however be difficult to avoid playing into stereotypes when depicting working class areas. While Keogh’s work here is admirable, I question some of the tropes included (the shirtless tattooed young male for example in Figure 2.20) in the same way that I question their use in my own practice.



Figure 2.20: From the series *Moyross Study*, Jamin Keogh, 2017- Ongoing. Source: PhotoMuseum Ireland 2024.

It may seem unfair to focus on these tropes out of a large body of admirable work, but I do so to answer my own questions and dilemmas about representation, particularly of working-class areas. I find these images highly coded and emotive and for me they represent my upbringing on a council estate, and certain aspects of where I live now. I know they have connotations, depending on the audience, not always positive. Other tropes, of young men on scrambler, bikes or scooters, horses, or elaborately dressed young women also fit this category. I struggled

with this in relation to my representation of Cabra, though I did indeed make some of these types of images (see Figures 2.21 and 2.22).



Figures 2.21 & 2.22: Photographs of young men in Cabra. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2020-2022.

2.4.2 Doug Dubois

The work of American photographer Doug Dubois preceded Keogh's work, with his series *My Last Day at Seventeen* (2012-2015), set in the post-crash/austerity period of the mid 2010s, in Cobh, Co. Cork. Dubois spent several summers on an artist residency in Cobh, attempting and failing to gain access to building sites representative of the Irish property crash. He began to teach photography to a group of teenagers, hailing from the nearby Russell Heights housing estate, who invited him to observe the areas where they spent time. The work ostensibly became about the fragility of youth and the associated bravado, but it is youth in a very particular context, with the markings of class and the topography of the housing estate taking centre stage. In fact, many of Dubois works were staged, albeit based on observations previously made. Dubois images of Russell Heights and its surroundings are beautifully composed, with a soft pastel palette and often cinematic visuals as evidence in Figure 2.23.



Figure 2.23: From the series *My Last Say at Seventeen*, Doug Dubois 2010. Source: <http://dougdubois.com/mldas/> accessed November 4th 2024.

His project also depicts shirtless, tattooed young men, as seen in Figure 2.24, with the topography of the estate serving as a backdrop. The raw breeze block walls and deterioration evident in the housing point to deprivation and official neglect. Dubois made every effort to include the community in his project, returning each summer with photographs for the participants. He also invited some of the participants to a showing of the work in New York and employed a local artist to make illustrations for a publication of the work.



Figure 2.24 From the series *My Last Say at Seventeen*, Doug Dubois 2010. Source: <http://dougdubois.com/mldas/> accessed November 4th, 2024.

Dubois is an extremely sophisticated and accomplished photographer and educator; it is disingenuous to think that he is unaware of the tightrope he is walking here between exploitation and inclusion. While the main character in this story is purported to be a young woman called Erin whose statement formed the title of the exhibition, it is the housing estate itself and the allusions to deprivation that loom large in the work.

I should note here that my questioning of Dubois strategy only emerged well after this body of work was published. I met Dubois in Cobh in 2010 and was greatly influenced by this work when undertaking my *Promise* project (2012-2015).

2.4.3 Shane Lynam

Shane Lynam's work of the past two decades has involved a sustained engagement with the built environment, with long term projects around specific European sites (Campion, 2024). A politics and economics graduate, Lynam is acutely aware of the socio-political underpinnings of the Irish built environment but is reluctant to speak directly to about it in his work, preferring instead to evoke a suburban landscape which refuses categorisation. *Pebbledash Wonderland* (2014-2024) is the title of Lynam's current project, which was exhibited at PhotoMusuem Ireland in September-October 2024. Figure 2.25 shows an example of his photographic approach.

Pebbledash Wonderland was exhibited during the same period as my own exhibition, *Best Laid Plans*. While on the outside there appeared to be similar themes, including buildings and the suburban environment, my PhD research took a more hybrid approach, encompassing the languages of cartography and planning, and incorporating sound, video, and installation. Lynam's exhibition also took a more traditional approach to presentation, an example of which can be viewed in Figure 2.26. This way of displaying contemporary photography partly originated in the 1990s, with photographers such as Wolfgang Tillmans challenging the ubiquity of the monumental large scale work prevalent at the time (Zanot, 2014, pp. 217-230). It appears to be a go-to for photographic exhibitions and was something I wanted to move away from in my practice. My attempts to explore new modes of display are evident in *Best Laid Plans*.



Figure 2.25: From the series *Pebbledash Wonderland*. Source Shane Lynam.,2024.



Figure 2.26 Installation photograph of *Pebbledash Wonderland* exhibition at PhotoMuseum Ireland. Source: Shane Lynam, 2024.

2.4.4 Jan McCullough

The focus of this chapter so far has been on Irish photographic responses to housing and the built environment, mostly concentrated on the photographs and their context. I would like to now shift from thinking about the photographs themselves to thinking about ways of ‘doing’ and making, with the photograph as a point of departure. I met with Jan McCullough at her studio at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in October 2021. I note in my field diary that ‘we talked about our attraction to materials and our mutual interest in playing with space, with installation, form, colour, and the experiential possibilities of the exhibition’ (FD2 2022, p. 22).

Ideas of construction are at the heart of McCullough’s practice. She states an interest in ‘the human acts of construction, fabrication and DIY, and the communities of interest and place that form around them [...] employing the materials, and formal, visual languages associated with these activities to create sculptural installations, interventions, and photographs’ (Jan McCullough, 2024). While photography is at the core of McCullough’s work, the end point in her process is not always the photograph. Referencing her project *Tricks of the Trade* (2021), McCullough states that: ‘recently it (photography), has played a more fluid role, as source material, becoming reconfigured into more sculptural and three-dimensional forms’.

(McCulloch 2021). She has also, as in the project *Constructions* (2019), used photography to document sculptural forms created in the studio, with photographs of these ‘constructions’ as the final artwork (Figure 2.27).



Figure 2.27: From the series *Constructions*. Source: Jan McCullough, 2019.

The emphasis on DIY, care, and community, in addition to the photography/sculpture nexus in McCullough’s work, resonates strongly with my own recent expanded photography practice. Figure 2.28 shows an installation image of the project *Ladders* (2022), a project considering the practice of making and remaking ad-hoc structures to fit a particular task. Utilising the

photograph as a reference point, working with construction materials, and installation are all elements I have incorporated into my PhD research methods. McCullough’s ongoing practice continues to offer context for my own work and serves as a valuable example in the field of expanded photography practice in Ireland.



Figure 2.28: From the series *Ladders*. Source: Jan McCullough, 2022.

2.4.5 Roisin White

Roisin White, a Dublin based visual artist/photographer works at the nexus of photography, drawing, sculpture and collage (White 2024). Her recent project *Play House*, (2023) examines the current Irish housing crisis and its effects on a demographic sometimes known as ‘Generation Rent’ (Hearne, 2020, p. 1). I spoke to Roisin in January 2024 and asked her about her motivation for the project. The project was initiated by anger and frustration at the inability of people of her generation (aged in their 20s and 30s) to afford a home, with many forced to live with their parents. Professing the topic to be highly emotional and difficult, White stated that only way she could deal with it was to take a ‘playful’ approach (White, 2024). She often utilises archival and found images in her practice, and for *Play House*, drew on 1950s housing advertisements and home-making manuals, alongside contemporary adverts on DAFT.ie for rental accommodation, incorporating her own photographs and employing collage methods

towards new works. Figure 2.29 shows an example of White’s multi-media approach to the topic of Irish housing (White, 2024).



Figure 2.29: ‘DAFT From the series *Play House* by Roisin White Source: The Library Project 2023.

White’s Playhouse project is ongoing, and she has professed the need to put it aside temporarily due to the emotive nature of the topic. Her practice continues to expand, recently incorporating complicated timber sculptures and textile works, presented in the exhibition *Safe Harbour* at the DLR Lexicon Gallery from 8th November 2024 – 19th January 2024 (see figure 2.30).



Figure 2.30: Installation image from the exhibition *Safe Harbour*, DLR Lexicon. Source: Artist Roisin White, 2024.

2.5 Irish art practice: further responses to the theme of housing

While my practice is situated within the field of photography, its evolving nature means that it also draws on other disciplines in terms of research and is influenced by the wider field of art practice. Throughout the research period, I have come across multiple projects by artists working in the mediums of sculpture, film and text, and in architecture, all of whom are addressing the topic of housing. I outline several of these projects below, to indicate some of the expanded research I have conducted into Irish art practice.

In 2021 I attended an online presentation of Corban Walker’s artwork *‘What do you need? Exploring minimal home standards over the last 100 years’* (Figure 2.31). The work was commissioned by Dublin City Councils City Architect Ali Grehan, and launched at Diamond Park, Dublin 1, in June 2021. Walker was tasked with creating an artwork in response to minimum housing standards in Ireland and chose to create a timeline/diagram of the evolution of minimum apartment sizes over a 100-year period. The commissioning of this artwork by Dublin City Council in 2021 is notable, considering the wider socio-economic and political context of a growing housing crisis, and indicated housing as a growing concern for artists. Walker’s wider practice relates to philosophies and perceptions of scale which dovetailed with my research concerns about over-scaling of new developments in Cabra. Notions of scale were incorporated into my final artefacts and will be discussed further in later descriptions.

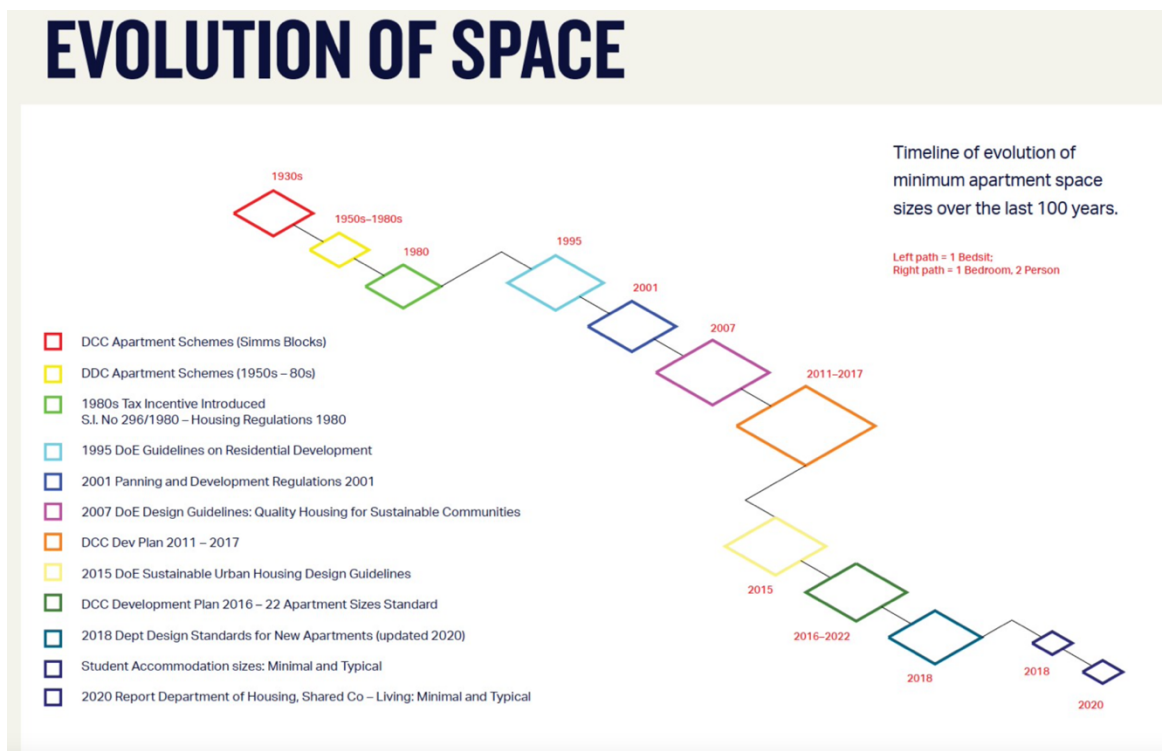


Figure 2.31: *Evolution of Space*, Corban Walker. Source: Dublincityarchitects.ie, 2024.

In 2021, the Architecture practice *Plattenbrau Studios* exhibited at the Irish Architecture Foundation as part of the *Momentum* exhibition (2021). This exhibition included a beautiful life-size rendering of a bedsit out of white paper (Figure 3.33). The exhibition *Open Heart* (2022), by Co-Lab, at the Magdalene Chapel Sean McDermott, combined sculpture, drawings,

photography, film, and community engagement, to create a discussion around the future of this historic and contested site.



© Peter Molloy 2021

Figure 3.33: Plattenbau Studios *All Mod Cons*, Irish Architecture Foundation. Source: Peter Molloy, 2021.

In Spring 2022, Project Arts Centre Dublin initiated ‘an open research project about housing’ entitled *Clear Back the Rubble*, which was the beginning of a multi-year programme on the topic (2022). The first iteration included the screening of a series of films, a reading group, various talks and discussions, and the initial stage of Avril Corroon’s artwork *Damp Tank*. Corroon’s artwork considers the condition of rental accommodation in Dublin City in the context of dampness. Over a two-year period, the artists collected condensation created through dampness, in collaboration with multiple households, towards a large installation at the Project Arts Centre in 2022. The work considers the health impacts of housing insecurity and the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.



Figure 3.32: *Damp Tank*, exhibition at Project Arts Centre, 2022. Source: Avril Corroon, 2022.

The 2022 *Multi-Story* project by Fiona Whelan and Feidlim Cannon ‘sets out to engage housing activists in a unique online collaborative arts process, which explores their direct experience of the housing crisis through visual and performative storytelling’ (Create National Development for Collaborative Arts, 2022). The inaugural theatrical performance *The Apology*, is a powerful statement of the suffering engendered by the current housing crisis. In the same year (2022) Michelle Malone’s work entitled *O, to have a little house*, exhibited at The Lab Gallery, addressed the theme of social housing, through her families move from the Fatima Mansions flat complex in Dolphins Barn, to Finglas Dublin 11. The installation comprised the construction of the interior of a Council house, with tapestries and other material markers of working-class history (Figure 3.34).

Also of note is Eimear Walshe’s project *Romantic Ireland*, which represented Ireland at the Venice Biennale in 2024. The installation of *Romantic Ireland* comprised a series of videos, with an operatic soundtrack, enclosed in earth-built walls. Walshe (2024), described the thematic of the project as being ‘the material legacy of colonialism and eviction in Ireland’. The topic of eviction, along artists responses, was discussed at the beginning of this chapter and is an emotive theme for Irish artists. The eviction ban enacted during the Covid 19

pandemic, and the subsequent lifting of the ban speaks to the precarious nature of housing for many, and for artists themselves.



Figure 3.34: *O' to have a little house*, The Lab Gallery 2021. Source: Michelle Malone, 2021.

2.6 Conclusion

Chapter Two has attempted to contextualise and situate my own practice within specific Irish photography practices, with an emphasis on photographic responses to spatial transformation, the built environment and socio-economic crisis. It has outlined evolving photographic approaches through the period from the 1980s to the present, including ‘aftermath’ photography, ‘presence’ in the landscape, and new photo-sculptural approaches. It has described the work of practitioners working with hybrid practices, which embrace construction and installation, as context for new directions in my work. Finally, it offered a brief overview of Irish artists working in different mediums, who have addressed the topic of housing, during the period I was conducting my research. The formal nature of the installation-based works described in the final section of this chapter serve as further inspiration for my practice, as I develop more spatialised, construction-based methods.

The following chapter describes the photographic methods I employed through the early data gathering stage of my research, experimenting and developing new strategies towards an overall new methodological approach to my practice.

Chapter Three: Finding the Way

3.1 Movement and the ‘Doing’ of Photography

Within the history of photography, much weight has been given to theorising the photograph as document or art object, as ‘reality’ or construction, as ‘decisive moment’, or agent of surveillance (Cartier Bresson 1952, Foucault 1979, Tagg 1988). Less time has been devoted to the investigation of photography as a practice. Eve Forrest (2012, p. 105) advocates for moving ‘the discourse on photography away from the dominant representational framework that often ignores the *doings* of the photographer’, toward one which acknowledges the importance of movement and the photographic act. She suggests taking a phenomenological approach to understanding ‘issues of practice, which place the body and movement at the heart of photography’ (Forrest, 2012, p. 107). In a similar vein Jonas Larsen (2008, p. 143) notes that, ‘photographing is absent from most theory and research jumps straight from photography to photographs’. An overarching theme of this thesis is the primacy of ‘doing’, and this is manifest in the acts of walking, photographing, and engaging somatically with the Cabra environment. The work is phenomenologically informed, drawing on Maurice Merleau Ponty’s idea of perception as ‘not an isolated event or state in the mind or brain but an organism’s entire bodily relation to its environment’ (Carmen, 2020, p. 1).

Cultural geographer Mia A. Hunt (2014, p.151) highlights the potential of photography to evoke ‘feelings, experience and textures of place’ and to draw from ‘more than representational approaches’ in its engagement with environment. While spatial transformation is at the heart of my research, I also endeavour to evoke a sense of place through the capturing of fragments that draw my attention. Sarah Pink (2011, p.9) suggests that ‘images are not *of* places or things’, but rather, they are inevitably and unavoidably *in* places: they are produced by moving through and not over or on environments, and they are not stopping points so much as outcomes of and in movement’. The notion of images captured in movement resonates with my use of the camera phone and ‘shoot from the hip’ photography, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Creating images as I moved through the environment of Cabra, I reflected on the impetus to photograph, and the act of photographing itself as much as the resulting photograph. Why was I only compelled to photograph in certain conditions, for example in strong sunlight? How did

movement affect the images I made? In what way did gender factor in to my walking? How did I perceive the material fabric of the area depending on physical circumstance or mediating technology (the camera)? What kind of images result from particular approaches and how did analysis of these approaches progress the research? In Chapter Three I attempt to address these questions, outlining the different photographic strategies I have employed, with a focus on the ‘doing’ of photography and the different strategies employed in my attempts to represent both the changing environment and the experience of moving through it.

3.2 On the trail

3.2.1 Walking and Noticing

Anthropologist Tim Ingold (2000, pp. 219-242) uses the terms ‘way-faring’ and ‘pathfinding’ to describe the act of moving through a place, particularly on foot, and discovering it as you go. Considering wayfaring as ‘our most fundamental way of being in the world’, he contends that ‘lives are not led inside places but through, around, to and from them’ (Ingold, 2011, p. 152). Wayfaring, for Ingold (2007, pp. 75-84), describes ‘the embodied experience of this preambulatory movement’. Wayfaring and pathfinding are apt descriptions of the beginning of my walking and responsiveness to the Cabra environment. It is through repetitive walking and looking that I notice large scale spatial transformation in the form of housing-led development, but also everyday micro-changes in the material environment. Michael Cronin (2012, p. 11) proposes the concept of ‘microspeciation’ as a way of examining the world, and the notion of ‘endotic travel’ as ‘an exercise in staying close by, not leaving the familiar and travelling interstitially through a world we thought we knew’. Cronin is borrowing the term here from French novelist and filmmaker Georges Perec, who called for an anthropology not of ‘the exotic anymore, but the endotic’ (Perec, 2008 [1973], p. 210). John Sturrock (Sturrock 2008, p.xiv) describes Perec’s ‘commitment to the ‘infra-ordinary, or the belief that none of us had given enough attention to what is truly daily in our daily lives’. The concepts of ‘endotic travel’ and the ‘infra-ordinary’ reflect my process of walking and noticing in Cabra, where the familiar becomes unfamiliar and is viewed anew through both incremental change and shaping by sunlight.

Weather and lighting conditions are important motivational factors for walking and taking photographs. Many photographers choose to avoid strong sunlight or shadow, seeking out a

more neutral or even type of light. For me, strong sunlight animates my environment, giving shape and colour to materials, and this is what I am compelled to photograph. The most quotidian details can become extraordinary in the right conditions, as is evident in Figure 3.1. Relph (1985, p. 3) points to an immersion in the world where ‘one phenomenological aim is to understand the nature of this immersion’. He goes on to say that we see the ‘phenomenon of curiosity and of ‘wonder’ as a ‘compassionate intelligence that seeks to see things in and for themselves’ (Relph, 1985, p. 16). The notions of curiosity and wonder reverberates with my embodied responses to the Cabra environment, with acute attention paid to the everyday material fabric of the area.



Figure 3.1: Detail of housing on Ratoath Road, Mandy O’Neill, 2021.

Cameras add another dimension to everyday observation, with photography ‘connected to a form of ‘heightened noticing’, where ‘repetitive encounters with the camera are important in creating a rhythm that allows the photographer to immerse themselves in their environment, as they start to notice where and how they go’ (Forrest, 2012, p. 112). It was through my initial walking, observing and photographing in Cabra that the ‘photo-walk’ protocols emerged as a way to shape and analyse the progress of my research.

3.2.2 The Photo-walk and The Field Diary

On 4th November 2020 I embarked on ‘my first official photo-walk’ through Cabra, which involved walking, observing, and photographing the area, and recording the experience in my field diary (FD1 2020, p. 2). As I embarked upon this path, I was reminded of how David Seamon (2018, p. 9) describes the phenomenology of place, and of the phenomenon of ‘place experiences, place actions, place meanings and place events’. As such, my attention was drawn toward the simple act of walking itself and how this action is the context within which a new artistic horizon began to open up. I experienced the everyday Cabra lifeworld phenomenologically, through the practice-based methods of walking, observing, and photographing.

Walking-based art practice has a long history, from the 18th century romantics, through to contemporary artists such as Richard Long and Hamish Fulton (Morris, 2015). The wanderings of the ‘flaneur’ can be traced back to the 19th century, and reflect the affluent male stroller of modernity. In much of the history of the flaneur it is a particularly male pursuit – perhaps not surprising considering its origins in the 19th century and public/private gender divisions. The gendered aspects of walking are examined by Lauren Elkins, where she calls for a repurposing of the term Flaneur to Flaneuse (the feminine form of flaneur) (Elkins 2016, p. 7). Gender is a factor in my own walking and as such has been influential while undertaking photo-walks. A number of street interactions have made me wary and I am conscious of both myself and the equipment I carry, particularly in unpopulated areas. A particular incident in a local park meant that I no longer went there without a companion. While gender is not the focus of my research, it is important to note because it can affect the type of images taken, and considering the embodied nature of my practice I must recognise the restrictions (perceived or otherwise) inherent in my own body. This self-consciousness and also photographing in a residential area (where photography might be questioned) resulted in the initial use of a camera phone, moving on later to a small mirrorless camera.

Rebecca Solnit (2001, p. 267) suggests that ‘walking has sometimes been, at least since the late eighteenth century, an act of resistance to the mainstream’ and that ‘it stood out when its pace was out of keeping with the time’. In some ways, my walking feels out of keeping with the time, and with the rapid speed of development happening in the environment. Acts of repetitive walking and photographing allow me to control, contain, and process the spatial

transformation. I began my initial photo-walk by selecting a route which followed the cranes I could view across the landscape, photographing scenes I encountered along the way. On returning, I reflected on the experience of the photo-walk through text and line drawings of the route (Figure 3.2). As the research progressed, I attempted more structured and intentional protocols, recording date, time, weather, mood, and general reflections in my field diaries.



Figure 3.2: Text and line drawing, FD1, pp. 2-3. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2020.

Darren Newbury (2000, p. 3 suggests that: ‘the research diary can be seen as a melting pot for all of the different ingredients of a research project – prior experience, observations, readings, ideas, and a means of capturing the interplay of elements). The field diaries became an essential part of my process and a way to work through the various elements over time. They now serve as a hugely valuable repository of the trajectory of practice, from which I draw extensively for this chapter. Newbury, (2001, p. 8) suggests that ‘one of the most interesting roles a research diary can play in relation to the variety of research topics is that of bringing together words and images’. My field diaries have adopted this role, combining text and imagery from the outset, the combination of which now allows me to visualise the evolution of my research through

practice. The use of handwritten field diaries rather than digital ones, can be seen as further grounding the material dimensions of the work. The tactility and materiality of the notebooks, the hands-on process of cutting and pasting images became part of the making process, and indeed facsimiles of the diaries were later created to form a series of artefacts which were exhibited as part of *Best Laid Plans*.

3.3 Camera, Body, Environment

During the early stages of my research, I favoured the camera-phone over other photographic technologies, as the most fluid and discreet method of photographing. While I also carried a small mirrorless camera, I noted that: 'I use the phone in a more reflexive way. It's much faster and more of an extension of me. The camera is more detached' (FD1 2020, pp.4-5). Forrest (2012, p. 108) describes the camera as 'an extension of the body, an instrument that both extends the reach of vision and is incorporated into the wider *body schema*' and I found this particularly applied to the camera phone. Using the camera-phone affected the type of photographs I took. The composition and fragmentary nature of the images gives a sense that they were taken in motion, with the impulsive act of photographing as primary motivation. The ubiquity of camera phones renders them almost invisible, which alleviated my worry of being perceived as some agent of surveillance. I did not want to draw too much attention in this dense residential area with highly visible equipment.

As the research continued, I recognised the need for different perspectives and image quality, that I could not achieve with the camera-phone. There was also a desire for more close-up imagery, and I began to alternate between a small mirrorless camera and DSLR with a selection of lenses. The resulting photographs varied depending on the technology employed, as did the experience of photographing. In recent years I have attempted to streamline and curtail the amount and size of camera equipment I use, and to achieve a more fluid way of working. While I had previously included a film camera, I have come to find digital technology more flexible in terms of work flow. I could photograph, download, print and edit images immediately after undertaking a photo-walk, which gave me great autonomy over the overall process. In terms of post-production I have always taken a minimal approach – with cropping, straightening and brightening in Photoshop often the only interventions.

Don Ihde's post-phenomenological approach, focuses on the mediation between body and environment through technology (Ihde, 1993). Ihde's approach suggests a relational rather than instrumentalist reading of technology, where 'we make and are made by technology', and 'we make things which in turn make us' (Ihde and Malafouris 2019, p. 195). Photographer Anneke De Klerke (2020), adopts this post-phenomenological understanding of the relationship between technology, environment, and self through a series of 'landscape photography' experiments with various cameras. She concludes that 'the images produced are as much documentations of photographer-camera-place relations as they are representations of place or examples of landscape photography' (De Klerke, 2020, p. 213). Her emphasis is, like Ihde, on the 'co-constitution of body, technology and environment', and her experiments echo the approach I have taken with various camera technologies through my interaction with the Cabra environment.

The impact of cameras on the body itself is discussed by Forrest (2012, p. 106) when she refers to taking photographs as 'a physical business requiring constant adjustment of position and posture'. In January 2021, I noted in my field diary 'the physical aspects of this work' with 'physical discomfort causing me to return early' (FD1 2021, p. 70). Physical discomfort means that I limited the times where I used heavy equipment and in this way can be seen to have shaped some of my data collection, which would eventually impact on production of artefacts for the exhibition. A gendered aspect to this could be suggested in terms of strength, body type and physical transportation of heavy equipment, which can become a distraction and ultimately impede the impulse to photograph.

3.4 Photographic approaches

As outlined above, my photographic approach to the Cabra environment began with walking and photographing with my camera phone, before embracing more conventional cameras. Embodied and phenomenological engagement with the transforming environment shifted as mediated by the different technologies, which also effected the type of photographs produced. In the following section I describe the various photographic methods I employed, and the resulting photographic data.

3.4.1 Typologies

According to Daniele Meaux (2019, p. 215), typologies occur where particular elements ‘can be combined on the basis of pre-determined criteria to establish a category’. Typological categorisation has been a feature of photographic practice since its inception and has been used extensively to support particular views of society and to bolster state apparatus (Foucault 1979, Tagg 1988). Throughout the 19th and 20th century, the serial typological portrait was ubiquitous, and it is a strategy I have widely used in my depiction of young people and children. Meaux’s discussion on typologies is related to contemporary landscape photography, or what she terms ‘territories’, and on the combination of seemingly similar objects, which take on new meaning through this typological grouping

In the context of contemporary art photography, the work of Bernd and Hilla Becher in the 1960s serves as an influential marker (Cotton, 2004. p. 15). The Becher’s developed a system of categorisation where they applied a neutral photographic style to a ‘large quantity of images to extract a typological perspective’ (Méaux, 2019, p. 215). Intentionality was an important factor in the Becher’s system of categorisation. The photographer sets out with the intention to photograph particular scenes or objects in a specific way. In my research, categorisation was used after the fact as a way to process a vast collection of images. I did not plan to create typologies, but categorisation became a strategy of containment, and a way to understand the ‘territory’.

Approximately one year into my research, and with an exponentially growing archive of photographs, I began to break my images into categories including houses, trees, hoardings, building sites, gates, factories and other details. Some of the resulting edits, from my camera phone images can be viewed in Figure 3.3 and Figure 3.4. I acknowledge that these images do not follow strict typological approaches in terms of composition or standardisation, and part of their function is to show variety in the Cabra environment. However, the grouping of these photographs serves to amplify the themes emerging in the research over time, particularly the focusing on housing as can be viewed in Figure 3.4.



Figure 3.3: Typological grid of camera phone images. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2020-2021.



Figure 3.4: Typological grid of camera phone images. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2020-2021.

It was through viewing these photographs that I began to question my instinctual approach to photographing, particularly in terms of composition and lighting. Harsh shadows and skewed perspectives made for overly abstract imagery which obscured information. As an alternative, I began to employ a more ‘straight’ documentary strategy, in more neutral weather conditions, focusing on detailed information (Figures 3.5 and 3.6). I used a DSLR camera and 35mm lens for these photographs and noted in my field diary the ‘compositional balance’ in contrast to the ‘cropped sections and skewed images’ resulting from the camera phone (FD2, p. 86). David Bate (2016, p. 75) describes this approach as an example of a ‘less expressive tradition of a more, ‘neutral’ form of descriptive documentary’. This ‘deadpan’ mode of photography is often seen as originating with the work of the ‘New Topographics’ photographers of the 1970s, though it also has precedents in 1930s documentary and as far back as the 19th century photographic expeditions (Bate, 2016, p. 122). I continued to employ this method throughout the ‘data’ gathering phase of my research, to create an expansive archive of Cabra housing typologies. Reflecting now on these images, I see them as an important documentary archive, which I will revisit when considering future iterations of my research, and which may form part of a resource for future researchers.



Figure 3.5: Housing on Ratoath Road. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2021.



Figure 3.6: Housing on Ratoath Road. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2021.

3.4.2 Repeat Photography

Repeat photography is generally defined as ‘a photograph specifically made to duplicate selected aspects of another, pre-existing photograph. The new image typically repeats the spatial location of the original, showing the viewer the same scene once again and inviting comparison’ (Klett, 2012, p. 2). Attempts are often made to recreate weather conditions and lighting, as much as possible. My repeat photography has employed looser protocols, often following an instinctual rather than strictly intentional path. Figure 3.7 for example shows a photographic grid of a particular tree on Broombridge Road. I photographed this tree repeatedly with my camera phone, always in sunlight and through multiple seasons, especially drawn to its sculptural form. Repetition in this instance was driven by compulsion and a somatic relationship to environment rather than intention.



Figure 3.7: Tree on Broombridge Road. Source: Mandy O'Neill 2020-2024.

In certain instances I did employ a more intentional approach, as in Figure 3.8 of the gated entrance to a house on Glenbeigh Road. The gates were photographed one year apart (November 2020-November 2021), with change indicated in the different paint colour. While they are not identically composed, there was intentionality in my attempt, which was more in line with traditional repeat photography protocols (Smith, 2007). The reasoning for photographing this scene was to further illustrate some of the everyday spatial transformations happening in the area.



Figure 3.8: Gates on Glenbeigh Road. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2020-2021.

I also applied a more directed strategy to documentation of building sites, particularly the Hamilton Gardens site as it developed. Finding appropriate vantage points proved difficult, as the site was mostly enclosed and inaccessible. I chose specific locations that I photographed repeatedly, documenting the different stages of development. Figure 3.9 shows a time lapse of building stages of what would become a common area/workspace at Hamilton Gardens. Figure 3.10 depicts a time-lapse compilation of photograph of two specific houses on Carnlough Road, with the development gradually rising in between, though in this case there are distinctive differences in light and weather.



Figure 3.9: Hamilton Gardens development. Source Mandy O'Neill, 2020-2022.



Figure 3.10: Hamilton Gardens development as viewed between two houses on Carnlough Road. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2020-2022.

Repetitive methods were not just a way of recording change, but a mode of containing and processing my research over time. Further examples are outlined in the case studies contained in Chapter Four, and in descriptions of the final artefacts for *Best Laid Plans*.

3.5 Photographic approaches to people

3.5.1 From a distance

During the first year of my doctoral research (2020), I was still considering how I might photograph people, and how this would be integrated into the project. While I was very much drawn to the built environment, I had not yet ruled out the possibility of including portraiture or the human figure in some capacity. In June 2021, I made a series of images with the DSLR camera and a long lens. I had been wary of pointing the camera at people in Cabra and the distance afforded by the long lens allowed me to capture people unnoticed (Figure 3.11). I had always been uncomfortable with this way of photographing people, preferring to have them fully aware of my presence as a photographer. However I was initially excited at the possibilities of this approach, as a way to illustrate the ‘lifeworld’ of Cabra, and its residents. The term lifeworld originates from the German *Lebenswelt*. The term ‘entered the vocabulary of 20th century philosophy and social theory with the publication of Edmund Husserl’s *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology in 1936* (Harrington 2006, p. 341). Martin Heidegger, a student of Husserl, explores the idea of ‘Dwelling’ (Heidegger, [1971], translation by Albert Hofstadter 2001 pp. 141-160). This term is employed by Buttimer (1976, p.277) where she states that ‘[...] to dwell implies more than to inhabit, to cultivate, or to organise space. It means to live in a manner which is attuned to the rhythms of nature, to see one’s life as anchored in human history and directed towards a future’. This speaks to the idea of ‘lifeworld’ which she defines as ‘the culturally defined spatiotemporal setting of everyday life’, (Buttimer, 1976, p. 277). Carville (2017, p. 246) draws on the concept of ‘lifeworlds’ when discussing post-crash Irish photography, which highlights ‘the everyday connectedness and sense of belonging of people and their environment’. In photographing

people from a distance, I attempt to capture the lifeworld of Cabra, before attempting a more fluid approach of shooting from the hip, characteristic of the genre of street photography.



Figure 3.11: People photographed from a distance, Ratoath bridge. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2021.

3.5.2 Shoot from the hip

For this 'shoot from the hip' strategy I used a small mirrorless camera, walking with the camera at hip height, and clicking the shutter. David Seamon (1990, p. 35) describes the photograph as 'a visual articulation of human being in the world'. In his analysis of the renowned street photography of Andre Kertesz, he considers the images as 'a phenomenological record' portraying 'the ordinary, tacit patterns and elements of life's everydayness', and it is this responsiveness that I attempt with my 'shoot from the hip' strategy (Seamon, 1990, p. 32). Figure 3.12 shows one of the many photographs resulting from this approach.



Figure 3.12: Shoot from the Hip approach. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2021.

I note in my field diary that ‘this felt really freeing, even if the pictures didn’t turn out great, there is something satisfying in trying to take them’ (FD1, p. 189). Throughout the summer of 2021, I continue to work with this strategy, gathering a selection of ‘people’ photographs. I note that I am often drawn to photograph children, as in Figure 3.11, which has long been a feature of my practice. However, over time I become increasingly uncomfortable with this mode of photography. I am conscious of the legacy of street photography and its relationship to a ‘patriarchal way of looking’ (Hunt, 2014, p 153). Gillian Rose makes the remark that street photography exerts a ‘kind of macho power’, and this resonates with my discomfort (2001, p. 22). I note also my tendency to photograph children, young people and the elderly. While this is partly related to the people who are populating the streets during the day, there is often a vulnerability in these groups and the resulting images that causes me concern. As I walked the streets, I began to find people engaged in acts of care, domestic building, or renovation, more interesting.



Figure 3.13: Children playing in Cabra. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2021.

3.5.3 Renovation and care

In the midst of large-scale housing and infrastructural building, were the everyday acts of building, renovation, and care for dwellings, enacted by Cabra residents. Figure 3.14 depicts a resident painting the front of a house. The pavement shows signs of infrastructural markings and areas of tarmac, with a glimpse of gardens pointing to individual dwellings. I made a series of these images which are representative of certain aspects of the lifeworld of Cabra and the constant flux in the built environment, whether on small or large scale. These scenes of renovation and care were particularly prevalent during the Covid 19 pandemic period, where people were confined to their immediate surroundings.



Figure 3.14: A man painting a gate, Cabra. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2021.

3.6 Photo-elicitation – Interviews and Workshops

Restrictive measures, introduced during the Covid 19 pandemic, variations of which continued up to January 2022, greatly affected my ability to meet people in the early stages of my research. I have described attempts to represent people in Cabra visually, but this was really a surface engagement, and it was important for me to have the input and opinion of residents. Outside of any structured interaction, it is characteristic of my practice to meet and converse with a wide variety of people, to engage in discussion of topics, and to show materials. The context of the pandemic rendered this casual interaction impossible. In November 2021, one year after beginning my research I received Faculty Research Ethical Approval to conduct interviews and workshops with Cabra residents of different ages, and other interested experts in housing, architecture and politics.

To recruit participants, I met with community leaders from the local Gaelscoil, GAA club, and Cabra Development Project, seeking advice and probing contacts I had built up through previous projects. Two workshops were organised with the Cabra History Group, a group of approximately 20 men and women in the 70+ age group, many of whom had grown up in Cabra. I applied a snowballing method to recruitment of residents for individual interviews and attempted a further open call through a local Facebook group (as suggested by one interviewee). Conversations with school principal Sean O'Donnaille, convinced me that a wide open call would not yield results, and indeed the Facebook outreach attracted only two participants. Working with Paul O'Farrell, the Cabra Development Officer, and members of the GAA club, was more fruitful. In doing this, I was also able to identify people with a wealth of historical knowledge about the area, including local historian Nicolas Keogh, and the author of several books about Cabra, Bernard Neary.

While this was useful to glean a historical overview of the area, my main interest was in finding out the views and opinions of residents about the housing-led changes taking place, particularly those directly affected by proximity to building sites. Hamilton Gardens is positioned directly behind Carnlough road, and I conducted audio-recorded interviews with five people living directly adjacent to the site. I also interviewed eight people living at other locations in Cabra, sourced through the Facebook outreach or word of mouth. My initial Faculty Research Approval application had included a younger demographic, and the implementation of walking-based interviews. I explored the option of engaging with younger people (in their 20

and 30s), those who grew up in Cabra but would be forced to leave due to rising costs of property and rent. As the work came to focus on particular sites, it took a natural turn towards the history of the built environment, and the experience of change. Focus was narrowed to an older age group (those who grew up in Cabra), residents impacted by development, and experts in history, geography, architecture, housing and art practice. Walking-based interview methods were tested informally, but with many participants in an older age group I deemed this impractical. I put this aside as an element which might be returned to as a practice endeavour, i.e. a walking tour of the area at some point.

The first workshop with the Cabra History Group took place in March 2022, and was based around the topic of housing-led development in the area. My photographic research materials were displayed and viewed by participants, prompting a round table discussion about the experience of growing up in Cabra housing and the impact of changes taking place (Figure 3.15).

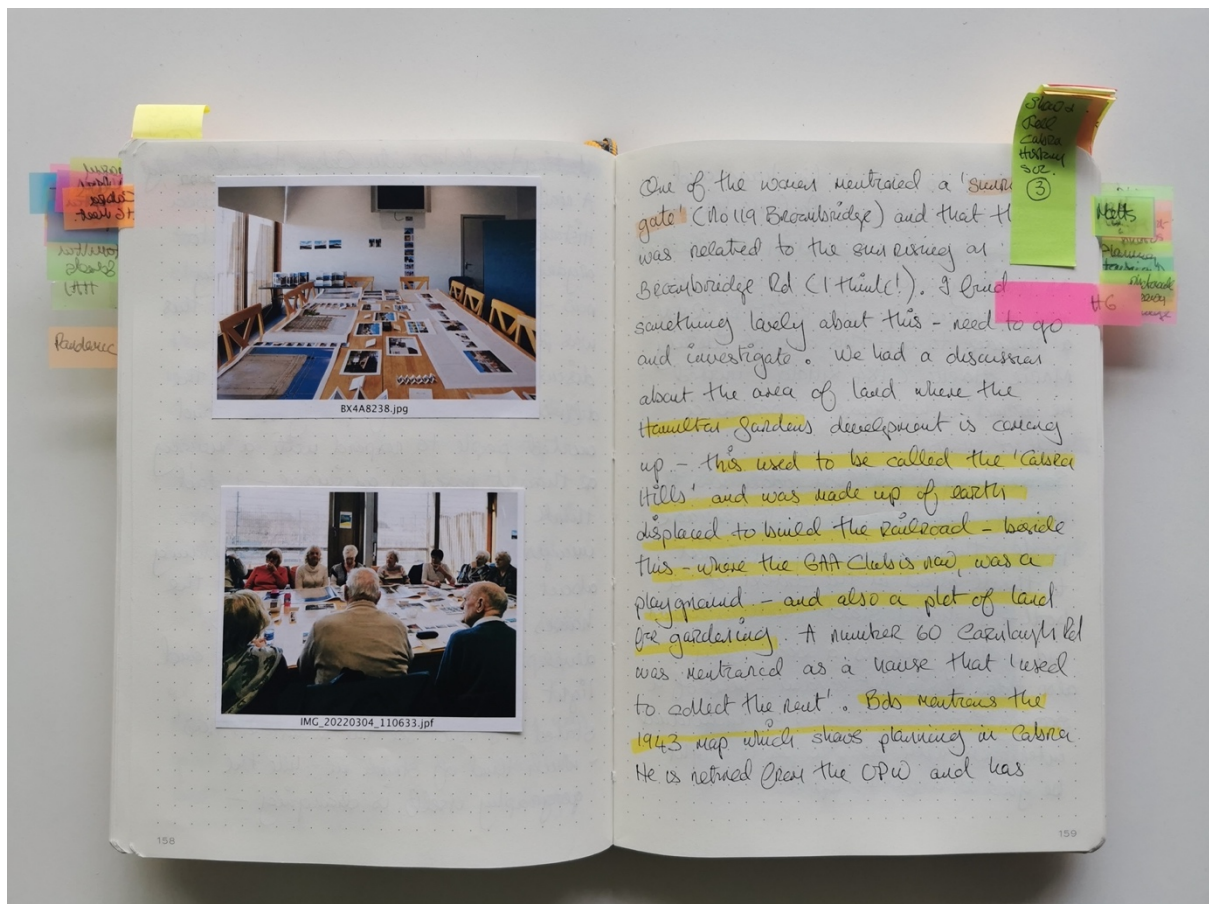


Figure 3.15: Photo-elicitation I with Cabra History Group. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2022.

Photo-elicitation methods are generally utilised as a way into the conversation, with ‘the understanding of how photographs communicate different meanings to the researcher and the subjects; thus the images become a basis of interviewing that explores the taken-for-granted assumptions of both researcher and subject’ (Harper, 2001, p. 182). In this case, the workshop was less interview than round-table conversation, but the dichotomy in perception between researcher and participant rings true. Images elicited unexpected reactions and information, sometimes contradicting and challenging my own assumptions. In the context of the workshop, they served as prompt and memory aid, while instigating a wider conversation about housing. Excerpts from the workshops and interviews will be introduced in later chapters, with some of this content shaped part of the final artefacts. Further interviews were conducted with other parties connected to the research including academics, politicians, artists and historians, most of which were not audio recorded, but reported in field diaries.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter began with an introduction to my walking and photography-based engagement with the Cabra environment, and the relationship between camera, body, and place. It discussed the photo-walk and field diaries as ongoing strategies, before describing a variety of photographic approaches to both the built environment and its inhabitants. The chapter concluded with an overview of the processes of interviews and workshops, and how participants were recruited for the project. Information gleaned through these interviews and workshops has informed the research and will be expanded upon in the next chapter, as I focus in on two sites of particular interest, the Hamilton Garden apartment complex and Matts of Cabra, a derelict public house.

Chapter Four: Development and Dereliction in Cabra

4.1 Focusing in

While I had initially walked a wide area of Cabra, going as far as the periphery at Phibsborough to the East and to the edge of the Phoenix Park, I eventually settled on a smaller area of Cabra East and Cabra West, outlined in Chapter One. I then focused in further, selecting two sites that I would investigate in detail, using practice-based methods. My reasoning for choosing these two sites was to consider the possible impact of both development and dereliction, visually and experientially, on the area of Cabra. In this chapter, I also consider the role that photography plays in understanding changes in the physical landscape, through the documentation of incremental change.

As previously mentioned, Hamilton Gardens is a new housing development in Cabra, the largest such development since the Dublin Corporation Schemes of the 1930s-1940s. Building at the site began towards the end of 2019, and as I started my research cranes were dotted across the landscape. I set out to document the spatial transformation photographically, while also interviewing residents who lived in close proximity to the development. A photo-elicitation workshop was also carried out with the local Cabra History Group, considering the evolution of housing in the area, and garnering opinions on the changes taking place (see discussion in Chapter Three).

Secondly, I focused in on the Fassaugh House pub (known locally as Matts of Cabra), which has been vacant since 2011. Matts of Cabra is directly across from Hamilton Gardens on Fassaugh Avenue. As I photographed the new development, I became conscious of the built structure of the Fassaugh House, and began to document it incrementally. Having been vacant for so long, it had fallen into a state of disrepair, with a series of small fires causing further deterioration. I was interested in the material fabric of the building, the historical layers being revealed through neglect. A major fire in 2021 saw it decline further. The site was of interest to me as a study in spatial transformation and materiality, and also as a way to examine contemporary planning. I conducted a workshop with the Cabra History Group, on the topic of the Matts of Cabra, in November 2022, using photo-elicitation methods to generate memories and opinion about the pub, and the land on which it stands.

4.2 Hamilton Gardens

On July 14th, 2021, the restaurant Bang Bang, located in Phibsborough Dublin 7, posted a letter to Instagram, which they had received from the London based DD design agency. The letter stated that the agency was ‘producing marketing collateral and websites for a new Dublin housing development called Hamilton Gardens, based in Cabra’, and that the development would ‘attract a vibrant new community of young professionals relocating to Dublin for all the exciting new businesses the city is home to, particularly in tech companies such as Facebook and Google’ (@Bangbangd7, 2021). The agency was contacting Bang Bang to see if they would like to feature in the marketing material. The restaurant declined, commenting on the same Instagram post that: ‘Build to Rent is a disgrace and only serves cuckoo funds that send money out of the country whilst the people renting can never own them’ (@Bangbangd7, 2021).

While this is quite a strong statement, the language of DD London’s letter is interesting, and could also be deemed antagonistic, in the context of the housing crisis in Dublin: ‘new communities,’ ‘young professionals’, and ‘marketing collateral’, serve to conjure a particular vision of place. A PR video on the website for Hamilton Gardens, describes: ‘blue sky thinkers’, ‘doers and makers’, and ‘the new face of renting in Dublin’ (DD London, 2022). Promotional images of this video can be viewed in Figures 4.1 and 4.2. All the ‘new faces’ featured in the audio/visual piece appear to be of a similar age group. This contrasts strongly with the existing multigenerational population of the surrounding area of Cabra. The @Bangbangd7 Instagram post also suggests that this type of development stands in stark contrast to the lack of affordable housing in the area, particularly for young adults who have grown up in Cabra and would like to stay there. Further dissonance is notable in descriptions of the ‘neighbourhood’ on Hamilton Gardens website, which focuses more on the adjoining area of Phibsborough, describing ‘an eclectic abundance of modern bars and bistros’, with Cabra referenced in relation to ‘tradition’ and ‘history’ (Hamilton Gardens.ie, 2024). There is in fact a distinct lack of ‘bars and bistros’ in Cabra, as will be discussed in the case study of the Matts of Cabra.



Figure 4.1: Promotional image for Hamilton Gardens. Source: Promotional film, <https://hamiltongardens.ie>.



Figure 4.2: Promotional image for Hamilton Gardens. Source: Promotional film, <https://hamiltongardens.ie>.

This cognitive dissonance is characteristic of what Brake and Van Aitkin refer to as ‘the development of the housing commodity through its participation in aesthetic capitalism’ (2020, p. 457). Photography has long been complicit in bolstering a capitalist agenda, and the aspirational images featured in Figures 4.1 and 4.2, along with the text, suggest a particular life view with a focus on productivity, temporality, and movement. References to both heritage and prospective futures are characteristic of visual and textual approaches to selling such developments, as outlined by Lawton and O’ Mahony, in what they see as a ‘globalised form of image making’ which attempts to resell mythologies of place ‘as both sensitive to the past, while also looking to an imagined future (2019 p. 203). The naming of Hamilton Gardens after the 19th century Irish mathematician Willian Rowan Hamilton (it is claimed that Hamilton

invented the quaternion multiplication formula while crossing Broombridge in Cabra), adds another layer of ‘heritage’ or prestige (TCD, 2024).

4.2.1 Location, Planning and Investment

The Hamilton Gardens complex is located on 3.89 hectares in Cabra East, bordered by Carnlough Road and the Great Western Railway line (see Figure 4.3). Built from 2020-2022 and comprised of 485 apartments and several retail outlets, the development is of rental only tenure, with a one-bedroom unit currently costing €2,270 per month (Daft.ie 2024). Twenty per cent of apartments are let as social housing under Part V stipulations (of the Planning and Development Acts, 2000-21).

The land on which Hamilton Gardens stands is known colloquially as the ‘Cabra Hills’ and was owned by Córás Iompair Éireann (CIE) up to 2002, when it was put on the market and acquired by The Ailesbury Co-Ownership (An Bord Pleanála 2024). Two planning applications were submitted in 2005 for over five hundred units, at heights of up to eight storeys. These applications were refused, and it was 2016 before a successful application was made by the Crekav Landbank Investments. A series of further applications were made in the period from 2016 to 2019, with a final application by Seven Cabra Real Estate, before building commenced in 2019. The table below (Table 2) shows further details relating to planning for the site. What is evident from observing the planning applications over time is that there are significant shifts in the number of units proposed. For the purpose of my research, it is interesting to note the more recent applications from 2016-2019, where the proposed number of units went up from 320 to 485. This escalation is possibly a reflection of new planning legislation introduced in 2016 and 2018, which allowed for the ‘fast-tracking’ of developments over 100 units, and for smaller apartment sizes (An Bord Pleanála, 2024). As a BTR development, Hamilton Gardens also reflects the increase in rental only apartments across the Dublin suburbs.

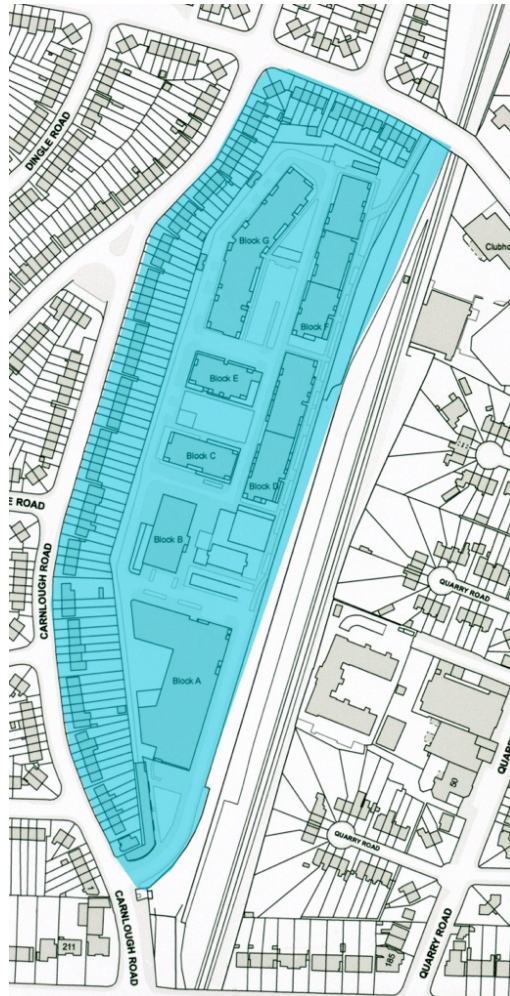


Figure 4.3: Extract from OSI Place map of Cabra showing Hamilton Gardens. Map 1:2500, coordinates 713951,736418. Source: Tailte Éireann.

Planning application number	Date	Company	Residential units (number proposed)	Planning decision
4943/05	26/9/2005	Niall Molloy	523	Refused
5000/5	3/10/2005	Niall Molloy	523	Refused
2387/16	7/10/2016	Crekav Landbank Investments	320	Granted
SHD002/2017	19/12/2017	Crekav Landbank Investments	420	Granted
SHD0027/19	19/11/2019	Seven Cabra Real Estate	485	Granted

Table 2: Table showing details of planning applications for 'Cabra Hills' site, 2005-2019.

Unlike the nearby housing which had originally been provided by Dublin Corporation as a public good, BTR developments are part of a capitalist system which uses housing as a vehicle for profit. Seven Cabra Real Estate is funded by Tristan Capital Partners (TCP). As ‘one of the state’s biggest residential landlords’ (Murphy 2019), the main remit of TCP is to maximise shareholder profits for its clients, as laid out in its investment strategies (Tristincapital.uk 2024)

It is important to note that the object of an investment fund is profit for shareholders, and the Irish rental market, as discussed in Chapter One, has developed into a profitable venture. High rents charged for Hamilton Gardens apartments (and other similar developments across the city and suburbs) make them prohibitive for many in need of housing, and while a small percentage of the development is leased to DCC for public housing, this has little impact on overall public housing requirements.

4.3 Building Hamilton Gardens

4.3.1 Impact of building

The emerging visual impact of Hamilton Gardens became evident to me in my photographic documentation of the building site, and I was interested to hear how it was impacting residents, particularly those living in proximity to the development. Following an easing of Covid 19 pandemic restrictions I was able to engage with a number of residents through the method of walking-based interviews. O’Neill and Roberts advocate for the effectiveness of the walking-based interview as research method and as ‘a powerful means for understanding the lives and experience of others’ (2020, p .4). Indeed walking-based methods as a way to understand spatial transformation in the city and suburbs have been increasingly utilised by artists and cultural geographers. Recent examples include the collaborative duo *Con:temporary Quarters*, whose work is centred on the ‘studentification and gentrification’ of the Liberties area of Dublin, and a series of urban walks by Cian O’Callaghan of Trinity College Geography department in collaboration with Community Action Tenants Union (CATU).

On June 18th 2021, I conducted a walking-based interview through Cabra with a resident of Carnlough Road. Afterwards, I noted in my Field Diary that ‘she said that lots of the houses backing on to the development have been sold, and that the noise might be an issue for some people. That it starts going at 6am and then all through the day’ (FD1 2021, p. 166). The

Hamilton Gardens development took approximately three years to complete, with downtime over the Covid 19 pandemic period. Residents were subjected to elevated noise levels throughout this time. The Carnlough Road resident, with whom I conducted a walking based interview, does not live directly beside the development and I wanted to speak with residents in close proximity to the new apartments.

In 2022, I interviewed another Cabra resident, who was living directly beside the development. His main issue was the noise of construction work, stating that ‘what is annoying me is the amount of noise they are making and the hours they are working...you know they are doing seven days a week [...] sometimes you hear them and they are going in at seven [...]. I don’t need an alarm clock!’ (Costigan, 2022). While noise is to be expected when construction is undertaken, the proximity of the building site to nearby houses and the lengthy period of disruption is notable. Additionally, there is the issue of escalating traffic, increased density, and contracting space. During a discussion in January 2022 with the Cabra Community Development officer, he states:

This development is going to increase our density of living, its going take away from spaces, I think it is going to put people under more pressure, and from a mental health perspective then, I mean there are no services being put in’ [...] if we’re building, building, building I think it can lead to a kind of tension, and possibly, not saying violence, but aggravated aggression. (O’Farrell, 2022)

Increased density is evidenced in the changing views engendered by the new Hamilton Gardens development. The buildings are visually imposing and can be viewed from numerous vantage points across the area. Cabra resident and local historian Nicolas Keogh describes them as follows:

These places are like islands away from the communities, they are space ships, you think you were in Manhattan, they remind me of the Projects. If you walk down Bannow Road, it’s like a big army pill box looking over the houses. I don’t know how they got to 10-11 storeys there, to me if you built 3-4 storeys would have been ideal. (Keogh, 2021).

A visual timeline of construction, as viewed from Fassaugh Avenue, can be seen in Figure 4.4, providing a sense of the visual impact of development. I have used these images to instigate discussion with Cabra residents about the history of the site, and to evoke thoughts about its current state. A different view of the complex can be seen in Figure 4.5, which is a compilation of photographs of the development rising in the gaps between the existing houses on Carnlough

Road. These images became an important facet of the research, illustrating as they did the aftermath of the development from this viewpoint. They went on to inform a number of pieces in *Best Laid Plans*, including the large sculptural piece and framed notebook piece. Figure 4.5 clearly illustrates the proximity of new apartments to the existing former Corporation houses, with the older 20th century dwellings forming a frame around the 21st century units.



Figure 4.4: Hamilton Gardens development. Source: Mandy O’Neill, 2020-2022.

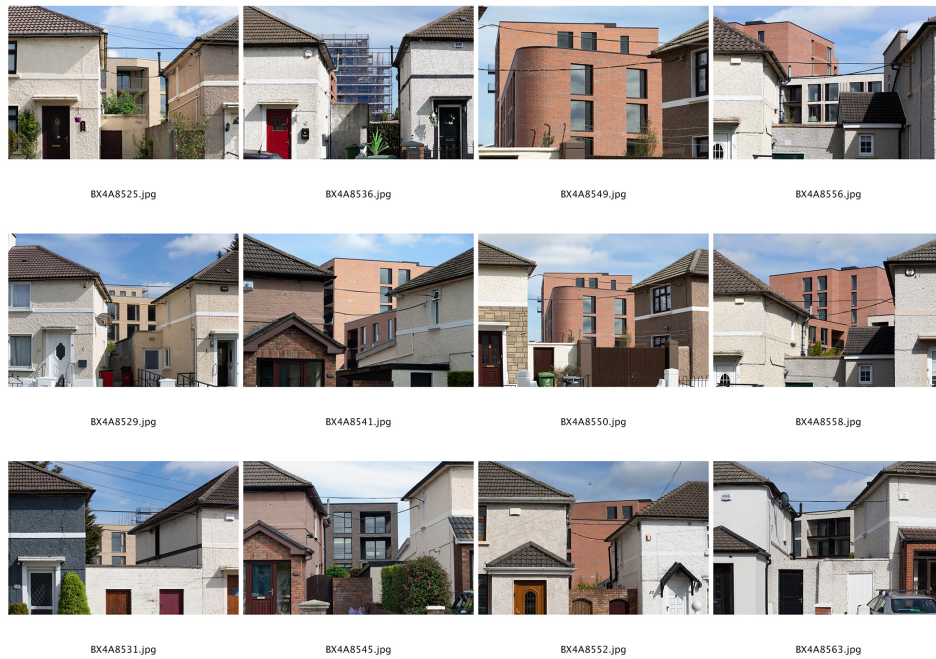


Figure 4.5: View of Hamilton Gardens, Carnlough Road, Cabra. Source: Mandy O’Neill, 2020-2022.

During the interviews with Carnlough Road residents at the local GAA club, it proved difficult to find participants willing to show me the view of apartments from their house. After much negotiation, I secured an interview with two Carnlough Road residents who invited me into their home and allowed me to photograph the apartments viewed from their back garden. My personal view was that the apartments were visually overbearing and imposing as can be seen in figure 4.6. The residents were not overly concerned about the proximity, though they were previously part of a committee who objected to several proposals for the site dating back to 2005. At the beginning of our interview one of the participants stated: ‘My objection up there always was it should have been houses that were built up there – and I know its financial things – they’re going to make a lot more money out of 485 apartments’ (Ferris, D, 2022). The resident does not see the current development as ‘ideal’, but is of the view that it could have been worse, stating:

My view now, on this one is, if we had managed to block this one, given what’s been happening between the Council and Bord Pleanála over the last five/six years, if they put in for planning now, I think they would get 13/14 storeys all the way around. Now that would be a nightmare. I think we have been fortunate when planning was given... because they don’t listen to the community, they go through the paperwork, and they go through the motions but when it comes down to it, they don’t listen. So I firmly believe – if you look at O’Devaney Gardens they have got 13/14 storeys up there. I firmly believe they would do the same here. And they would get it. I’m an optimist, I’d rather look at what could have happened (Ferris, D, 2022).

A sense of powerlessness and resignation pervaded the conversation with these residents, in spite of the suggestion of optimism. Worn down by almost two decades of planning negotiations, they choose to be happy that things are not worse. Hamilton Gardens can be considered a result of fifth-wave gentrification, which Aalbers (2018, p .1) defines as ‘the urban materialisation of financialised or finance-led capitalism’ ‘characterised by the emergence of corporate landlords’. Fifth wave gentrification benefits from a type of state sponsorship, where state support of gentrification is often considered ‘natural’, as if it is the duty of the state to support private investment’ (Aalbers 2018, p. 7). Under such circumstances it can be difficult for residents to object to new developments, and while many new planning applications can be delayed by judicial review, fast track planning which bypasses the local authority has made the consultation process increasingly less effective and more costly.



Figure 4.6: View of Hamilton Gardens from participant's house on Carnlough Rd, Cabra. Source: Mandy O'Neill 2022.

Another Carnlough Road resident I interviewed at the GAA club, while conceding that he 'would rather see housing there', also stated that: 'Personally I think it is good'. His reasoning was that the land was previously used for grazing horses and as a track for motor bikes, suggesting that it encouraged antisocial behaviour. Security was his concern, and he felt that the apartments would serve as a barrier to the Carnlough Road houses and aid crime prevention (Moore, 2022). A builder by trade he has some interesting insights regarding aspects of the construction. He made a point that it is highly unusual to have a site of this scale with no visual mock-up on hoardings around the periphery, stating that:

Every building site, here or throughout the country, no matter where it is, they put up, what the development is going to look like when it's finished [...] that is not there, so nobody knows anything – the only thing you do know is what you've read on the internet, which is that there is 400 and something apartments going in and there's 3 bed, 2 bed and 1 bed – that's as much as I can tell you (Moore, 2022).

It is an important point in terms of the geographical imaginings of what a place might become, and how the visual plays into this. There were no visual indicators of what the Hamilton Gardens development would look like around the hoarding in Cabra. The first visual indication was the changing of the hoarding colour from grey to a signature yellow (Figure 4.7) and the

text announcing ‘the new face of renting in Dublin’ (Figure 4.8). An interesting comparison can be made here with the PR for the 1990s dockside apartments. The 1990s apartments were very much promoted as a glamorous escape from the ‘humdrum’ life below, whereas the Hamilton Gardens PR is more prosaic, directed towards a new type of rental client. As outlined above in the Hamilton Gardens website images, there is also very much a focus on work and the entrepreneurial citizen, with the self-contained development the facilities needed for the busy individual.

Photo-realistic CGI renderings are widely utilised as a way to ‘visualise and market future urban developments’ (Degan, Melhuish and Rose 2017, p. 3). It is highly unusual not to see this, and it may have something to do with the location. Lawton and O’ Mahony’s analysis of the role of visual imagery in circulating the ‘associated symbols’ of the real estate industry in lifestyle magazines online adverts and on-street hoardings’, with a particular focus on Dublin 2 and Dublin 4 is worth contemplating (2018, p. 202). These areas of Dublin are sold as especially prestigious locations, and this is reflected in the design and content of building site hoardings (Lawton and O’Mahony 2018, p. 210). Cabra is located in Dublin 7, though I would suggest that in the cultural imagination the area of Dublin 7 is often association with the more gentrified Stoneybatter and Phibsborough. Indeed, the Hamilton Gardens website utilises photographic imagery of Phibsborough only, in its promotion of the Cabra site. The absence of digitally rendered projections on the Hamilton Gardens hoardings I speculate was a deliberate choice by the developer to not draw attention to the development, conscious of antagonising local residents and igniting objections. There is also the possibility that as a BTR development, the owners did not need to attract prospective purchasers and did no therefore had the same need to generate interest.



Figure 4.7: Hamilton Gardens hoarding, Carnlough Road, Cabra. Source Mandy O’Neill, 2020-2022.



Figure 4.8: Hamilton Gardens entrance on Fassaugh Avenue 'The New Face of Renting in Dublin', Cabra. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2022.

4.3.2 Photo-elicitation Workshop 1 (Cabra History Group)

As noted in Chapter Three, on March 4th 2022, I conducted a workshop with the Cabra History Group for the purpose of instigating a discussion about new developments in the area, particularly Hamilton Gardens. My photographic research materials were displayed and viewed by participants, prompting a round table discussion about the experience of growing up in Cabra housing and the impact of new developments. A series of large and small-scale photographs of the area were shown, along with several contact sheets and foldout booklets (Figure 4.9). Time-lapse compilations of new developments were viewed by participants, alongside fragments of the existing built environment.



Figure 4.9: Table with prints and leprellos , Cabra History Group, photo-elicitation workshop 1, Cabra Parkside Community Centre. Source: Mandy O’Neill 2021.

With the workshops, I was particularly interested in the participant’s thoughts about the new developments. While the majority of the group agreed on the urgent need for housing in Dublin, most are not in favour of the type of housing exemplified by the Hamilton Gardens apartment complex. Issues of concern include increased traffic, blocking of sunlight and views, scale and density, affordability, and the perceived difficulty of community cohesion in a possibly transitory new population. One workshop participant complained that ‘I can’t see the mountains anymore from my house, I stand at the door and can see three storeys of those apartments’ (Tighe, 2022). Another participant opined that the view ‘changed so much since they have put these apartments up, I used to be able to see from my bedroom the sun setting, going down, and I can’t see it anymore’ (Fulham, 2022). The overall narrative coming out of the discussion was of a negative response to this type of development in Cabra, with the concession that affordable housing is badly needed. This narrative highlights the wider context of investor led developments, and the impact of such schemes on both the spatial and social fabric of the areas in which they are constructed.

4.3.3 Further Interviews

In my attempts to garner opinions of Cabra residents more generally, I also interviewed individuals in the 30s-40s age group. One of these participants is employed by the housing division of Dublin City Council, and as such has good insight into housing processes. While expressing reservations about the ‘build-to-rent’ model overall, he is ‘not fully against it’, and

feels it will bring in new amenities such as shops, bars, and cafes (Bermingham, R., 2022). His partner also felt positive about the new apartments, stating:

I wouldn't mind a bit more of a main street vibe, to Fassaugh Avenue – rather than – four convenience stores, one terrible pub, one shut down pub, a load of bookies – so like I'm hoping – and that feeds into this new development right – there's lots wrong, no doubt, I don't even know the ins and outs – because I've just found out in the last week it's all BTR apart for the 10% social housing – but I'm thinking more people is better for the community generally, because you'll see new businesses opening, and I'd like to see that – I'd like to see a bit more variety. (Bermingham, K, 2022)

A female resident in the 40s age group, who had moved to Cabra the previous year, was ambivalent about the changes to the built environment while also conceding that she stopped looking at houses for sale on Carnlough Road because of the proximity of the apartments. One of her reasons for purchasing a house rather than apartment was the garden, and she would not want that garden 'overlooked by a massive apartment building' (Participant, 2022). Another participant in the 30s age-group and recent resident living on Dingle Road, Cabra West, was concerned about the scale and affordability of new developments, stating: '[...] visually it's out of place, prices are out of range, they are not made for the people from here, so they will drive the locals out' (Siragusa, 2022). Her view was that she could put up with the overbearing scale of the development if it was affordable and accessible to more income ranges.

These interviews and workshop offer a small cross section of opinions as part of a polyphonic and layered research approach. Some individuals and groups have been identified as those with valuable and extensive knowledge of the area, while others have been drawn from an open call. I have also specifically approached residents on Carnlough Road because of their proximity to the development. Even within my small selection there has been a variety of responses, with plenty of grey areas. I am also aware through additional conversations that some residents are very pleased about the changes taking place, and especially the provision of social housing.

4.3.4 The Apartments

Social housing residents moved into Hamilton Gardens apartments in early 2023, and are all concentrated in Block A, on the periphery of the development. In June 2023, an article in the Dublin Inquirer newspaper reported that social tenants were 'segregated into separate blocks with barriers to access to amenities' (Neylon, 2023 [unpaginated]). Dee Roche, a Hamilton Gardens resident, voiced her disappointment at what she saw as segregation and worried about

the psychological impact on young people and children (Neylon, 2023 [unpaginated]). The article mentions similar issues across the city with build-to-rent developments and social tenants. While the social housing is welcome, the suitability of such complexes is open to debate. In terms of the quality of the actual apartments, and the experience of living there, I have spoken to a couple who viewed one of the studio apartments as a temporary rental option, who deemed the property to be materially flimsy and far too expensive for what was on offer. I also took part in an *Open House Architecture* tour of the complex in October 2023. The tour began with a viewing of a communal area at the entrance to Hamilton Gardens. Elegantly decorated, this space felt like an upmarket, if generic hotel type (Figure 4.10). Encompassing a private cinema, meeting rooms, kitchen and work areas, the space is open to private rental clients only (i.e. not to social housing tenants).

Walking the exterior of the complex, the building facades and materials look impressive in sunlight, with beautiful planting and trees (Figures 4.11 & 4.12). I noted that there is a sense of the unreal about these views and of CGI renderings come to life. As we enter one of the blocks, the first sensation was the smell of cooking, and the heat; the air felt somewhat stifling. Visually I was reminded again of hotel aesthetics, although the quality differs from the communal space. The one-bedroom apartment on show was small and dark. From the large square window of the apartment, a person standing in their kitchen on Carnlough Road could be seen. Figure 4.13 shows the tour group standing at this window. My overall impression was one of disappointment in terms of the quality of the apartment versus the cost.



Figure 4.10: Hamilton Gardens communal area. Source: Mandy O'Neill, October 2023.



Figure 4.11: Hamilton Gardens apartments façade and green area. Source: Mandy O'Neill, October 2023.



Figure 4.12: Hamilton Gardens apartments façade and play area. Source: Mandy O'Neill, October 2023.



Figure 4.13: Hamilton Gardens one-bedroom apartment. Source: Mandy O'Neill, October 2023.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the visual, qualitative, and statistical research conducted in relation to the Hamilton Gardens development. Firstly there is a clear indication that planning amendments in 2018 paved the way for higher densities and smaller sizes of apartments, evidenced by planning applications. Going on an tour of a one-bedroom apartment in Hamilton Gardens, provided me with a sense of the possible lived experience in these kind of dwellings. It also reflected a cognitive dissonance between the marketing of these developments and reality. Opinions of residents, and the possible lived experience associated with the development have been outlined, with concerns about noise, blocking of light, unaffordability and disconnection from the existing area. Visual impact is evidenced in photographs of the complex from different vantage points, with images of the development viewed through the gaps in housing attesting to the increased land-use density.

4.4 Matts of Cabra

Directly across from the Hamilton Gardens entrance on Fassaugh Avenue is the former Fassaugh House pub, known locally as Matts of Cabra. Figure 4.14 shows the pub and its adjoining land as marked on the OSI map. The building is located beside a funeral parlour with an ample stretch of land behind, running along the Great Western Railway. Erected in 1949, the building changed hands several times until its closure in 2011. The site has remained vacant since then, despite a number of successful planning applications in the interim. A planning application for a ‘four storey retail and residential block’ comprising of eight apartments and one retail unit was granted permission on 29th March 2017 (3420/16). A further application under SHD regulations was submitted in 2018 for 208 student accommodation units. Permission was granted on 12th April 2018, but building was not enacted (SHD0001/18). Another application was submitted in 2022, this time for 117 build-to-rent apartments. Permission was refused on 9th June 2022 (SHD0005/22).

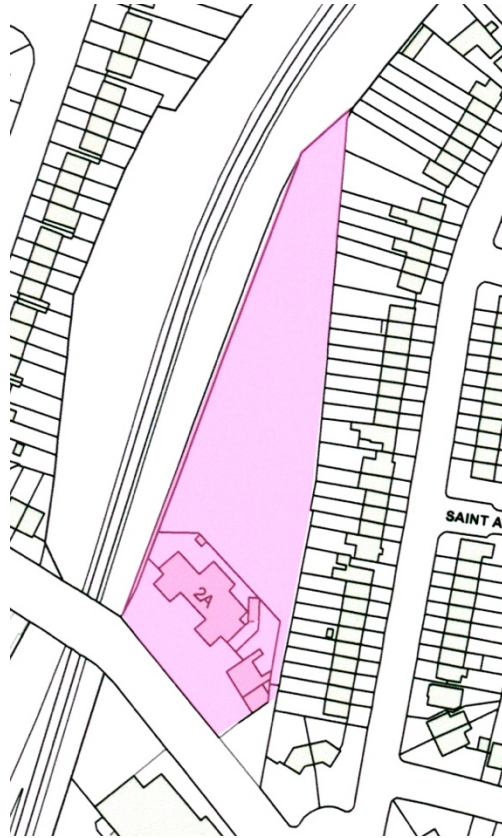


Figure 4.14: Figure 3: Extract from OSI Place map of Cabra showing Matts of Cabra and adjoining land. Map 1:2500, coordinates 713951,736418. Source: Tailte Éireann.

4.4.1 Documenting Matts

Figure 4.15 depicts the first photograph I took of ‘Matts of Cabra’ in January 2021, recorded in my Field Diary (FD1 2021, p. 46). The impulse to photograph the building came from both somatic and visual awareness of the structure itself, and the possibility that it might soon be demolished. The building is situated on Fassaugh Avenue, a main through road in Cabra. As such, it is a prominent landmark and highly recognisable part of the built environment. Significant changes occurred on this site throughout the period of my research. In terms of the development of my practice, documentation of the material fabric of the building contributed to the sculptural/materially engaged direction the work would take.



Figure 4.15 'Matts of Cabra' pub, FD1, p. 46. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2021.

Figure 4.16 shows part a series of images of the building taken between January 2021 and July 2022, constructed into a leporello. Up to this point there was very little change to the façade of the building. The entrance and windows were boarded up and corrugated metal shutters attached at various points. There is anecdotal evidence of squatting and of small fires being set on different occasions. Photographs contained in the leporello were taken using a repeat photography strategy, documenting incremental shifts in the façade of the building.

In March 2022 I observed graffiti directly adjacent to the building stating 'Say no to seven story apartments', along with a banner erected by Sinn Féin (Figure 4.17). An objection had been lodged by Sinn Féin and several residents to the proposed 117 build-to-rent apartments. It is likely that the Hamilton Gardens development was a motivational factor for the residents objection in terms of the level of build-to-rent developments in the area. Observations submitted by residents, as laid out in the Inspectors Report, stated that 'concern was expressed in relation to the over concentration of BTRs in the area', and of a '[...]BTR model, which would not deliver affordable homes for people in the area' (ABP Inspectors Report 2022).



Figure 4.16: Compilation of 'repeat photography' images of Matts of Cabra' pub. Source Mandy O'Neill 2023.



Figure 4.17: Graffiti at the side of Matts of Cabra pub. Source: Mandy O’Neill, 2022.

Interviewed in 2021, a Cabra resident, with property to the side of the proposed development, expressed concern about possible heights, and the blocking of sunlight to his garden (Keogh, V., 2022). He was also ambivalent at the time about the possible success of any complaints, but was one of the signatories to the successful objection. It can be suggested that political tensions around SHD developments, along with planning controversies during this period (former deputy chair of An Bord Pleanála was sentenced to two months in jail in June 2023, for breaches of planning and development act), went some way towards the motivation for, and success of the objections (Roche, 2023 [unpaginated]).

In June 2022, An Bord Pleanála refused the application for a proposed 117-unit BTR scheme on the Matts of Cabra site, stating that it would be visually obtrusive and seriously detract from the visual amenities of the area. Reporting at the time also suggested that this was a political win for Sinn Féin, describing Mary Lou McDonald, the party leader, as emerging ‘victorious in her opposition’ to plans for the site (Irish Times, June 13th, 2022). Figure 4.18 shows a digital mock-up of proposed development on the site, alongside a view from 2023.



Figure 4.18: Digital rendering of development at former 'Matts of Cabra', accessed 2023 Source: planning application SHD0005/22.

On the 10th of August 2022 a fire broke out on the premises, causing major damage to the building. A series of rapid changes to the facade took place following this destruction. Figure 4.19 shows the fire damaged building, photographed on the 12th of August 2022. As I walked past two weeks later, I noticed a sheet of wood bearing the text '@hustlebustlemarket – coming soon', and was curious as to what this meant. An article on the website Lovindublin.com stated that Hustle Bustle Market was seeking to host 'potential craft markets, flea markets or even an enterprise program for transition year students' (Thornton 2022). On 30th August, I arrived to find a high fence and bunting erected around the periphery (Figure 4.20). The fence proved controversial to some residents and was removed within a day.



Figure 4.19: Matts of Cabra pub shortly after fire, Fassaugh Avenue, Cabra. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2022.



Figure 4.20:: Matts of Cabra pub, with fence, Fassagh Avenue, Cabra. Source Mandy O’Neill, 2022.

Removal of the fence allowed me to visually access the premises once again. I found myself drawn to photograph the fire damaged material structure of the building and the resulting markings. In my field diary I note that I am:

Interested in the building and structure itself – the materials/colour – the way it is evolving through dereliction. The big concrete blocks – with A-B written on them are kind of intriguing. These structures make me think about sculpture and form and inspire ideas about possible objects I would like to make. (FD3 2022, p. 185).

Figure 4.21 provides an illustration of the concrete blocks. It was at this midpoint in my research that the interest in materials and form intensified and I began to examine the relationship between photography and sculpture, along with building and the constructed image.



Figure 4.21: Matts of Cabra pub with A & B blocks, Fassauga Avenue, Cabra. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2022.

On September 12th 2022, I was introduced to the organiser of the Hustle Bustle Market who outlined some of the difficulties he has faced trying to set up in Cabra. My field diary records that I ‘met guy who is trying to set up Hustle Bustle Market at Matts of Cabra. The fence he put up has been rammed a few times and he is trying to stop this’, I noted ‘this is a contentious spot with all sorts of politics going on’ (FD4 2022, p. 210). In mid-September, a coffee truck arrived on site, with several food and craft stalls following at the weekends. Details of the market were communicated online through an Instagram account, where a poll was undertaken to choose a new paint colour for the façade. On October 3rd G&B Painting arrive to paint the building (see Figure 4.22). The finished outcome can be viewed in Figure 4.23.



Figure 4.22: Painting at 'Matts of Cabra' pub, Fassaugh Avenue, Cabra. Source Mandy O'Neill, 2022.



Figure 4.23: Final painted façade, Matts of Cabra pub, Fassaugh Avenue, Cabra. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2022.

I continued to document the changes taking place at the Matts of Cabra site from September 2022 to December 2022. Several additional food trucks arrived on separate occasions, one of

which is depicted in Figure 4.24. Over the period from November to December a series of murals was painted on the building by local artist Tom O'Brien.



Figure 4.24: Mexican food truck at 'Matts of Cabra' pub, Fassaugh Avenue, Cabra. Source: Mandy O'Neill 2022.

Figure 4.25 depicts the first mural, at the side of the pub, and includes a spray-painting figure, a 'keep Cabra tidy' sign, and Instagram handles for the market and artist. Additional murals celebrating various Cabra characters and associations were added, though some are rather tenuous. Figures 4.26, 4.27, 4.28 and 4.29 show photographs of these artworks.



Figure 4.25: Mural, Matts of Cabra pub, Fassaugh Avenue, Cabra by Artist Tom O'Brien. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2022



Figure 4.26: Mural, Matts of Cabra pub, Fassaugh Avenue, Cabra by Artist Tom O'Brien. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2022.



Figure 4.27: Mural, Matts of Cabra pub, Fassaugh Avenue, Cabra by Artist Tom O'Brien. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2022.



Figure 4.28: Mural, Matts of Cabra pub, Fassagh Avenue, Cabra by Artist Tom O'Brien. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2022.



Figure 4.29: Mural, Matts of Cabra pub, Fassagh Avenue, Cabra by Artist Tom O'Brien. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2022.

On the 21st of November 2022, I had a conversation with the organiser of the Hustle Bustle Market, outside Matts of Cabra. Reflecting afterwards in my field diary I noted that ‘The place is not doing much business and hasn’t really taken hold in the local community’ (FD4 2022, p. 162). Anti-social behaviour at night was an issue and attempts to involve local groups in the endeavour were unsuccessful. There was some initial interest in using the space for a ‘car boot sale’, but the organiser was more in favour of a ‘farmers market’. A disconnect seemed to exist between local needs and the organiser, and with two coffee retail spaces already existing in proximity to the market, residents took their custom elsewhere. It is possible that the

contentious nature of this site also caused local resistance, an exertion of the power of refusal in the face of encroaching development.

4.4.2 Photo-elicitation Workshop 2 (Cabra History Group)

On March 4th 2023, I conducted another workshop with the Cabra History Group, this time focused on Matts of Cabra, again utilising photo-elicitation to instigate ideas and conversation. Photographs and other research materials were laid out on a table for participants to view and pass around, followed by a round table discussion. The use of photography in the construction of ‘imaginative geographies’ makes it a potent tool of recall, with my photographs serving as effective prompts for the discussion (Ryan and Schwartz, 2003, p.5). A thread running through the conversation was an appreciation of the building itself, both visually and as a marker of memories. These sentiments were described by one participant below:

Well I always loved the building, even when I was a kid, I loved it, I loved the shape of it, I loved the whole thing, that’s why I took such a lot of notice of it. And when they were going to build, I was saying – I’d love to keep that building the way it is and let them build behind it if they want. I was only in it about four or five times as a pub, but I just love the building. It was built as a pub for the area. My mother used to go into town to my granny’s and she used to walk past that pub every day and I often still stand at the corner and look down and remember, and there wasn’t that much traffic and she used to walk with the pram on the road and she only got up on the path when she got to Doyle’s corner. When it closed, I got my son to take a photograph and I painted an oil painting of it. I’m thinking of painting it on fire and calling it the ‘Demise of Matty Whelan’s’ (Tighe, 2022).

Opinions on the current state of the building are less positive, as the following exchange outlines:

Participant one: A hoarding would have been better, that’s a terrible space on the road. When you pass by it in a bus, that’s disgraceful. It’s a reflection on the area.
Participant two: It looks horrible.
(Cabra History Group, 2022)

The proximity of this now garishly coloured ‘market’ to a funeral parlour (next door) is also a bone of contention, with participants considering it ‘disrespectful’. The overarching consensus is that the group would like to see the building restored and retained as a public house. The demise of the public house in Dublin is the possible subject of another dissertation, but it is worth noting that the escalation in the privatisation of public spaces affects the possibilities for interconnection within communities. Participants recalled the former centrality of the pub to social life in the area – and the loss they felt in its demise:

Participant one: I went down with the girls every Wednesday night and Fran used to bring down, what was that book you used to bring? Fran: Ah yeah, The Irelands Own.

Participant one: The Irelands Own, and she'd hand it to me, and we would have all the songs and we'd be singing. Once I was at a party, some occasion, but there was a brilliant atmosphere in it, I've always said, same as everyone else, it absolutely looks gorgeous, and it will be a shame if anything happens to it.

Me: and did you miss it?

Participant one: Ah yeah, it really broke us up.

(CHG Workshop, November, 2022)

I refer back to an interview cited earlier in this chapter, where a participant laments the lack of decent pubs and cafes in the area. Another public house, The Cabra House, also on Fassaugh Avenue has been closed since 2020. A planning application for a four-storey apartment development and supermarket on the site was refused in April 2022.

4.4.3 Further decline at the Matt's of Cabra site

By mid-2023 the market was abandoned and the coffee truck moved on. The site has since deteriorated further and become a dumping place for rubbish. Corrugated shutters have been pulled off the windows, with indications of squatting. Figures 4.31 and 4.32 attest to the state of the building in March 2024.



Figure 4.31: Matts of Cabra. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.



Figure 4.32: Matts of Cabra. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.

Given the long-term vacancy of the Matt's of Cabra site, it is not surprising that Dublin City Council (DCC) intended to place the site on its vacant site register in 2018. As a result, the owner, R&D Developments, was served with a demand for payment of €364,000 in February 2022, although this levy was subsequently challenged in the High Court by the developer in June 2022 (O'Faolain, 2022) According to independent councillor Cieran Perry 'the outstanding levies are more that €1million at this stage, with another due this year' (Ciaran Perry Newsletter March 2024). Perry (2024) suggested that discussions were currently underway with a co-operative housing association to develop the site for social housing, but this has been hampered 'due to Iarnród Éireann seeking to take some of the site for storage'. So the site is currently still in limbo, pending the outcome of discussions with the developer, community representatives, and Iarnród Éireann. A recent election pamphlet for the Dublin Central independent candidate Clare Daly (Figure 4.33) highlighted the ongoing issues with the site. It featured Matts of Cabra as an example of vacancy and dereliction and the responsibility of property developers to address the issue.



Figure 4.33: Excerpt from election pamphlet. Source: Clare Daly, 2024.

4.5 Conclusion

Several conclusions can be drawn from Chapter Four, encompassing planning, the impact of development and dereliction on the lived experience of residents, and the effectiveness of photo-elicitation in generation opinions and discussion. In terms of planning, it can be seen that new planning amendments have facilitated the construction of smaller apartments at a higher density and with increasing heights. Increasing heights have affected residents who complain about the blocking of light and general visual impact of such developments. The noise and length of construction have affected residents living close to Hamilton Gardens, while others see the new development as a positive outcome which provided more security and add value in terms of new facilities. Dereliction was addressed through a case study of Matts of Cabra public house, which also shone a light on the planning process and the vacant site tax. A successful planning objection by residents pointed to a growing resistance to BTR developments, which was supported by local politicians. Photo-elicitation workshops also proved highly successful in generating discussion around the topics of the historical and contemporary development of Cabra and dereliction as illustrated through my documentation of Matts of Cabra.

In terms of my photographs of Matts of Cabra, at various stages of deterioration, I acknowledged the possibly problematic nature of these images as glorifying the urban ruin

(Pohl, 2019). I did however see the documentation of change in this building, over a short space of time as being a valuable historical record. To counter any overt aestheticisation of dereliction these images were displayed in *Best Laid Plans* in quite a modest way, printed on non-photographic paper and mounted on waste cardboard.

Chapter Five: Studio Practice, Process and Material Thinking

The focus of this chapter is the process of making, of thinking through materials, and the role of the studio as a space for conceptualising and constructing artworks. Taking the concept of praxis as an overarching framework, I borrow from Barbara Bolt (2004, 2006, 2007) and Tim Ingold (2000, 2011, 2013, 2021), in relation to material thinking, while also drawing on a wide range of literature on practice-based research, which sees making as the central driver of practice (Candy and Edmonds (2018), Manghani (2021), Scrivener (2004), Skains (2018).

Sunil Manghani (2021, p. 378) cites the artist's studio as 'a place of making and remaking images and objects of culture', and studio practice as a space of 'speculative endeavours which allow unexpected outcomes and help challenge established ways of thinking'. Throughout the PhD research, I have been resident in a series of studios, all of which have contributed to and shaped the process of making. This chapter unfolds with reference to the various studio experiences and how each experience informs what comes next. Included in this is an outline of experimental attempts to use 'practice as a testing ground, letting each new step develop out of my reflections on the previous work [...] and making a series of experimentations letting the practice twist and turn upon itself' (Jardemar, 2015, p. 4).

Additionally, this chapter outlines various interactions between the public and my research materials, through presentations, interviews and workshops, and describes how this fed into the research process.

5.1 DCU Artist Residency and Exhibition at Belvedere House (November 2021)

On 11th November 2021, I exhibited an edited selection of my PhD research, at the 17th Century Belvedere House on St Patricks DCU campus in Drumcondra. At the time, I was artist in residence at DCU All Hallows, with a studio in the 18th Century Drumcondra House. While the residency had begun in November 2019, it was cut short in March 2020, due to the Covid 19 pandemic. On returning to the DCU studio in June 2021, I began to edit and engage with my digital photographs through printing and time-lapse paper constructions. The transformation of digital files into physical prints was important in terms of the material emphasis in my research, as were the types of paper and modes of printing. Following Kathrine Fackler's (2018, p. 523) assertion that 'printing a photograph is not merely an act of reproduction and representation',

I am conscious of materials used, scale, colour and all of the elements which ‘shape the photographs materiality and its meanings and possible uses’. The shift from analogue photography to digital has engendered discussion about the ‘dematerialisation’ of the photograph (Ritchen, 2009). However a return to considering materiality has been evident in photographic practice of the past decade, whether this is through analogue methods or hybrid, craft based projects.

Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Harts seminal collection *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images* (2004) considers the ‘physical attributes’ of the photograph anew, while still allowing for consideration of image content (Fackler, 2019, p. 523). They consider how ‘photographs have inextricably linked meanings as images and meanings as objects; an indissoluble, yet ambiguous, melding of image and form, both of which are direct products of intention’ (Edwards and Hart, 2004, p. 2). In this light a growing response to perceived dematerialisation among photographers is evident in a turn towards analogue, hybrid practices and material engagement, particularly over the past decade, including my own practice.

For the exhibition at Belvedere House in November 2021, I began by editing my photographs of Cabra into different categories. At this point I had a wide range of photographic materials and was considering a possible monograph or series of small books as my final artefacts. I commenced by utilising book-making processes to create narrative sequences, and as a display strategy for time-lapse images. Figure 5.1 shows an example of a leporello created in the studio on November 5th 2021. In this series of images the Hamilton Gardens apartment complex is depicted, rising between two houses on Carnlough Road in Cabra. The process of folding and constructing the leporello (simple though it may be) was a way for me to think through the research, to both develop and contain ideas, echoing what Bolt (2006, p. 5) refers to as the ‘material nature of visual thinking’. Folding the prints also shaped them into 3D objects, and allowed them to stand, a precursor to later developments in the research. The time-lapse images became an important thread in my research and this initial experiment contributed significantly towards key works in *Best Laid Plans*.



Figure 5.1: Photographs constructed into leporello at DCU studio. Mandy O'Neill November 2021.

Site specificity emerged as an important consideration in the development of my practice throughout the research period, and the nature of the Belvedere House venue, as a heritage building and protected structure, meant innovation in terms of display strategies. I was not permitted to attach anything to the walls so had to devise alternative ways of showing my work. As an experiment in construction and display, this turned out to be an invaluable process, one which greatly informed my conception of the final artefacts and exhibition.

The presentation at Belvedere House comprised of several leporellos, some featuring time-based, repetitive imagery, with others taking a narrative approach that attempted to give a wider sense of the material fabric of Cabra. Also displayed were large scale printed photographs of building sites and contact sheets, while digital images were shown on a large screen. This combination of physical material objects with the digital screen, along with their modes of display engendered a type of 'affective spectatorship' which Kaisa Rastenberger (2018, pp.97-112) sees as a 'dialogue between action and representation'. The idea of 'affect' resonates with my attempts to engage audiences through hybrid practice, modes of display and somatic engagement.

Figure 5.2 shows an excerpt from my Field Diary (FD2 2021, p. 31), with installation images from the exhibition. In these photographs, time-based leporello structures of two significant

Cabra sites (Carnlough Road/Hamilton Gardens and Matts of Cabra) can be viewed on tables in a front room at Belvedere House. It is notable that *Best Laid Plans* was exhibited in another historical building, also with free standing works (nothing on the walls) and with the motifs of the accordion book represented in various ways.



Figure 5.2 Installation photograph of presentation at Belvedere House, November 2021, in FD2, p. 31.

In the foyer area of Belvedere House, vitrines were utilised to display research diaries and smaller leporellos constructed from contact sheets (Figure 5.3). Audience interaction with the work is depicted in Figure 5.4.



Figure 5.3: Installation photograph of presentation at Belvedere House, November 2021. Source: Mandy O’Neill, FD2 p.33.



Figure 5.4: Audience viewing vitrines at Belvedere House, November 2021. Source: Mandy O’Neill.

On November 12th, I note in my Field Diary 2 the ‘dynamic experience’ of the presentation, ‘the interactive nature of it, being able to walk around the table, look down instead of looking at the wall, all of this led to a dynamic and rich engagement with the work’ (FD2, Nov 12th 2021, p. 28). The ‘table’ I refer to is the large boardroom table which I appropriated as another display area (Figure 5.5). On the table I displayed some large photographic prints of building sites, alongside smaller prints, contact sheets, drawings, maps, research literature, and some of the mark-making tools I was using. The layout attempted to show some of the research process and emulate to a degree the notion of an architecture or planning office. Geographical and historical research was represented in the form of an essay I had written about the evolution of

the Cabra suburbs. Audience members could walk around the table handling or reading materials.



Figure 5.5: Audience viewing work presented on boardroom table, Belvedere House November 2021. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2021.

The exhibition was experimental in nature, with the goals of both refining my research, testing modes of construction and exploring audience engagement strategies. Creating a more dynamic experience for the audience has long been a concern in my practice, with an ongoing desire to find ways to slow the viewer down. I write in my field diary that ‘while the presentation was not perfect, it was hugely successful as an exercise in audience’ (FD2, p. 32). It also served to heighten my awareness of the spatial elements of moving through an exhibition, and the challenges of working in spaces which are not purposely constructed as art galleries.

It is important also to note the influence of the DCU studio as a reflective making space, and the building/environment in which the studio is contained. Jenny Sjöholm (2014, p. 4) suggests that ‘art and artists are underpinned by extensive knowledge practices and specific spatial knowledge qualities. Crucial to this is the artist studio’. While I have not always had, or needed, an artist studio, having a studio space for the majority of my PhD research has undoubtedly shaped my relationship to materials, and the spatial perception of how they might be exhibited. Indeed, the various buildings themselves have also had an impact.

The atmosphere and architecture of the 18th century Drumcondra House, shaped and reshaped by changing light throughout the day, served as a catalyst for making particular types of photographs. Studio light also affected how I viewed printed photographs, and I was drawn to re-photograph images on the wall as they were altered by shifts in the weather. My relationship to light in the studio echoed the ways I was drawn to photograph the Cabra built environment. The material fabric of Cabra is constantly shaped and reshaped by light and my preference for strong sunlight is evidenced in the resulting photographs. The way that photographs shift and change as the light flows through the studio indicates another layer in the process of interconnection between materials and conditions, and echoes Merleau Ponty's thoughts on the bodily nature of perception (Carmen, 2020, p.89). Thinking through the handling of materials is discussed by Estelle Barrett (2007, p. 1) where she considers that 'the continuity of artistic experience with normal processes of living is derived from an impulse to handle materials and to think and feel through their handling'. The processes of printing, viewing, editing, folding and exhibiting my research during this period allowed me to gain a tacit knowledge based upon material thinking, which would be difficult to achieve through more empirical inquiry (Barrett, 2007). The knowledge gained through these processes was then applied to the next stages of my research, and further studio practice.

5.2 Studio residency at Fire Station Artist Studios

Following my DCU residency, a new studio residency began at Fire Station Artist Studios (FSAS) Dublin 1 in May 2022, which further shaped the trajectory of my research. The change of environment from DCU All Hallows, with its grand historical buildings and surrounding gardens, to the urban environment of the North East Inner City provided an interesting contrast. Moving through this area everyday was influential in considering the wider picture of housing, planning and the city, with numerous small tents showing evidence of homelessness.

Visiting architectural and historical archives (the Irish Architectural Archive and Dublin City Archive) during this time was also influential in that the language of maps, plans and architectural drawings began to seep further into the work I was producing. It was during a visit to the Irish Architectural Archive (IAA) in June 2022 that I began to think of it as a possible exhibition venue. The function of the institution as an archive of materials related to the Irish built environment, and its history of exhibiting contemporary artists were key considerations.

When I approached the IAA in December 2022, I proposed an exhibition which would encompass both two floors of the building, and was offered a show for September 2024.

On commencing my FSAS residency, I re-evaluated the photographic leporellos I had previously made of Hamilton Gardens rising through gaps in the Corporation housing on Carnlough Road (Figure 5.1). I had the urge to play with and manipulate these images, to see what they would look like as ‘drawings’. I experimented with the ‘trace contour’ filter in Photoshop to render the photographs into a type of line drawing, which changed how I viewed the contents of the image. Through this process, I enacted what Tim Ingold (2013, pp. 6-7) calls the ‘art of inquiry’, where ‘the conduct of thought goes along with, and continually answers to, the fluxes and flows of materials with which we work’. Ingold (2013, pp. 6-7) suggests that that in this context ‘every work is an experiment: not in the natural scientific sense of testing a preconceived hypothesis, or of engineering a confrontation between ideas ‘in the head’ and facts ‘on the ground’, but in the sense of prising an opening and following where it leads’. With Ingold’s thoughts in mind, I reflect that manipulating, printing, constructing, and testing materials elicits a thought process in which further knowledge is gained and applied to the next stage of my making/research.

Figure 5.6 shows a double spread from my Field Diary depicting some of these experiments (FD3, Aug 16th 2024, pp. 140-141). Paper became a major concern at this point in the research, as I began to find the ‘whiteness’ of photographic paper disconcerting. I speculate that this view was influenced by my research into historical maps and planning documents with images rendered on faded parchment using soft pastel colours. The tactility of these material objects was also an influential factor. In her consideration of material thinking in practice-based research, (2006, p. 5) suggests that ‘materials are not just passive objects to be used instrumentally by the artist, but rather the materials and processes of production have their own intelligence that come into play in interaction with the artist’s creative intelligence’. While paper stock might seem like it should be a minimal concern, paper has its own material intelligence and connotations, and this can shape the perception of cultural artefacts.

I began to experiment then with what I considered to be more ‘archival’ looking paper, examples of which can be viewed in Figures 5.7 and 5.8. Figure 5.7 shows a textured cream watercolour paper, while Figure 5.8 is an example of Munken Pure paper, which is primarily used in book-making. It can be noted that at this stage in my research, I was still considering

making a book or series of books. Working with Munken paper would allow me to visualise how a book might look. Decisions on materials, printing and presentation are crucial in terms of what a final object might communicate.



Figure 5.6: Excerpt from FD3, August 2024.

I focus here on the process of thinking through making, conscious of Ingold's (Ingold 2013, p.7) suggestion that in material culture much emphasis is placed on 'finished objects', and that 'the creativity of the productive processes that bring the artefacts themselves into being' can be lost. Candy and Edmonds (2018, p. 64) concur with Ingold in stating that: 'practice that is creative is characterised not only by a focus on creating something new but also by the way that the making process itself leads to a transformation in the ideas – which in turn leads to new works'.



Figure 5.7: Rendered photographs on textured cream water colour paper. Source Mandy O'Neill, October 11th 2024.

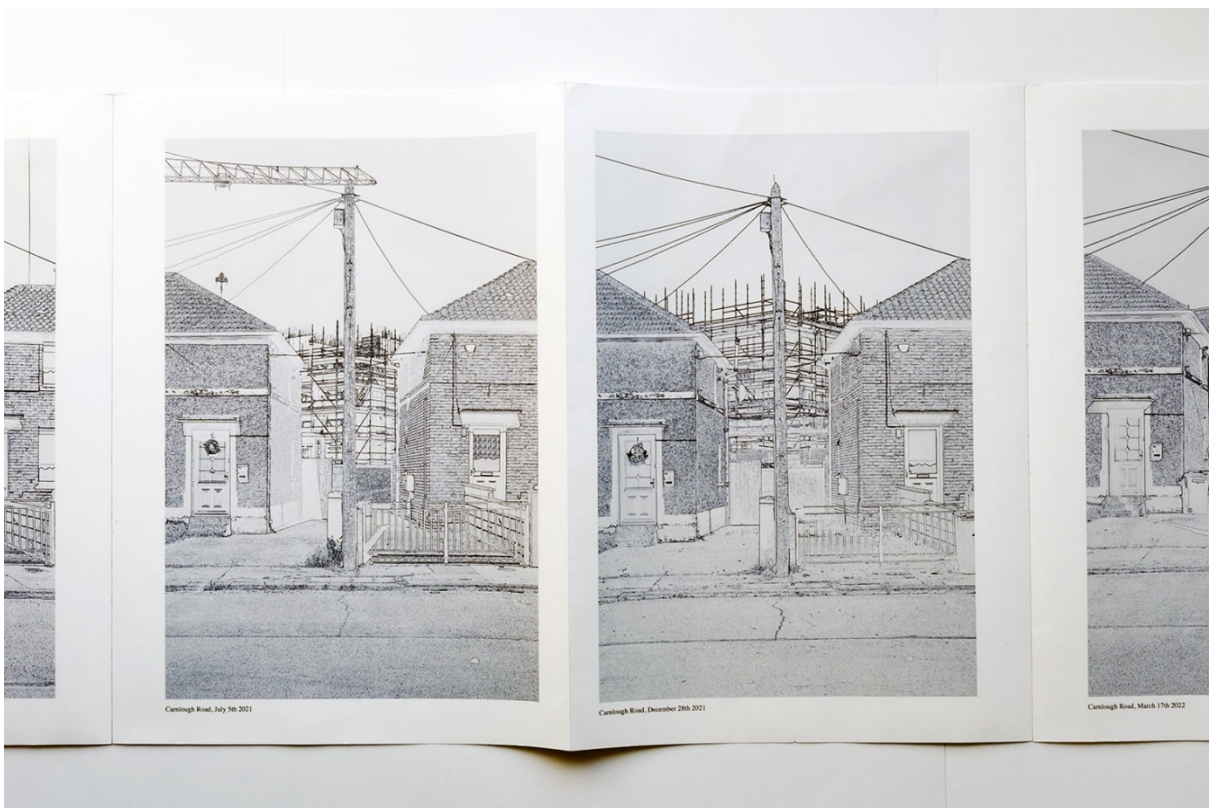


Figure 5.8: Rendered photographs on Munken Pure paper. Source: Mandy O'Neill, October 11th 2024.

As I continued with the editing process, the idea of layering multiple elements emerged. I increasingly had the urge to combine photographs with other visual material, and with text. Figures 5.9 and 5.10 show examples which combine photographs, line drawings, text, and photographic renderings. This layering approach would continue throughout the research, informing the approach to the final artefacts.

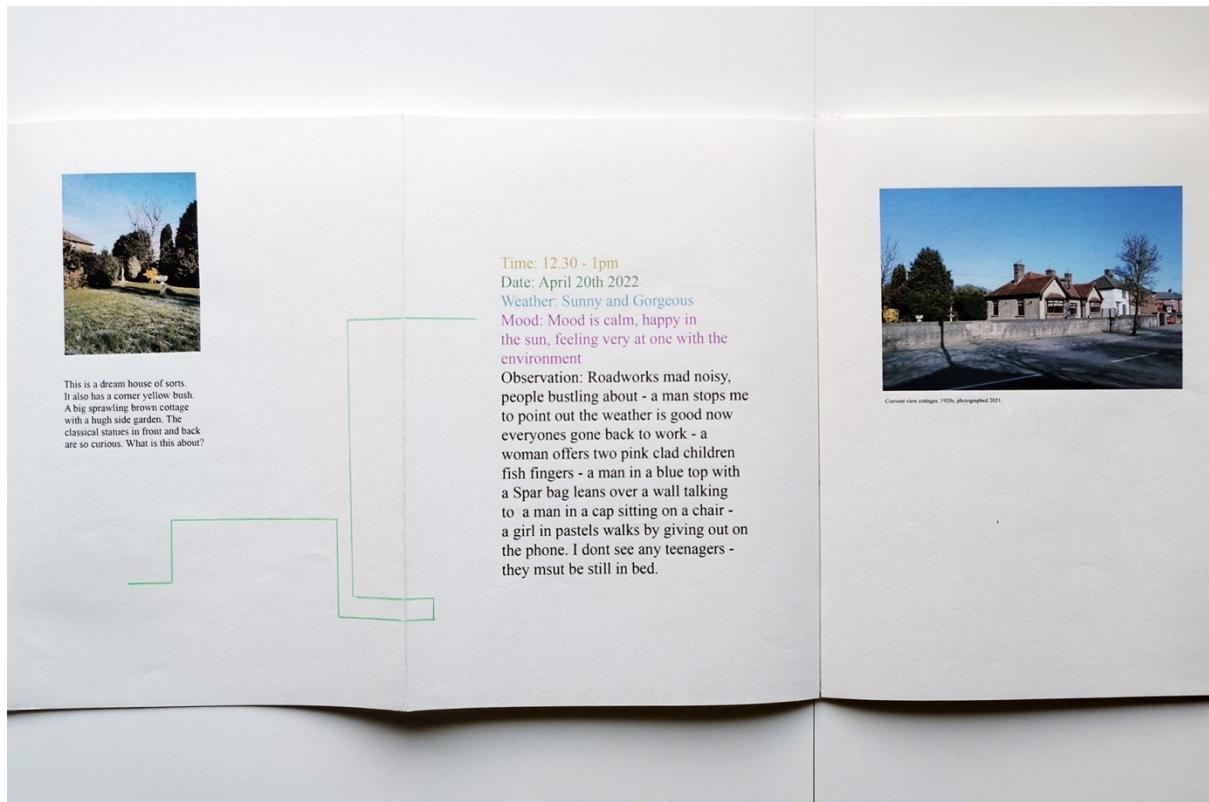


Figure 5.9: Example of leporello with photographs, text, and line drawing. Source :Mandy O'Neill 2022.



Figure 5.10: Example of leporello with photographs, text, and rendered photo-drawing. Source: Mandy O'Neill 2022.

Throughout this period, I was also becoming increasingly responsive to materials such as concrete, timber, steel and paint, from observations of both building sites and the existing fabric of Cabra. I began some small experiments with timber and paint, which I would start to combine with photographic prints and other paper materials to form assemblages.

5.2.1 Interviews, Studio Visits and Presentations

While the studio primarily serves as a space for thinking and making, it is also vitally important as a place to meet and talk with people. Engagement with people, through discussing and viewing photographs is part of my process, and during my time at FSAS I had many visitors to the studio, from multiple disciplines. Visitors included local politicians and Dublin City Councillors, curators, artists, geographers, architects, and housing experts, all of whom brought their own point of view to the work.

On 16th July 2022, a group of international curators and artists visited my studio as part of the PhotoIreland Festival. Earlier that week I had attended individual portfolio reviews with some of the curators (including Natasha Christia, curator of *Best Laid Plans*), and the studio visit was a way to expand on these conversations about my work. As part of the festival, I also gave a presentation at Dublin Castle as part of the 'Think Tank on Histories II, which proposed to

‘explore the key events, exhibitions and practices that have shaped contemporary Irish photography from the 1990s to the present’ (PhotoIreland, 2022).

During the presentation, I discussed my research up to that point, with a focus on the typographies and time-based imagery I had been gathering. In May 2022, I had presented similar material at the Conference of Irish Geographers, at the University of Limerick. The cross-disciplinary nature of my work is notable here, with different concerns emerging depending on the audience. I mention these presentations and studio visits to give a sense of the layered and iterative process of my research overall, and also to illustrate its interactive nature. My engagement with people, through the materials I have produced, adds a further layer of understanding, which then informs the trajectory of my research.

5.3 Studio residency at Temple Bar Gallery & Studios

5.3.1 Site specific installation

In April 2023, I moved into a studio at Temple Bar Gallery and Studios, (TBG&S) with the building and environment again affecting my working practices. The context and sounds of non-stop building directly outside the gallery instigated further reflection around the topic of development. I was commissioned to create an artwork and lead a series of workshops as part of the TBG&S Summer School in July 2024. I used this opportunity to experiment with the construction of a site-specific installation which responded to my images of building processes at the Hamilton Gardens building site. The source images pictured in Figure 5.11, are contained in my Field Diary 6 (FD6 April 10th 2023, pp. 112-113). The motif of ‘the grid’, which would become a recurring theme, also emerged from observation of these building supports.



Figure 5.11: Hamilton Gardens building site structures, in FD6, April 2023.

Responding to these images, I collaborated with a carpenter to create my own site-specific installation using timber and coloured paper. The site was the TBG&S main gallery. Using the big central steel girders in the centre of the gallery as a framework/support, we created a timber grid structure, behind which coloured paper rolls were installed. Figure 5.12 depicts photographs of the structure in TBG&S, alongside a textual reflection contained in my field diary. The artwork was in dialogue with the building work taking place outside in Temple Bar Square, with the sound of construction ever present throughout the Summer School weekend.



Figure 5.12: Timber and coloured paper construction, TBG&S, July 2023, in FD5, pp. 232-233.

Reflecting on the process, I note that the ‘insights gained from this experiment are: the importance of specific materials and what they signify, the connotations, the nuance, colour’ (FD5 July 19th 2023, pp. 238-239). Another important observation was the necessity to make the structure to see how it would work, and learn from this. Bolt (2006, p.7) argues for a type of ‘praxical knowledge’ that emerges through ‘creative arts research’ and through interaction with tools and materials. Ihde and Malafouris (2019, p. 195). suggest a relationship between post phenomenology and material engagement theory that argues for ‘the primacy of making or creative material engagement in human life and evolution’. They are committed to the ‘relational ontology in which people and things are inseparably linked’, and that in ‘making we transform the world, changing ourselves in the process’ (Ihde and Malafouris 2019, p. 197).

Through working closely with the carpenter, I gained an understanding of types of timber and their different properties. Observing the final structure, I could better understand how an installation occupies space (for example the positioning of the structure between the steel girders gave it the appearance of a wall rather than free standing sculpture), and also the

importance of using colour sparingly. Through material engagement, my perception and experience are altered, as I transform materials through building, my understanding of myself and my practice, and how I relate to the world is transformed (Bolt 2007, Ihde and Malafouris 2019, Ingold 2013). Conceptualisation and production of the timber/paper structure for TBG&S marked an important juncture in my PhD research, as it was the first time my smaller process experiments had manifested into a scaled up finished piece. Knowledge gained from the process of making and observing this piece fed directly into the conceptualisation and construction of final artefacts for *Best Laid Plans*.

The process also allowed me to decipher elements which didn't work (the bluntness/literal nature of the installation for example, and the colour combination). The value of knowledge gained through 'failure' is championed by Kathleen Kralowec (2019, [no pagination]) 'because one has expanded one's awareness of one's own abilities, one's deeper ideas, the potential of a media, a process, a genre, an art-form'. My perceived failures in this experiment only served to reorientate my thinking as to how this might be done differently or better.

5.3.2 TBG&S Summer School workshops

As a way to activate the artwork, I conducted a series of workshops with different groups, working with children, adults, and an invited group from Cabra (the Cabra History Group). Using a series of printed photographs I took of buildings around Temple Bar, along with paper and mark-making materials, participants were invited to produce simple accordion books, responding to the photographs, and incorporating their own personal history and thoughts. Figure 5.13 shows participants, along with an example of the accordion books they produced.



Figure 5.13: Participants in TBG&S Summer School workshops, with example of accordion book, in FD5, pp. 236-237).

Regarding the workshops, I observe that ‘the workshops have contributed valuable research to my PhD, in terms of people engagement, dialogue, material thinking and making, this very simple process unlocked some impressive creativity in the different groups, people found it cathartic, and both photographs and making served as catalysts for discussion about the built environment’ (FD5 July 19th 2023, p. 239). In Douglas Harpers (2002, p. 13) view, photo-elicitation is powerfully effective in evoking ‘information, feelings and memories that are due to the photographs particular form of representation’. A combination of thinking through photographs and shaping photographic material, combined with text ,was highly effective in eliciting thoughts and discussion among participants.

Figure 5.14 shows a participant from the Cabra History Group during the workshop. Viewing my research photographs of Cabra building sites, along with the process of making the accordion book, instigated memories and knowledge for this participant, of being a builder and structures of bridge building. The same participant recalled his experience of travelling through the Temple Bar area on a horse and cart as a ‘rag and bone’ collector as a teenager.



Figure 5.14: Participant at TBG&S Summer School workshop. Source Mandy O'Neill July 2023.

Ingold (2013, p. 21) considers making as ‘a process of growth’, with the maker ‘in among the world of active materials’, with the outcome emerging through the synergy of maker and materials. The connection made by this participant to previous knowledge fed into the construction of the accordion book, instigated in the first instance by the photograph, with new thinking emerging from this process.

At the start of each workshop, I gave participants a tour of the TBG&S building, and my studio, outlining the history of the space and its beginnings as a shirt factory in the early 20th century.

The history of the building was of particular interest to the Cabra History Group, many of whom had moved to Cabra from Dublin's inner city, and who had memories of various industries and factories where they or family members might have worked. This multi-layered experience, visual, historical and somatic, along with an introduction to the artist studio, led to rich discussions about buildings, and how we live in them.

This echoes Ingold's anthropological approach of researching *with* rather than *about* people, and the value to the researcher of thinking through making with participants. He tested this hypothesis by carrying out a series of experiments with anthropology students. The group engaged with various publics in activities such as building, singing or drawing, asking the question 'what difference does it make if discussion is grounded in a context of practical activity?'. Ingold (2013, pp. 8-9) concluded that the 'discussions had while doing things', 'were tremendously productive of new insights'. This supports my assertion that the act of making and thinking through materials generates a particular kind of knowledge which might not arise from other methods.

In addition to these interventions in the TBG&S gallery, the studio itself acted as a catalyst for ideas and works which emerged through the interaction and placement of materials. A chance interaction between coloured paper and sun led to the creation of 'sun-prints', a series of which were then created using the grid structures of studio windows (Figure 5.15). R.Lyle Skains (2004, p. 90) discusses the 'serendipity in the artists process' and 'identifying this cognitive process as more than luck: rather it is the convergence of the knowledge and experience to make the mental connection and to recognise the significance of that connection'. Figure 5.16 shows a series of prints, some of which went on to feature in the final exhibition as part of assemblages combined with notebooks, drawings and timber.



Figure 5.15: Making sun-prints in the window of TBG&S, July 2023, in FD5 pp.226-227.



Figure 5.16: 'sun-prints', TBG&S, Source: Mandy O'Neill, October 2023.

These prints also prompted consideration of early photographic processes and their use in the creation of architectural blueprints, using the cyanotype method, adding another layer of connection to the IAA final exhibition venue. Additionally, the sun-prints referenced the primacy of light in my practice, how sunlight shaped my impulse to photograph, and the materials themselves. This multi-layered thinking is characteristic of the overall research approach.

5.3.3 Curator Visit: Natasha Christia

In July 2023 my supervisor Dragana Jurišić suggested the possibility of working with international curator Natasha Christia, for *Best Laid Plans*. The curator's vast experience of working with photographers, and her conceptual interest in 'the exploration and reinvention of dominant narratives' in photography were deciding factors (Christia 2024). I had also met Christia at PhotoIreland portfolio reviews, and she had shown an interest in my research. We began an online conversation in September 2023, and an agreement was made to work together for the exhibition. In February 2024, Christia came to Dublin for three days of intensive work at my studio, where we started the process of editing materials. The process began with an overview of materials and research I had gathered which related to the wider geo-historical, context of Irish housing, and to my own personal family experience. The Dublin of the Future historical planning document was examined as possible material towards production of artefacts for *Best Laid Plans*, as were a series of historical maps of Cabra. Photographs were edited into categories, and ideas emerged about the possibility of a modular system of support for artworks in the exhibition. The leporello emerged as an important motif, which would go on to feature prominently in the final artefacts. Following this visit, the collaborative process continued in the months leading up to the exhibition, with the curator also present at the installation of artefacts.

5.3.4 Studio 22

In May 2024, I moved into a much larger, light filled studio at TBG&S for a period of three months. This was a crucial juncture in the PhD research process as I began construction of the final artefacts. The shift to this larger studio is important to mention in that it allowed me to think and experiment at scale, to layout and allocate materials with the exhibition venue in mind, and to test material combinations. Figure 5.17 gives an idea of the size/scale of the studio and how it enabled the process. Drawing on Merleau Ponty's assertion that 'perception is not

an isolated event [...] but an organism's entire bodily relation to its environment' (Carmen, 2020 p.1) - the spatial and sensory experience of the studio, the unique world accrued through the creation and assemblage of objects and materials, and how the body moves through it all affect the production of work.



Figure 5.17: TBG&S studio. Source: Mandy O'Neill, June 2024.

A sense of how the final exhibition would manifest is evidenced in this combination of photographic works, timber structures, paper experiments, colour interventions and assemblages. The opportunity to work within this space cannot be underestimated in terms of the spatial imagining of artworks for the exhibition. Having the room to build at scale was also essential.

5.3.5 The Leporello Structure

By the time I entered the new studio, ideas were formulating as to how I would work with the different exhibition rooms at the IAA. My communication with the curator intensified and we began with the ground floor Architecture Gallery, which contains four large vertical vitrines/cabinets. Drawing on the paper leporellos, and the acts of folding and construction, I wanted to incorporate this method into larger structures. A decision was made to create timber leporellos which would fit precisely into the larger two cabinets. The structures were built by

the carpenter, with initial design, conception, and testing beginning at home, before constructing a prototype leporello structure at the studio. Figure 5.18 depicts an early version of the framework.



Figure 5.18: Early leporello structure tests at TBG&S. Source: Mandy O'Neill, May 2024.

Building processes extended to the production of photographs which would be mounted on the final structures, with singular A3 prints emulating building blocks. A number of options were considered, including large photographic vinyl's, or prints on photographic paper. Based upon mock-ups made in my studio at TBG&S (Figure 5.19), I decided to produce these photographs myself, using a grid system and non-photographic Munken paper. This process also gave me autonomy and control over production of a large photographic piece - control that generally must be handed over to a commercial printer. Making this myself was fraught with anxiety, with concerns about quality of image at scale. Taking this chance showed me the possibilities for hand-making and autonomy in the overall photographic process, which will inform future work.



Figure 5.19: Mock-ups of cabinet grid photographs at TBG&S, June 2023.

5.4 Studio Residency at D-light Studios

Following my studio residency at TBG&S I moved into D-Light Studios, Dublin 1, from July-September 2024. As at the other studios where I had worked, the workspace/building had an influence in both practical and conceptual ways. Practically this large warehouse building allowed me the space to construct and work at scale, an important factor in the production of large installation works. However, the lack of natural light in the studio had a negative effect on how I viewed my photographic prints. I had gone from a large light filled room at TBG&S to a dark, cold space with artificial light. This experience emphasised the material qualities of the photograph; their ‘volume, opacity, tactility’ and physical presence in the world (Batchen 1997, p. 2). How we look at and experience photographs is a significant concern of this research. Following on from the somatic experience of making photographs is the bodily experience of how we perceive them as objects or part of objects.

I mention this in the context of studio practice, and how sensory engagement with an environment can alter perception. Conceptually, this echoes the wider themes of my work in relation to bodily experience of the built environment, and my interaction with light, colour and form through photography.

5.4.1 The Leporello structure continued

In July 2024, a vertical framework was constructed in the studio, onto which sheets of MFD were attached (Figure 5.20). Following this, I used the photographic grid system, tested in TBG&S, and mounted two large, fragmented photographs on the structure (Figure 5.21). The bespoke nature of these pieces, their odd measurements (the cabinets into which they would fit were constructed with imperial measurements), consideration of how they could be installed into the restricted space of the cabinets, along with the process of hand-printing the photographs, meant that these full mock-ups were necessary to gauge if the pieces would work. This necessitated constant and ongoing negotiations with the carpenter, the space, and the materials, as we transformed the spatial context around us. Again, the physical experience of interaction with these large objects enables an understanding which could not be gleaned from geometrical plans on paper, echoing Merleau Ponty on the ‘role of the body in perception’ (Carmen 2020), p. 1) and Ihde’s (1978) conception of humans as technical beings.



Figure 5.20: Mock-up of leporello structure for cabinets, July 2024.



Figure 5.21: Photographic grids installed on leporello structure at D-Light Studios. Source: Mandy O'Neill, August 2024.

Editing/choosing the photographs for these pieces began earlier in the process and the conceptual relevance of these choices will be outlined in my descriptions of the final artefacts.

5.4.2 ‘Formwork’ experiments

In tandem with construction of the large leporello structures, I was also imagining ways that artworks could be displayed both vertically and horizontally in the exhibition spaces. A modular system of timber supports was designed and produced, taking note of what had worked with the previous structural experiment at TBG&S, and what had not. In carefully observing my photographs of building sites, I noticed the name Gaelform on the side of a housing structure. Researching this name I discovered the concept of ‘Formwork’, which describes a support system for building; a series of grids, panels and beams which are used to create the walls of buildings and which serve as moulds for concrete (Gaelform.com 2024)). While I had been conscious of the grid pattern previously, I was not entirely aware of the functionality. The idea of support resonated with my endeavours to find a system to enable free standing works, rather than hang them on the wall. The notion of a support system also resonates with the focus on social/public housing in the work.

Drawing on the idea of ‘Formwork’, a series of grids, panels and braces was constructed. Figure 5.22 shows a prototype of the panel structure with angled braces which allow it to stand. This structure was reproduced at different scales and as both vertical and horizontal panels. Figure 5.23 shows a horizontal prototype. Both of these prototypes were adapted and resized to create the final modular system of support for the exhibition.



Figure 5.22: Prototype of panel structure with angled braces. Source: Mandy O'Neill, July 2024.



Figure 5.23: Prototype of horizontal structure. Source: Mandy O'Neill, July 2024.

5.5 Conclusion

The main focus of Chapter Five has been the processes of making, of thinking through engagement with materials, and the studio environments within which artefacts are conceived, developed, and constructed. Audience engagement with presentations of the ‘in-progress’ research has been discussed, along with knowledge gained from reflection in these interactions. The processes of making have been extensively illustrated by photographic documentation in this chapter, as a way to show the iterative nature of my practice based research, and to reveal the rigor which has gone into production of artefacts as part of this PhD. I have outlined multiple iterations, from paper leporellos to sun-prints, to large sculptural experiments and engagement with new materials. An important element of the process was devising the modular system which would serve as a framework for mounted photographic pieces. Chapter six will describe how this system was enacted in the exhibition and how it supported the artworks. It will also describe each of the artefacts within the context of *Best Laid Plans*.

Chapter Six: Best Laid Plans

The exhibition *Best Laid Plans* was held at the Irish Architectural Archive (IAA), 45 Merrion Square from September 18th 2024 to November 29th 2024. This was an installation-based and photo-sculptural exhibition displayed over two floors of the Irish Architectural Archive (IAA), addressing the topics of planning and housing-led development, through expanded photography practice. The term ‘expanded photography’ is put forward by Lucy Soutter as photographic practice that overlaps or borrows from other media, for example sculpture, painting, architecture, or installation (2016, p. 36). She also speaks of ‘further hybrid possibilities for the mediation and presentation of images’ in relation to digital technology, and the use of ‘moving image, performance or audience participation’ (Soutter 2026, p. 36). The germs of this type of hybrid practice can be found in the 1960s and 1970s (though precedents exist earlier), where artists were ‘actively challenging the notion of medium specificity’ (Stazer 2016, p. 33). The topic of ‘medium expansion’ was explored by Rosalind Krauss in her influential essay *Sculpture in the Expanded Field* (1979), which is still referenced today in discussions of media hybridity (Soutter 2016, Baker 2005, Osbourne 2003).

My work is primarily located within the field of expanded photography but within this is a turn towards installation, which has developed exponentially through my PhD research and the resulting exhibition. In their publication *What is Installation Art*, part of a series by the Irish Museum of Modern art, Byrne and Moran describe the term as applying to ‘a range of arts practice which involves the installation or configuration of objects in space, where the totality of objects and space comprise the artwork. Installation art is a mode of production and display of artwork rather than a movement or style’ (IMMA, 2024).

There is not scope within this thesis for a wide overview of installation art, but it is interesting to note the emergence of these hybrid practices of expanded photography and installation art around the same time-period. For the purpose of this thesis, I use the term ‘expanded photography’ to encompass the different mediums, materials and modes of display I have utilised for the exhibition, including installation.

6.1 Expanded Photography Practice

One of the earliest photography-based exhibitions seeking to challenge the idea of medium specificity, was *Photography into Sculpture*, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, (Stazer 2016, p.33). The exhibition was conceived of by photography curator Peter Bunnell, and was a follow up to *Photography as Printmaking* (1968), in which approximately forty photographic processes were presented (Stazer 2016, p. 38). According to Lucy Soutter:

Photography into Sculpture proposed that photography could be an art form not only of pictures but also of sculptural and interactive objects. With hybrid forms ranging from stitched fabric collage to Perspex assemblage to hand-coloured TV stills encased in inflatable vinyl, the exhibition questioned what an art photograph could be and do. (Soutter 2016, p. 70)

Soutter (2016, p. 70) describes the exhibition works as a type of ‘hybrid’ art, and while recognising that Bunnell was ‘firmly grounded in modernist pictorial tradition’, he had ‘an uncommon interest in how the physical, material form of an image could lead the viewer beyond representational content. Reaction to the exhibition at the time was ‘mixed and sometimes hostile’ with the notion of the photograph as ‘mere raw material’ seen as a violation of photography’s integrity (Morse 2016, p. 100). Mary Stazer’s (2016) *The Photographic Object 1970*, offers a series of essays on the emergence of hybrid photographic practice during the 1960s/1970s, focusing on *Photography into Sculpture* and associated exhibitions at MOMA. Rebecca Morse (2016, pp. 100-113) suggests that it was not until the mid-2000s that photo-sculptural practice emerges as a ‘sophisticated, diverse and widespread practice’, which was embraced by the art world.

In 2011 at Cherry and Martin Gallery Los Angeles, a contemporary version of *Photography into Sculpture*, entitled *Photography into Sculpture: The evolving Photographic Object* was exhibited. This version received wide public acclaim and indicated an abandonment of ‘medium specificity for hybridity in ever-increasing numbers’ for many contemporary artists (Morse 2016, p. 101). An article by Mark Godfrey (2005) for Artforum Magazine, entitled ‘Image Structures: Photography and Sculpture’, articulated this evolving relationship in contemporary art between photography and sculpture, and the two decades since has seen a wide expansion of these hybrid photographic practices. There is also a renewed interest in materiality by photographers, and desire for more ‘hands on’ experience (Morse 2010, p. 31). An interest in materiality has seen ‘a growing tendency towards using photography in

sculptural ways and a rising interest in the objecthood of the photograph (Vuorinen 2022, p. 405).

Lucy Soutter (2016, pp. 36-43) suggests that there are many contemporary artists taking a photo-sculptural approach who are not especially invested in photography. She argues for the value of works wherein ‘the work pushes beyond photography’s traditional domains of the wall, the page and the screen, yet retains a deep connection to photographic ideas or impulses’. This seems an apt description of my own expanded photography practice, where photography lies at the core but is incorporated with other materials and challenges the viewer through modes of presentation.

6.2 Best Laid Plans

The exhibition *Best Laid Plans*, took a hybrid, photo-sculptural, installation and site specific approach to address themes of housing and planning, with a focus on the area of Cabra. The approach to imagining and formalising the artworks for the exhibition underscores the process of planning and experimentation, with embodied experience and material thinking at its core. Sustained engagement with the built environment and observation of construction processes, along with the desire to mimic my own spatial and somatic experience of walking and photographing in Cabra, have resulted in a layered approach, with a focus on the experiential.

The reasons for choosing the IAA as an exhibition venue have been outlined in Chapter Five. In terms of the actual building itself, each room offered the possibility to create a site-specific experience, with the artefacts in conversation with the material fabric of the space. What follows is a description of the multiple artefacts contained in the exhibition. I have chosen to ‘walk through’ the space as the viewer would, describing the works conceptually and formally, before concluding with a summary of findings.

6.2.1 Foyer area of the IAA

The foyer area of the IAA contains several architectural models, sculptures and framed works. In terms of curating an exhibition, it is difficult to compete with the existing works in this space, and the grandeur of the building itself. It was necessary to create an intervention here that would indicate something else was going on. As a way to introduce the exhibition a bespoke birch plywood platform was constructed, as both sculptural piece and display area for

artworks and materials. Displayed on the platform was a digital tablet showing a short video on loop, a mounted photographic print, a small publication, LED lighting, and a combination of my research materials and items gleaned from the IAA stores. All of the items on the platform resurface in some form throughout the rest of the exhibition, as does a scaled-up version of the platform.

The video was created on my mobile phone and depicts a concrete pavement with chalk drawings along the Ratoath Road, Cabra. Kathleen M. Ryan (2018, pp. 245-246) describes a ‘vertical video’ aesthetic characteristic of mobile phones, recognising the ‘changing visual paradigms’ engendered by new media technologies. The video displayed aims to introduce the idea of movement into the exhibition, and rather than seeking to obscure the technology used, the tablet to some extent replicates the aesthetic of the mobile phone (Figure 6.1). In this way it aims to evoke what Sarah Pink (2011, p.5) refers to as ‘the production and consumption of images in movement’ which is my experience of walking and producing both still and moving images with the camera phone.



Figure 6.1: Video installed in foyer of IAA. Source: Mandy O’Neill, 2024.

A small publication was displayed at the front of the platform, with viewers invited to take one as they enter the exhibition (Figure 6.2). The publication, developed in collaboration with graphic designer Niall McCormack, contains a series of texts and an artwork, and its primary purpose was to offer an expanded understanding of the exhibition. Texts in the publication are drawn from different aspects of my research, including geo-historical elements and photo-

sculptural practice. I also used the publication as an opportunity to share my own personal context of growing up in social housing. Structurally it takes the form of a leporello, to echo this motif running through the show, with the fold-out aspect and paper choice emulating the aesthetics of mapping. Graphics running through the document seek to evoke the idea of walking.



Figure 6.2: *Best Laid Plans* publication. Source: Mandy O'Neill 2024.

On the rear side of the publication is a type of photo-drawing, which can be seen as a precursor to further artworks in the exhibition (Figure 6.3). The 'drawing' originates from a photograph which was manipulated using a Photoshop filter, with another layer of abstraction enacted by the designer in the form of colourisation. Including this image in the publication was a way to offer a self-contained artwork for free to the viewer and also an opportunity to introduce the notion of hybrid practice at the beginning of the exhibition.

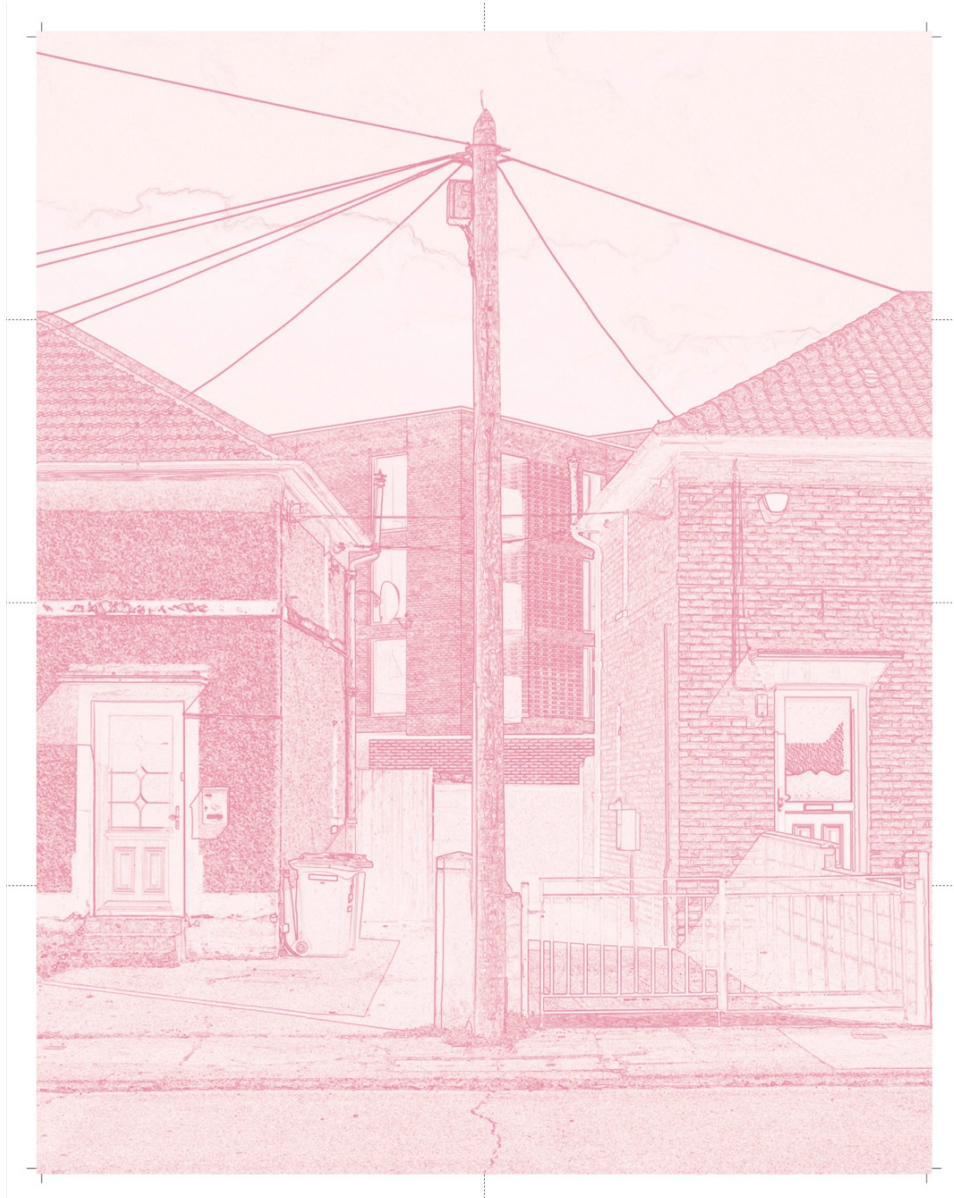


Figure 6.3: Photo-drawing, *Best Laid Plans* publication. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.

6.2.2 The Architectural Gallery

The Architectural Gallery on the ground floor is a bespoke space with low lighting, generally used to exhibit historical maps and architectural drawings. Retaining the aura of a museum building, the material construction of this room, comprised of a series of standing screens, large scale cabinets and metal curtains, make it both challenging and conceptually complex as an exhibition space. Materials such as ebony hark back to a colonial past, and evoke connections to the concepts of mapping, exploring, architecture and the marking and remarking of territories. In thinking conceptually about this space I needed to consider these connotations, as I would use it to ground my own research historically, geographically and socially.

I had noticed previously that exhibitions in the Architectural Gallery were often comprised of multiple documents and objects displayed in the large cabinets and vitrines, with further elements installed on the wooden screens on each side of the space. My intention was to take a minimalist approach what would acknowledge the characteristics of the room itself, while creating an immersive experience. Installation art is characterised by the creation of an ‘environment’ in which the viewer becomes emersed (Han Er 2023, p. 12). Combining a series of large scale, site-specific photo-sculptural works, map-based framed pieces and sound, my aim was to create an immersive experience for the viewer, where layers of my research are revealed. Figure 6.4 shows a viewer immersed in the space of the Architectural Gallery.



Figure 6.4: Architectural Gallery installation view. Source: Mandy O'Neill. Photograph by Ros Kavanagh 2024.

Artwork 1 Sound piece

The sound piece, entitled *The Best Thing We Ever Did*, which is placed in the centre of the room contains a combination of voices drawn from housing documentaries contained in the RTE archives, and interviews undertaken as part of this research. The RTE documentaries entitled: *The Best Thing We've Ever Done* (1962), *Not By Bricks Alone* (1969) and *Acute housing shortage in Dublin* (1972) all attempt to evoke the experience of housing in Ireland, particularly social/public housing. The aim of the sound piece was to humanise the space and give voice to the lived experience of housing and planning. Voices of residents are combined with more official voices of architects, officials and builders, to offer different points of view. Interviews with Cabra residents are incorporated, describing the experience of moving to the

social housing schemes in the 1940s and 1950s. Testimony from my mother is included where she describes the dilapidated nature of the cottage in which she grew up, and being handed the keys to a new council house in 1958. The personal element is important in that it informs my own experience of housing and is an underlying motivating factor for this research overall. Outside of the informational purpose of the sound piece, equally important is the auditory somatic experience for the audience, the connotations of different accents and voices and the overall sensory experience (Cortez 2022).

The overall aim of the sound piece is to open a space for thinking about the experience of housing in Ireland and to make connections between past and present. Figure 6.5 shows the wooden structure within which the sound piece is enclosed. The structure functions as a type of support for the sound piece and the design was based on elements of a timber modular system created for the exhibition.



Figure 6.5: Architectural Gallery installation view. Wooden structure enclosing sound piece. Source: Mandy O'Neill. Photograph by Ros Kavanagh 2024.

Artworks 2 & 3

Artworks 2 & 3 were contained in the larger cabinets situated in the Architecture Gallery. The form taken by these artworks was significant in that my earlier process of folding and leporello making were manifest in the folded structure, albeit at a much larger scale, and using timber and MDF. The structures were custom built to fill the cabinets and to work with the lines of

metal on the glass, an extremely difficult task. Measurement was a stumbling block as the cabinets were originally built using the imperial system. Timber sheet materials come in standard sizes, all of which are too small to fit exactly.

The housing images contained in these structures had several aims. Firstly, to introduce the architectural fabric of Cabra in the form of social/public housing examples. Cabinet 1 (Figure 6.6) contains two photographs of a council house on Fassaugh Avenue, with the images taken two years apart. On the left hand side, the houses is boarded up (and was for approximately three years). On the right it is occupied. It is not entirely clear that this is the same house, with the three-dimensional leprello structure skewing vision somewhat. The aim of this work is to provoke questions in the viewer around the notion of social supports, but also leaves an opening for projection of the personal experience of housing in Ireland.

Cabinet 2 (Figure 5.12) takes the same approach, with photographs of a Senior Housing complex on Ratoath Road, the same location photographed over a three-year period. The chairs in these photographs aim to evoke a human presence, while the architecture of the flats/apartments speaks to a type of production line of dwellings built in the 1970s. It is interesting to note that the houses built in the 1930s and 1940s, as in Cabinet 1, (Figure 6.7) have stood the test of time, while the 1970s flat complexes (there are several similar in Cabra) are now set for demolition or reconstruction.

My photographs of these housing typologies borrow from what Méaux (2019, p. 209) terms a ‘geographical tropism’, a seemingly neutral documentation which draws on protocols of repeat photography and typologies. They do not adhere however to the strict methods of repeat photography in that the scenes are not structured identically; I do not try to replicate weather conditions and I am directed by instinct rather than a more scientific approach. Photographs are taken in strong sunlight, with blue skies, ‘with the formal aesthetic gesture contained within the act of photography itself’ (Ghirr, 1970). I did not set out to make this series of comparative images but rather identified their importance after the fact, in the editing process. This presented challenges and concerns around the possibilities for combining these photographs, and for what they might look like at scale.

The production of large-scale, hyper-detailed photographs became particularly prevalent in the late 20th century, often captured on ‘large format view cameras’ epitomised in the work of

photographers such as Andreas Gursky and Gregory Crewdson (Soutter 2018 pp. 110-115). Indeed, when I graduated from my BA photography in 2005 this was the prevailing trend. While photography has expanded since then, not least due to new technologies of image capture and sharing, this legacy of the large scale, large file print remains. So it was with trepidation that I attempted to create photographic objects by scaling up relatively small files and printing in blocks of A3 paper. The autonomy of printing these images myself rather than reverting to a printer, gave me more of a connection to the process and the object itself, echoing Ihde and Malafouris (2018, p. 195) contention that we do not just make things but are ‘made by them’.

The grid layout, while initially a practical solution to creating scaled up images became ‘a means of imbuing dimension into a traditionally flat medium’ (Morse 2010, p. 31). Audience feedback from the exhibition, gleaned through tours with various groups verified the effectiveness of this three-dimensional effect. Several viewers also commented on the ‘monumental’ nature of these pieces, and the way in which they celebrated and brought attention to public housing.



Figure 6.6: Artwork 2, Cabinet 1, leprello structure with photographs of Cabra housing. Source Mandy O'Neill. Photograph by Ros Kavanagh, 2024.



Figure 6.7: Artwork 3, Cabinet 2, leporello structure with photographs of Cabra housing. Source Mandy O'Neill. Photography by Ros Kavanagh 2024.

Artworks 4 and 5

Utopian and speculative notions of planning are represented in the map and plan artworks contained in Cabinets 3 and 4. For Artwork 4, an original map, including part of Cabra and the surrounding area of Glasnevin was appropriated from the IAA collection and reimagined to produce a speculative artwork. The map, edition of 1908, sheet number XVIII. 26, depicts the built up area of Phibsborough and Glasnevin, veering into the beginnings of Cabra at Fassaugh Lane. According to Ruth McManus, a corresponding sheet of this detail would not have been produced for the area to the West of this map (Cabra) as it was mostly agricultural land at that point. This prompted the idea of creating an imaginary map of the area – a type of *tabula rasa* – an empty space onto which plans could be projected. A section of sheet 26 was combined with this ‘empty’ map, with further interventions in the form of text (Figure 6.8). Geographer Derek Gregory (1994, pp. 70-205) considers the role of cartography in the geographic imagination, and the underlying power dynamics inherent in map making. What is recorded and what is not? How and by whom?.

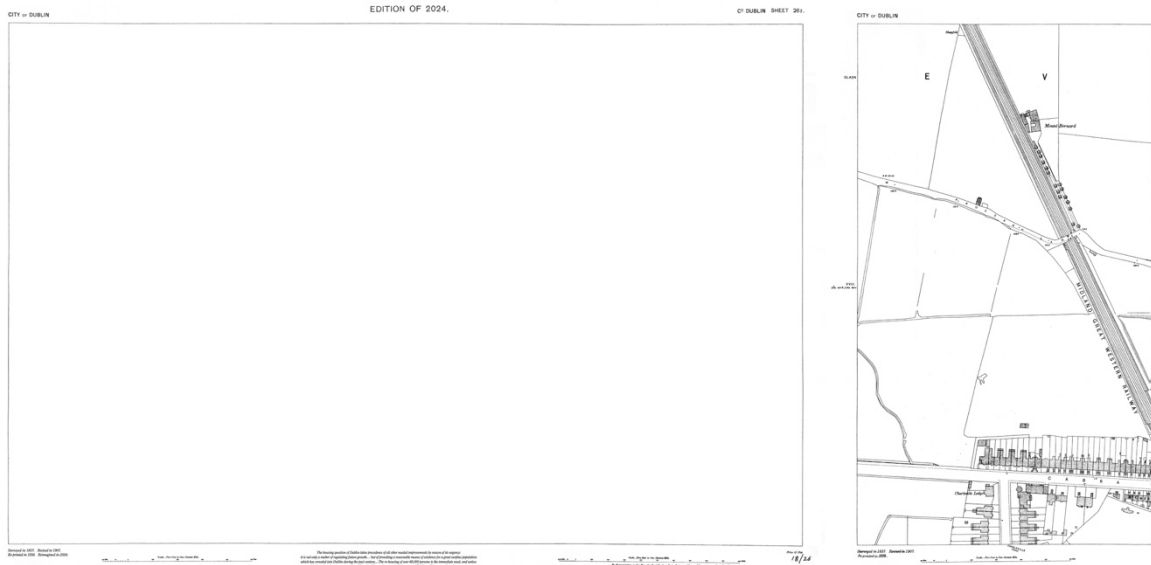


Figure 6.8: Artwork 4. Source Mandy O'Neill, 2024.

Margarita Cappock considers the subjectivity of mapping, stating:

For thousands of years, maps have always played a central role in human knowledge and our understanding of the world around us. One associates a map with factual information, ordinance survey, military maps, an A to Z of a city – a way to orient and locate oneself. Although one thinks of maps as objective views, they are subjective views and are constantly in flux as borders change or as cities evolve. The links between art and cartography are evident – after all, what were the first maps only a visual language for conveying space and place (Cappock 2021, p. 11).

Cappock writes this in the context of an essay about Irish artist Dorothy Smiths subjective mapping of Dalymount Park Football Stadium (2021). Smith was commissioned to respond, through drawing, to the environment of the stadium, creating her own map which focused in on what might be considered overlooked details. In creating an empty map for the exhibition *Best Laid Plans*, my aim was to question the veracity of such visual methods, and to make my own intervention. Much like photographs, maps often conceal as much as they reveal and the different visual languages in the Architectural Gallery thus exist in dialogue with each other as part of an environment.

On the periphery of the map, I have made textual interventions, including an excerpt from the winning competition entry in the Dublin of the Future Planning competition 1914, which was published in 1922. The competition is expanded upon in Chapter One, within the context of 20th century town planning.

The quote I have extracted, an image of which can be seen in Figure 6.9, describes housing conditions in Dublin at the beginning of the New State. The purpose of including this text was to illustrate the perennial nature of housing issues and planning as a consistent concern over time, giving an opening for the viewer to reflect on relationships between past and present. Figure 6.10 shows an installation image of the map piece in the Architectural Gallery.

The housing question of Dublin takes precedence of all other needed improvements by reason of its urgency: it is not only a matter of regulating future growth... but of providing a reasonable means of existence for a great surplus population which has crowded into Dublin during the past century... The re-housing of over 60,000 persons is the immediate need, and unless this is undertaken in conjunction with radical town planning the latter state of Dublin will be worse than the present.

DUBLIN OF THE FUTURE 1922, PART II, HOUSING. P. 19

Figure 6.9: Excerpt from the DOTF 1922 planning publication, inserted into imagined map of Cabra. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.

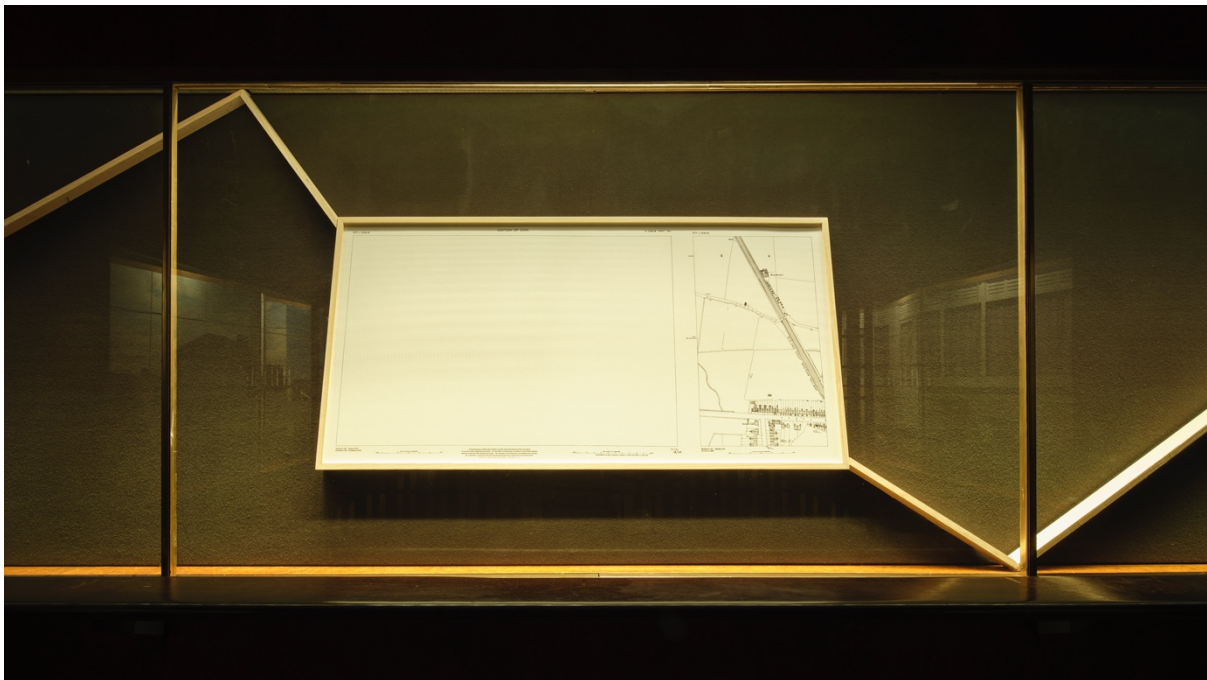


Figure 6.9: Installation view of Artwork 4. Source: Mandy O'Neill. Photograph by Ros Kavanagh, 2024.

In the opposite cabinet, further excerpts from *Dublin of the Future* are utilised which illustrate the notion of utopian planning and the dangers of piecemeal planning. Figure 6.9 shows a view of the completed Artwork 5 installed in the cabinet. On the left hand side is a facsimile of page 31, Plate XXV of *Dublin of the Future*, depicting a ‘Suggested Development of an area off Cabra Avenue as example of Suburban Housing; with types of houses’ (Abercrombie et al,

1922, p. 31). On the right-hand side is a quote from the former Chief Engineer of Dublin Port, Bindon Blood Stoney, decrying the outcomes of bad planning and the need for more careful consideration of how we plan (Figure 6.10).

Then prove we now with best endeavour, what from our efforts yet may spring; He justly is despised who never, Did thought to aid his labours bring. For this is art's true indication, When skill is minister to thought; When types that are the mind's creation, The hand to perfect form has wrought. (Bindon Blood Stoney, 1922).



Figure 6.10: Installation view of Artwork 5. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.

Both works are printed on a soft cream 'Bamboo' paper, an attempt to evoke a sense of the 'archival', with each work supported by a type of flat leporello structure made of lengths of ash wood. This structure echoes the standing accordion structures of Cabinet 1&2.

6.2.3 The Model Room

On leaving the Architectural Gallery, the viewer is then directed up the stone staircase, with a textual description of the exhibition installed on a large window as a guide. Coloured vinyl and pink LED lights attempt to set an atmosphere into which the audience is drawn. The viewer then enters the first of two large Georgian rooms, named the 'Model Room', referencing its use in the display of architectural models. A point of departure for artworks in the Model Room was a time-lapse photographic case study of the construction of Hamilton Gardens apartment

complex from 2020-2022, along with observation of additional sites of development. In tandem with this case study I also produced an archive of documentation featuring the everyday material fabric of Cabra. Images in the room are drawn from both of these observations, with the mode of photographing linking them together visually. The spatial layout of artworks in the Model Room, and the different scaling aimed to evoke my experience of walking in Cabra, with the viewer invited to move through and around the objects. Figure 6.11 shows a wide view of the elements, which when combined aim to create an experience/environment for the viewer. A series of ‘constellations’ were arranged in this room, as a way to reference the collision of past and present, and also the practice-based approaches employed throughout research process.



Figure 6.11: Installation view of ‘Model Room’. Source Mandy O’Neill. Photograph by Ros Kavanagh, 2024.

Constellation 1

Constellation 1 consists of a large timber panel with leg braces, which functions both spatially and as support for a photographic print which is mounted on plywood on the front, and a framed notebook containing a photograph on the back (Figure 6.12). The ‘monumental’ nature of the

structure situates it in the realm of sculpture in the traditional sense (acknowledging the wide definition of sculpture in contemporary art contexts), with the installation of photographic pieces allowing a 'singular idea' to be 'communicated simultaneously by an image and object' (Morse 2010, p. 31). The photographs depict scenes from Cabra building sites, while the structure emulates building processes and materials observed and photographed. Viewers are encouraged to stand back or move close, to move around and to engage in a tactile way with the entire installation, an experience quite different from looking at a two dimensional image on the wall.

The large photograph installed on the front of the panel depicts a building site on Kilkieran Road, Cabra. Dublin City Council are currently building 46 senior housing units at this site. The site was vacant for over a decade, after demolition of previous accommodation for senior citizens. Notions of the collective, community and social supports, are suggested through the use of this image. The panel structure itself serves as support for the photographic piece, with bricks from the IAA collection used as weights for stability. Using these bricks was also a way to integrate materials from the Archive into the exhibition. The photograph behind was taken at the periphery of the Hamilton Gardens building site, encompassing the natural environment and building/man-made materials. It evokes a space on the cusp of change, while also referencing the process of mark making (through coloured spray paint), which filters through the exhibition.



Figure 6.12: Constellation 1, Model Room. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.

Figure 5.22 shows a rear view of the panel structure with a facsimile of my Field Diary 5. Photographs in the diary were taken at various building sites in Cabra and show examples of the afore mentioned 'Formwork' in the shape of grids and beams. This reference is important in the research, having emerged at the beginning of the process and been explored throughout. I will expand upon this in the description of further artworks in this room.



Figure 6.13: Photograph of Hamilton Gardens building site. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2021.



Figure 6.14: Framed notebook with images of building sites, Constellation 1. Source: Mandy O'Neill.

Constellation 2

On the opposite side of Constellation 1 is a second arrangement of structure and images. Constellation 2 structurally replicates the first, with a large photographic image on the front,

framed notebook to the rear and smaller image against the wall (see Figure 5.23). The large frontal photograph depicts a section of the Hamilton Gardens building site, located at its entrance. A time-lapse series of this scene was made over the period from 2020-2022 (and featured in Chapter Three), with this image taken in 2020, as building was underway.



Figure 6.15: Constellation 2, Model Room. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.

The photograph positioned against the wall shows the façade of a Cabra house on Broombridge Road, with the original railing design which is ubiquitous throughout these schemes. The vertical structure of the railings references the verticality of steel girders, concrete and rebar in

the larger photograph. This subtle slippage is a feature with many of the artworks in this room, with recurring patterns and concepts in conversation with each other.

A facsimile of my Field Diary number five (FD5) is positioned on the back of the structure, an image of a large overgrow bush located on Fassagh Avenue. As with the building site, this bush was photographed and videoed multiple times, through different seasons, and as it was incrementally cut down. Further discussion on this repeat photography process is contained in Chapter Three. The purpose of including this particular field diary image in Constellation 2 was to reference the natural habitats which proliferate around and through the built environment and which also inform the experience of place. Figure 6.16 shows a view of the notebook on the rear of the structure. The framing system for these objects was not random, with the choice of timbers carefully considered in conversation with other materials in the exhibition. The ash wood framing and MDF background echo materials utilised in the cabinets downstairs, while the plywood on which the pieces are installed appears in different iterations throughout the exhibition.



Figure 6.16: Framed field diary, Constellation 2. Source: Mandy O'Neill.

The Custom Hoarding/Aftermath Render

One of the methods developed at an early stage of research (and previously mentioned) was the rendering of photographs into ‘drawings’ using the photoshop ‘find edges’ filter. The compulsion to do this was influenced by research into historical architectural drawings and plans. It was also noticing that changing the visual language from photography to drawing altered my view, as different elements became more prominent despite the content being ostensibly the same. A participant in one of my exhibition tours commented on the ‘precision’ of these images. The photographs from which the drawings are extracted depict the Hamilton Gardens apartment complex rising between the Corporation houses on Carnlough Road (Figure 6.17). In offering a view of the development from this vantage point, I am aiming to subvert somewhat the architectural render, which will always show the development to its best advantage. These images aim to show the other side.

For the large installation/sculptural piece situated in the middle of the room, I took the rendering a step further, going from photograph to drawing to stencil to spray painting. The stencil was created by graphic designer Niall McCormack, from the rendered drawings of my photographs. The photographs on which the stencil is based can be viewed in Figure 6.18.



Figure 6.17: Photographs of Hamilton Gardens on Carnlough Road. Source: Mandy O’Neill 2023.

The stencil was then used by artist Cian Walker to spray paint the image onto a series of plywood sheets. These painted sheets were attached to timber grid panels, and arranged in a leporello type shape in the Model Room (see Figure 6.19). The artwork plays on the idea of the building site hoarding, which often displays speculative renderings of future buildings and lifestyles. Rather than speculative, my painted rendering aims to be reflective, showing a view

of the finished Hamilton Gardens, as seen between the existing housing. A type of ‘aftermath’ image.

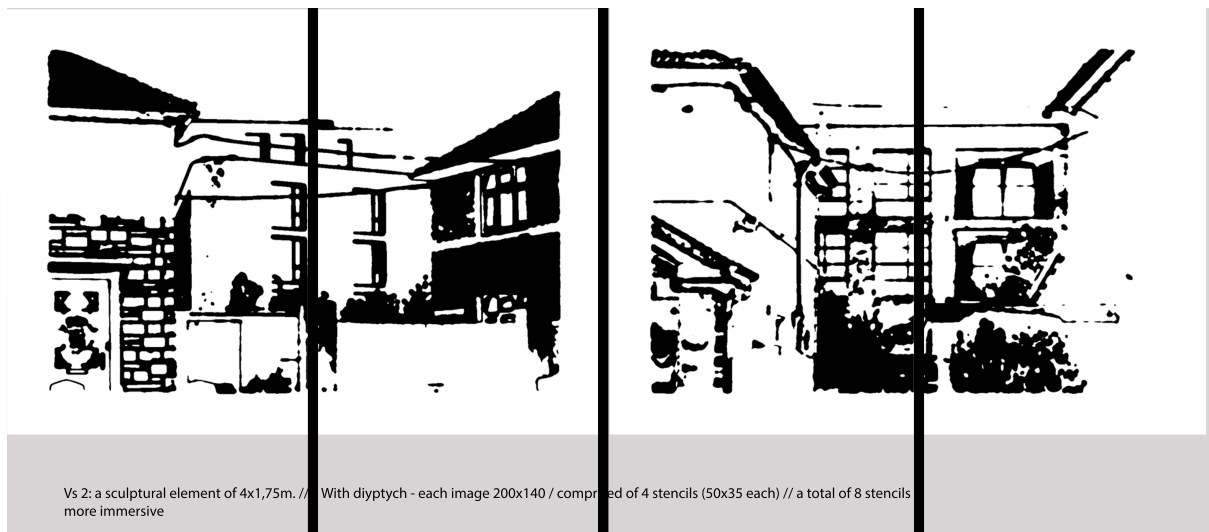


Figure 6.18: Stencil for sculptural piece: Source: Niall McCormack, 2024.



Figure 6.19: Sculptural piece: Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.

Birch plywood and 3 x 1.5 inch timber lengths were used to construct this sculptural piece with the paint colour specifically chosen to compliment the exhibition palette. Positioning of this

artwork in the room was important in the creation of a spatial experience for the viewer, as was the positioning of all of the artworks. Seeing through and over the different pieces aims to emulate the experience of my walking through the Cabra landscape, encountering particular views.

The piece is held together by a series of grid ‘stud’ walls, with wooden braces securing the structure in place, as in Figure 6.20. Installed within the grid is a facsimile of my Field Diary (FD3 & 4) containing photographs of building activity at the Ratoath overbridge, Cabra (now the completed 8th Lock Royal Canal apartment complex). Grid patterns in the photographs are echoed in the timber grid, which also references the window grids of the room. A close up image of the framed field diary can be viewed in Figure 6.21.



Figure 6.20: Installation view, Model Room. Source: Mandy O’Neill. Photograph by Ros Kavanagh, 2024.



Figure 6.21: Framed field diary. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.

In addition to the framed field diary, two digital tablets are installed on the timer grid, showing two short videos. Video 2 depicts a crane at the Kilkieran Road building site, from which a large flock of birds takes off. It represents the notion of dwelling, habitat, and the convergence of the man-made and natural environment. Video 3 shows a series of trees that I was draw to record regularly throughout the research period.



Figure 6.22: Video 2 installation view, Model Room. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.



Figure 6.23: Video 3 stills. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.



Figure 6.24: Framed field diary. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.

Figure 6.24 shows an installation image of another framed piece containing a field diary, 'sunprint' and paper leporello, displayed on a mantelpiece in the Model Room. The field diary describes Hamilton Gardens and the history of the land on which it now stands, with the leporello showing a time-lapse view of the development from Carnlough Road. The pink 'sunprint' was also created over time, through the effect of sunlight on paper. Combined, these elements speak to the concepts of time and building, and to the material processes of my research.

6.2.4 The 'Meeting' Room

The function of the final room in the exhibition is to look to the future, to offer a space for thinking about potential and the possibilities of planning. A large timber platform was constructed which conceptually references the concept of 'giving a platform', of empty spaces of potential, of a tabula rasa. It also serves as a different type of support structure for images, again keeping them off the wall. The notion of 'coming to the table' is also referenced through the platform, and echoes the workshops I conducted with Cabra residents, where photographs were placed on tables and each individual contributed their thoughts. In future iterations of this structure I would like to find a way to activate the platform throughout an exhibition. Two

‘skeleton’ grids are placed on the platform. These are again referencing the grids throughout the exhibition, but this time removing the frames, an ‘unfinished’ piece onto which ideas and dreams might be projected. Figure 6.25 shows a view of the platform, grids and photographic prints.



Figure 6.25: Installation view. Meeting Room. Source: Mandy O’Neill, 2024.

The starting point for this room was a time-based case study of the Fassaugh House (Matts of Cabra) public house, as outlined in Chapter Four. Research into Matts of Cabra revealed an interesting story of planning and dereliction beginning in 2011, with planning issues still ongoing. Rapid changes to the building which took place from 2021-2022 (multiple fires, the arrival of a ‘farmers market’, painted façade, a dumping ground) made for a visually dynamic interaction with the building in terms of photography. A selection of these images was presented on the platform, as seen in Figure 6.25.

In November 2022, as noted above, I conducted a workshop with the Cabra History Group, where I shared photographs of Matts of Cabra, and a round table discussion took place related to memories and thoughts of the pub. There was a lot of negative feedback in terms of the current state of the pub as an eyesore and anti-social space, but also lots of wonderful memories. We discussed the idea of this land as a site of potential and consensus was that the group would

like to see a new public house or community gathering space on the site. I was somewhat surprised by this, thinking that housing was the foremost concern, and this instigated further thinking around public/private space, ownership and the politics of space.

An image of the railway line adjacent the vacant site is presented at the front side of the platform. The purpose of including this image, pictured in Figure 6.26, is to suggest again this notion of possibility, of horizons and what could be, with the added layer that Irish Rail is currently restricting building at the site.



Figure 6.26: Photograph of railway at Fassaugh Avenue Bridge. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2021.

Another framed field diary is placed on the mantelpiece in the Meeting Room. Again the background is drawn from a series of sun-prints created on studio residency at TBG&S. Text describes 'my first official photo-walk' and I note world events going on at the time, commenting on the US presidential election of 2020. The overall piece seeks to indicate the circular and iterative nature of my research, harking back to where it started in 2020 and positioned in the final room of the exhibition.



Figure 6.27: Framed field diary. Meeting Room. Source: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.

6.3 Colour, light, and the installation photograph

Many visitors to the exhibition commented on the colour choices, particularly the use of the colour pink. Colour interventions have formed part of my practice as far back as 2014, when I began working in schools. The uniformity of these environments resulted in an often monotonous colour palette, and to counter this I began to introduce my own colour choices in the form of painted backgrounds. It was and is an instinctual process which carried through my practice of the past decade. I also use colour to create atmosphere and add to the experiential nature of my exhibitions. In *Best Laid Plans* this extended to the use of pink lighting, which attempted to create a particular visual experience for the viewer, and which also altered the artefacts themselves depending on how they interacted with the shifting natural light in the upstairs rooms. Installation photographs were able to capture some of this interaction and serve as another layer of the exhibition. The multiple lighting sources in the upstairs rooms, while not always ideal, meant that the exhibition view and atmosphere shifted throughout the day, depending on the time and weather. Interaction of different lighting sources with the timber constructions produced interesting effects which I will explore further for future iterations of the work.

6.4 Conclusion

The focus of Chapter Six was the exhibition *Best Laid Plans*, and the artefacts presented as the practice component of my PhD research. This chapter took the form of a ‘walk through’ of the exhibition, describing conceptual and formal aspects of the artefacts, along with their construction. It began by moving through the Foyer area, which set the scene for the exhibition by presenting a series of methods (video and construction) and materials (photograph, timber, brick and sun-print). A fold-out publication was exhibited on the timber platform, offering an expanded textual context of the exhibition, and which also folded out into an artwork. The chapter then describes artefacts contained in the Architectural Gallery, with a focus on the experiential nature of this space. The large leporello structures and sound piece were particularly affective in this space. Geo-historical research is also referenced in the Architectural Gallery in the ‘map’ and ‘plan’ artworks, which have drawn on the Dublin of the Future 1922 planning document and historical maps of the Cabra area. The purpose of these works was to indicate the importance of appropriate planning, but also the perennial nature of ‘piecemeal’ planning in the Irish context. This is evidenced in the textual interventions, which were written over a century ago but have similar resonance today.

Following this, the chapter goes on to describe the artefacts and modular support system exhibited in the upstairs rooms, known as the ‘Model Room’ and ‘Meeting Room’. Scale and spatial arrangement were key to the curation of works in these rooms, as was the choice of materials. Works were supported by a series of timber panels braces, arranged vertically and horizontally, which grid structures emulated building processes observed in my photographic documentation of Cabra building sites. These grids also respond site specifically to the Irish Architectural Archive building, referencing both the large window grids and the screen grids situated in the Architectural Gallery. Artefacts are incorporated into modular system, and placed at different heights, requiring the viewer to move around and look in multiple directions, creating a dynamic experience. The large timber platform also creates a spatial dynamic, with site specific considerations relating to the scale of the room and use of space.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This thesis has provided an overview of my practice-based PhD research, and the development of a photo-sculptural, embodied response to spatial and social transformation, through a study of housing led development in Cabra, Dublin 7. The main rationale for the research was the identification of transformation happening in the built environment of Cabra, which dovetailed with new directions in my practice. The largest housing development in Cabra history since the 1930s and 1940s was underway and there was an imperative to document this change. I recognised that practice based methods could contribute towards understanding the shifting spatial environment, and that my practice itself could be deepened and expanded through this process. In approaching the PhD, I have sought to address a series of research questions, with several aims and objectives. I begin this concluding chapter by recapping on the main research questions and attempting to provide some answers, while examining how my aims and objectives have been achieved. This is followed by a discussion on my contribution to the field and a reflection on the overall research process. I conclude with suggestions for future directions and a reflection on the limitations of my research.

Addressing the Research Questions, Aims and Objectives

- Research question: How effective can interdisciplinary, photography-based art practice be, as a way to open dialogue on the topic of housing-led development, and its potential impacts on lived experience?
- Aim/Objective: To produce a series of artefacts and develop methods of public engagement, which aim to enhance understanding, and stimulate reflection on the lived experience of housing -led development.

My photography-based, interdisciplinary approach to addressing the topic of housing-led development, and its potential impacts on lived experience, was highly effective. I base this on several observations – public interaction with and discussion around the exhibition *Best Laid Plans*, community engagement in the form of photo-elicitation workshops, book-making and dialogue, the effective utilisation of time-lapse photographs of development and dereliction to engage in discussion with Cabra residents, and the ability of photography to facilitate the geographic imagining of place, among multiple groups.

Regarding the exhibition, the interdisciplinary nature of the research, has resulted in a wide and varied audience across disciplines, including photography, art, history, geography and architecture. The exhibition period included Culture Night (20th September 2024), Open House Dublin: Festival of Architecture (11th-19th October 2024) and the Dublin Festival of History (27th September – 13th October 2024), with attendance estimated at 2,200. I gave multiple tours of the exhibition, including a photography group from IADT, a Geography group from Trinity College Dublin, with visitors from Capetown and Vienna, an MA Architecture group from TU Dublin, and a cross disciplinary group from DCU. I note that the photography and architecture groups are particularly responsive to modes of display, examining the exhibition as a way to think about their own practice and prospective presentations. The geography group were focused on the topic of social housing, with the tour forming part of a day long workshop at TCD. I found they were particularly responsive to the large scale leporello/photo constructions in the Architecture Gallery, with several participants commenting on the ‘elevation’ of social housing represented by these sculptural works. The monumental nature of these pieces was remarked upon by multiple groups and speaks to the resonance of the artefacts with the audience. The time-lapse elements also resonated with the geography group, with one participant commenting on the effectiveness of the photo-drawings in drawing attention to the visual impact of development.

Tracy (2010, p.844) uses the term ‘resonance’ to reference ‘research’s ability to meaningfully reverberate and affect an audience’. The immersive experience of the installation in the Architecture Gallery was considered particularly moving, particularly the sound piece which triggered memories and emotions. Conversations and presentations about housing and development have become so ubiquitous in the public sphere, it can be difficult to engage an audience. The non-didactic but affective installation of artefacts in the Architecture Gallery, I suggest, were successful due to their somatic nature and their imaginative capacity. One Cabra resident described the combination of works in this space as ‘surprisingly poignant’, evoking ‘nostalgic memories’ and as a ‘beautiful and powerfully evocative exhibition’. Aesthetic merit is a key element when it comes to resonance, along with ‘narratives that are vivid, engaging, and structurally complex (Bochner, 2000). Transferability is another aspect of resonance, where the topic of the research overlaps with the viewers own experience (Tracy, 2010, p.845). *Best Laid Plans* as a whole offered a multi layered and rich aesthetic experience for the viewer, as evidenced by the many public responses throughout the three-month exhibition.

The process of public engagement throughout the research was equally instrumental in encouraging dialogue on the topic of housing-led development and its possible impacts. This involved a series of photo-elicitation workshops with the Cabra History Group on the topics of development and dereliction. Photo-elicitation has been utilised widely in qualitative research and the social sciences, and often involves participant photography. My approach involved a sustained engagement with the Cabra History Group, using my photographs of Cabra as prompts in discussions on the changing built environment of the area. Time-lapse photographs of Cabra sites were used to encourage discussion on the possible lived experience of spatial transformation, and also to glean what type of change residents would like to see. Individual interviews were carried out with residents living adjacent to the Hamilton Gardens site, again using my photographs to generate dialogue.

I then added another dimension in the form of a ‘leporello’ book-making workshop, where participants constructed small accordion structures, using my photographs but personalising them through collage, text and mark-making. The ‘meditative’ quality of this workshop was commented upon by participants, with the process of making encouraging memories and thoughts about the lived experience of the built environment. The Cabra History Group were also invited to visit my artist studio at TBG&S and to view *Best Laid Plans* at the Irish Architectural Archive. Through this engagement I have found the long-term, incremental engagement with the group, and involving them at various points in the research is an effectively authentic way to work with a community as a practitioner. Dublin City University, in line with wider European initiatives advocates for Engaged Research strategies that involve research ‘with’ rather than ‘about’ communities. In relation to ‘creative’ practice it aims to ‘identify societal challenges, sharing expertise and research methodologies, disseminating knowledge in a diverse transdisciplinary manner’ (DCU 2024). I would suggest that my discursive engagement with the Cabra History Group, and the multiple methods of making, looking, discussion and moving through the spaces of the studio and exhibition make for a rich experience for both participant and researcher.

In terms of ethics, I have endeavoured to conduct the research in a respectful way that involves participants at various stages of the research in an inclusive and non-hierarchical way. Research is conducted *with* rather than necessarily *about* people, following the tenants of Engaged Research. In this way, my main group of participants (the Cabra History Group) felt part of the

research process and were therefore more invested in the outcome and results, which they deemed very successful.

- Research question: In what way can my practice-based research contribute to the field of expanded photography practice, with a particular focus on material thinking, conditions and acts of making?
- Aim/Objective: To challenge, deepen and accelerate my practice, through an iterative process which reveals valuable tacit knowledge as a contribution to the field of photography/art-based practice.

The reflexive process of research and making throughout the PhD has exponentially expanded and deepened my practice, while making a significant contribution to the field. This is evident in the descriptions of the exhibition, and also in the outlining of artistic processes contained in this thesis. In addressing the research question and aim/objective above, the following section provides an overview of outcomes and knowledge gleaned through making, material engagement and re-evaluation of my photographic practice.

In attempting to challenge and deepen practice, one of my goals was to develop more fluid photographic methodologies, and through experimentation with technologies and multiple photographic approaches I have developed a new multi-stranded methodology, with instinct as a guiding feature. On reflection, I now identify photography as a set of practices, or 'photographies' which are always in flux, with intention as a deciding factor (Elkins 2018, p. xix). Allowing myself to work with a camera phone in the first instance, embracing the impulsive act of photographing, and making small videos all contributed towards freeing and loosening up my practice. For many professional photographers, concerns about quality, equipment, and accepted photographic conventions can result in self-restriction, and this is something I identify in my previous work. This new multi-stranded approach to photography will inform my future photography-based practice.

Another practice inquiry I addressed in my research was the shift in my work from primarily portraiture and documentary, to a more, responsive hybrid practice. I began to explore this through an overview of Irish photography practice which included examples of my own previous work, before testing a series of photographic approaches in relation to the

representation of people. The desire to photograph people has always been a strong motivation in my practice, and I had in the early stages of research considered a series of portraits. I was aware, as is outlined in Chapter 2, of a prevailing trend in Irish photography (including my own) for the ‘environmental’ portrait, but I felt would give a somewhat reductive representation of Cabra. I did however still have the urge to photograph people who were emersed in the everyday ‘lifeworld’ of the area. Drawing on various ‘street photography’ methods, I made several series of photographs depicting people moving through or working in the landscape. Many of these images were of children and elderly people. Viewing the images afterwards I identified a vulnerability, particularly in the photographs of elderly people. There was also the fact that most of them were photographed from behind which lent the images a furtive quality I wasn’t entirely comfortable with. I did not feel the same about images of people working or building, as there seemed to be a certain dignity in that. What I found in effect was that it wasn’t necessarily that I no longer wanted to photograph people, but that it was who and how I photographed. It was the representation of vulnerability and the power balance involved. While I identified the beginnings of this shift in my engagement with teenagers in DEIS schools, these ‘street photography’ experiments clarified for me that my quandary here was an ethical one, and one that reverberates across my practice as a whole. This also reflected my sensitivity to representations of class, and my choices to exclude particular types of imagery in this research project.

The importance of ‘environment’ and the conditions of making, also emerged as important factors. While much photography theory has considered the content of the photograph, or the photographic object, less attention has been paid to the conditions and acts of making photographs. The instinctual approach I took to walking and photographing in Cabra was highly cognisant of light and weather conditions, and I chose to photograph primarily on bright, sunny days with blue skies. It is notable that I had no desire to photograph on dark or cloudy days. The shaping of the material environment by sunlight, along with the interaction of sun and colour were driving forces in my desire to photograph under these conditions. In retrospect, I can identify a sculptural impulse engendered by this shaping of the environment, where ‘readymade’ temporary sculptures appear and are captured by my camera, before disappearing. I can now see that my sculptural impulses are captured in the first instance by the camera, which plants the seed for the manifestation of sculptural works in other materials.

Consideration of environment extends to the working space of the studio, where material thinking and material engagement take place in the processes of making. It is notable that my PhD research has been supported by a series of artist studio residencies, and that this has been highly influential to the process of making and thinking through materials. The studio is another environment, within which material experiments are carried out. It can also facilitate a type of world making, or the creation of atmosphere, which aids in imagining possibilities for artefacts and their presentation in exhibitions. Working in these studio spaces throughout the research period has expanded my practice and allowed for its development into a more installation-based endeavour. My examination of studio practice and processes as outlined in Chapter Five has added to the progression and deepening of my practice, while contributing valuable tacit knowledge to the field of practice-based research.

Direct engagement with new materials, including timber, paint, paper types, along with new methods of construction have further expanded the possibilities for my practice. Close collaboration with the carpenter has enlightened me on the material qualities of timber, principles of construction, and practicalities of choosing particular materials. There was also the somatic experience of living with the evolving timber constructions that were made in my living space, the sounds, smells and residue were part of my everyday existence. The process of engaging with every step of construction, from choice of materials, to planning and design, making prototypes and testing, up to the final object, had been invaluable to my understanding of making. Having gleaned this hands-on knowledge I can now move into the next phase of my practice with the foresight of knowing how to work with these materials. I see this as a big step forward. Throughout the research process, I experienced frustration based on my lack of construction skills or sculptural techniques. Working with materials and construction in the final months of the research has given me skills and understanding I did not have before, which I can now utilise for further practice.

In terms of my contribution to expanded photography practice, in the first instance I suggest that the interdisciplinary nature of the work, the interweaving of photography, geography, architecture and history, along with the construction and combination of materials, offers a novel contribution in itself. Additionally, the site specific nature of the installations in the exhibition, the decisions to subvert the conventions of photographic display, to offer the viewer a spatialised experience and take risks, resulted in a dynamic and affective interaction for the audience. There was also a questioning of the relationship between the photographer and the

usual support systems engaged in exhibition making – as in the printer and framer. While I did utilise these supports for certain aspects, I also constructed large and small scale works myself, using non-photographic paper and non-precious mounting materials, in an effort to retain as much autonomy as possible. This was a challenge to perceived modes of exhibition making, particularly in relation to photography. The experience of viewing the exhibition, the resulting documentation and the overview provided by this thesis and accompanying material provides a valuable cross-disciplinary contribution, with scope for further development.

Future directions

Future directions relate to both the knowledge and learning gained through production of the artefacts for exhibition, and the wide breath of material gathered throughout the research. For any exhibition, choices have to be made about what to include and what to leave out. *Best Laid Plans* was a particular interpretation of my Practice based PhD research, with site specific considerations. Decisions were made to focus on the experiential and affect as a way to encourage discussion and thought about the themes of housing and planning. The formal manifestations of the work in *Best Laid Plans* served as a way for me to push and deepen my practice and to explore my new interest in material engagement. There were/are many other possible iterations. With this in mind I am currently analysing and rethinking the exhibition and artefacts, towards another solo exhibition at Ballina Arts Centre in September 2025. For this exhibition I will rework some of the artefacts while drawing on the new methods developed, to response site specifically to the Ballina exhibition space. I will also engage with residents in Ballina, utilising some of the people engagement strategies developed through the PhD.

I am also planning to create a type of edited dossier of photographic documentation of Cabra, as a resource for future researchers, to be held in the Irish Architectural Archive and Cabra Library. Documentation of Cabra housing and the unique time lapse imagery of development from 2020-2024 may be of value geo-historically, and also as a visual record of the Dublin inner suburbs. Ruth Mc Manus (2018, p. 9) suggests that: ‘The suburb is relatively under-researched in Ireland, despite its ubiquity’ with Smith and Workman (2018, p. 1) stating that: ‘relatively little has been written on the suburbs in Irish literature and Visual Arts’. While this PhD research is not focused on the suburb as such, nor on the concept of ‘suburbia’, it does

add to a body of research in this area, with scope for further development and dissemination of my work.

Abbott (2004) describes research as ‘heuristically significant’ when it develops a curiosity in the reader and helps inspire new discoveries. The heuristic significance of the research lies, to a certain degree, in the future scope of the artefacts, the methods developed, and the wide range of photographic data gathered, which can be mined for future projects. Valuable data was gathered through sound recordings of interviews and workshops, which could be mined as research for my future projects. There is also the prospect of interdisciplinary uses of my research. For example, Dr Cian O’Callaghan, Associate Professor in Urban Geography at TCD has expressed interest in discussing my research methods with geography students, in relation to the topic of Urban Vacancy. I have also engaged with Dr Brian Ward of TUD Architecture, where there is scope for further engagement with my research.

Best Laid Plans has been utilised by multiple student groups across the disciplines of photography, art, architecture and geography, in addition to inspiring a series of workshops for primary schools at the exhibition venue. Photography students have used the exhibition as material for Visual Methodologies college assignments. Heuristic research is also research which is transferable to other settings. For example, the invitation to discuss my research with TCD geography students, or with housing experts, offers new ways of expansion and further avenues of discussion. I have also been approached by the group *Cabra Connects*, to develop an iteration of the exhibition for a presentation in Cabra. Additionally, the exhibition has generated ideas as to how the topic of housing and planning might be addressed in other locations, specifically Ballina, Co. Mayo, where another solo exhibition will take place in September 2025.

Limitations of the research

One premise of the research was to identify the impact of new developments on residents in Cabra, particularly those living in proximity to Hamilton Gardens. While I was able to interview some residents, and conduct a series of workshops, I acknowledge that these residents are only a small selection, and that a wider study might glean different results.

I also acknowledge a series of experiments with artefacts for the exhibition, which attempted to include more of the voices of Cabra residents, simply did not work and were not included. One example was a music recording of children from Gailscoil Bharra Primary school which I had planned to include in the final room of the exhibition, as representative of possibilities for future generations. While the sentiment was correct, I judged that the recording of children singing might have different connotations than intended and therefore did not include it. An alternative to this was developed through a speculative prose piece related to housing development, which would be shown on a scrolling digital screen. On testing this in the exhibition, I deemed the text work to be somewhat confusing and not honed enough and it was also removed. This is something to revisit in further iterations of the work.

In terms of including the voices of others, what I did find successful was the public engagement and discussion ignited in the exhibition tours, with questions and comments often delivered at the platform as a type of impromptu 'round table'. This activation of the artefacts through dialogue is something I would like to develop in future showings of the work and in my practice as a whole. Including participants in different stages of the research process has also emerged as a worthwhile endeavour and something I will expand upon in the future.

In terms of the exhibition, there were attempts to create a more immersive experience in the main hallway and up the stairs. Extensive research was conducted into using transparent materials on the windows and doors, which would interact with sunlight to affect the atmosphere in this area. Budget constraints resulted in the use of non-transparent pink vinyl's and lighting instead.

The Irish Architectural Archive is a very distinctive venue, with multiple activities taking place throughout the run of the exhibition. It is also a functional research library. The foyer and hallway areas contain objects which are not movable, and which sometimes clash with the artworks. This was a factor which was out of my control. However the multi-use nature of the building resulted in a very wide demographic in terms of audience, which outweighed any disadvantage.

Appendices

Appendix 1: *Best Laid Plans* exhibition, installation photographs.

Photo Credits: Mandy O’Neill, Ros Kavanagh and Evanna Devine.



Installation photograph 1: Platform, video and exhibition materials. Foyer of Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Mandy O’Neill, 2024.



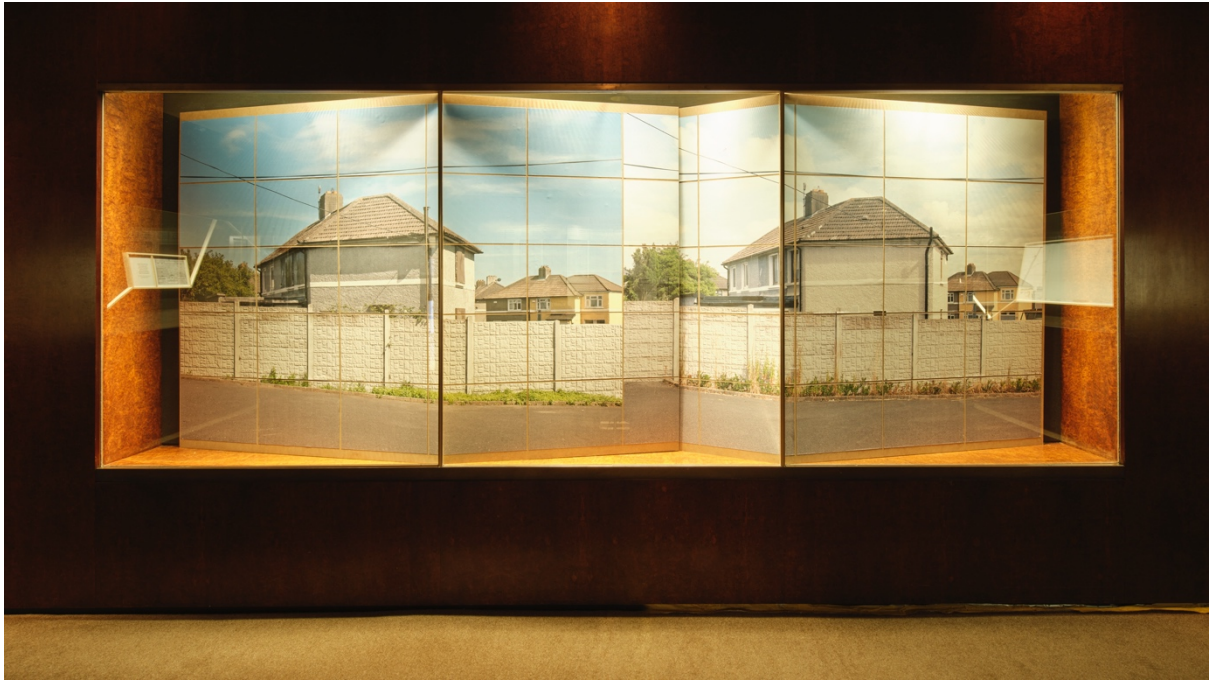
Installation photograph 2 :*Best Laid Plans* publication. Foyer of Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Mandy O’Neill, 2024.



Installation photograph 3: Combination of works in Architectural Gallery, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Ros Kavanagh, 2024.



Installation photograph 4: Combination of works in Architectural Gallery, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Ros Kavanagh, 2024.



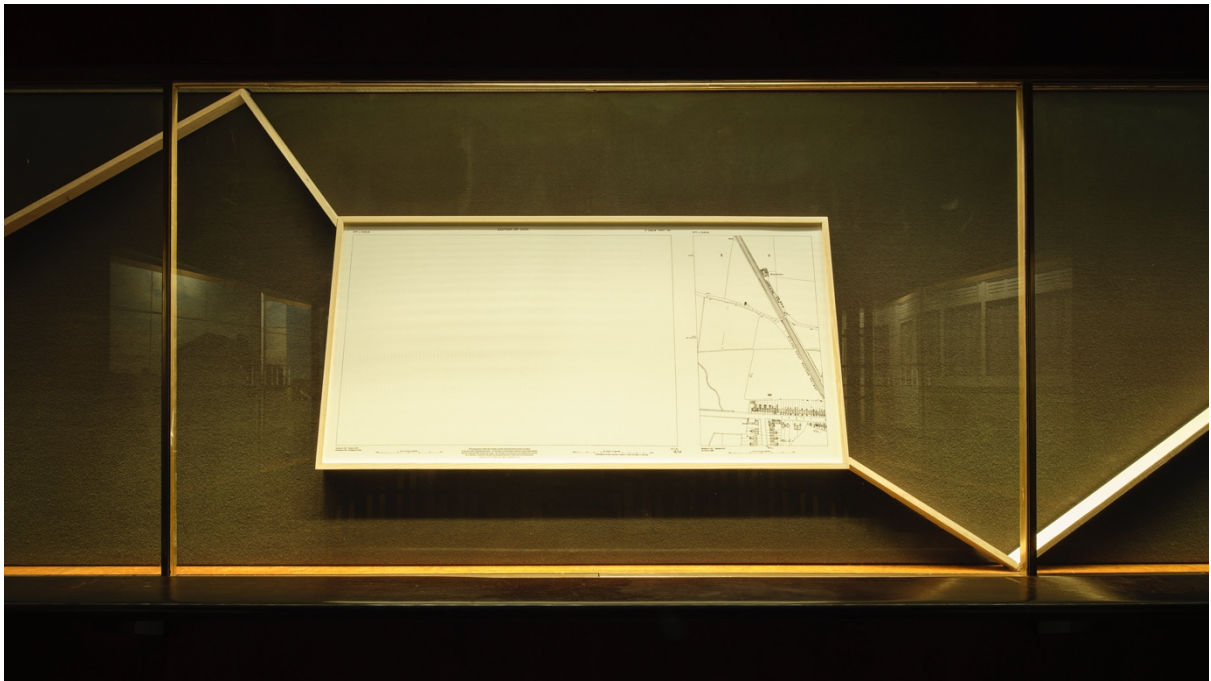
Installation photograph 5: Housing leporello, Architectural Gallery, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Ros Kavanagh, 2024.



Installation photograph 6: Housing leporello, Architectural Gallery, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Ros Kavanagh, 2024.



Installation photograph 7: *Dublin of the Future* plan artwork, Architectural Gallery, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Ros Kavanagh, 2024.



Installation photograph 8: Speculative map artwork, Architectural Gallery, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Ros Kavanagh, 2024.



Installation photograph 9: Sound piece and sculptural structure, Architectural Gallery, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Ros Kavanagh, 2024.



Installation photograph 10: Vinyl's and text, stairs and landing, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Ros Kavanagh, 2024.



Installation photograph 11: Timber grid construction with videos and framed notebook, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Ros Kavanagh, 2024.



Installation photograph 12: Close up of Timber grid and framed notebook, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.



Installation photograph 13: Painted sculptural time leprello, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.



Installation photograph 14: Framed notebook with sun-print and leprello, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Ros Kavanagh, 2024.



Installation photograph 15: Mounted photograph of Cabra housing, with timber, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.



Installation photograph 16: Photograph of Cabra housing, on horizontal timber grid, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.



Installation photograph 17: Constellation of mounted photographs, notebook and modular timber construction, Irish Architectural Archive.
Photo credit: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.



Installation photograph 18: Constellation of mounted photographs, notebook and modular timber construction, Irish Architectural Archive.
Photo credit: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.



Installation photograph 19: Photograph of Hamilton Gardens site hoarding, with horizontal timber support, Irish Architectural Archive.
Photo credit: Mandy O'Neill, 2024



Installation photograph 20: Photograph of 8th Lock Royal Canal site, with horizontal timber support, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Mandy O'Neill, 2024



Installation photograph 21: Photograph of Cabra housing with timber slip, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Mandy O'Neill, 2024



Installation photograph 22: Photograph of framed notebook, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Mandy O'Neill, 2024



Installation photograph 22: Photograph of video, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.



Installation photograph 23: Photograph of Platform, grid structure and photographic prints, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.



Installation photograph 24: Detail of Platform, and photographic prints, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.



Installation photograph 25: Detail of Matts of Cabra public house, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.



Installation photograph 25: Detail of Matts of Cabra public house with painter, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Mandy O'Neill, 2024.



Installation photograph 26: Audience engagement with *Best Laid Plans*, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Evanna Devine.



Installation photograph 27: Audience engagement with *Best Laid Plans*, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Evanna Devine.



Installation photograph 28: Audience engagement with *Best Laid Plans*, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Evanna Devine.



Installation photograph 29: Audience engagement with *Best Laid Plans*, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Evanna Devine.

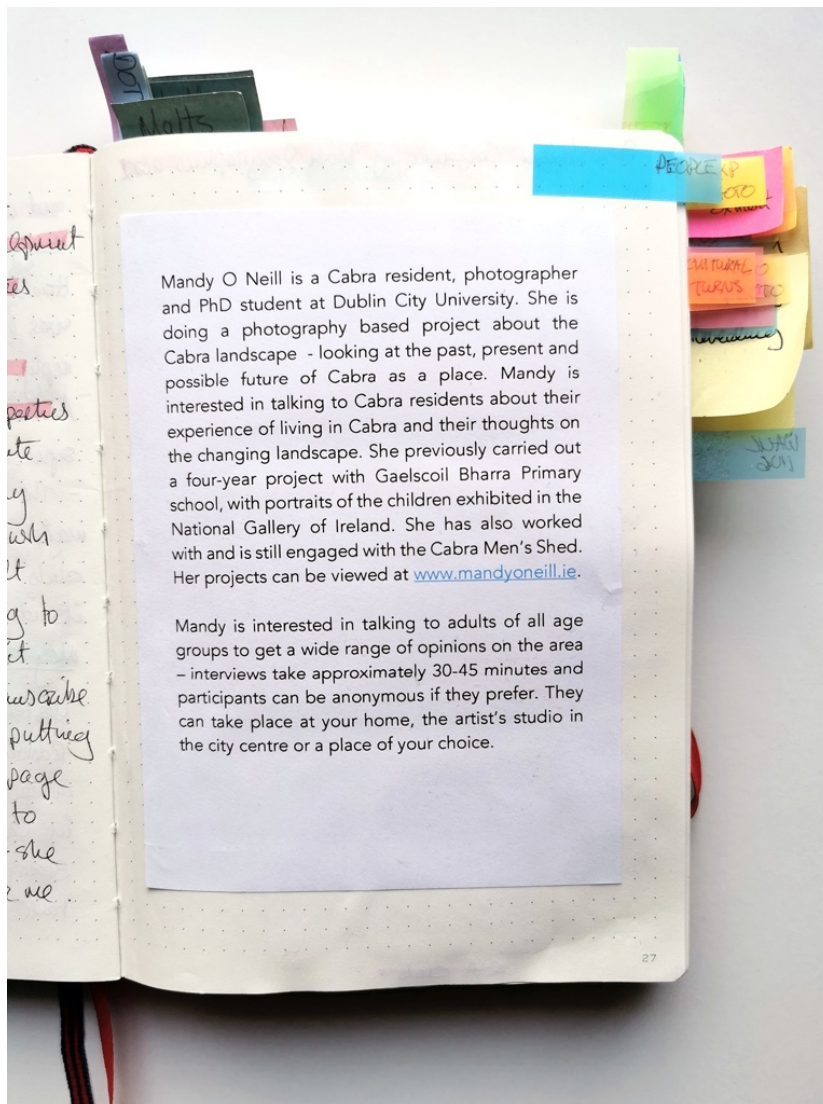


Installation photograph 30: Audience engagement with *Best Laid Plans*, Irish Architectural Archive. Photo credit: Evanna Devine.

Appendix 2: Field Diary Interviews

1. Jamin Keogh, Photographer 20th August 2021, FD1, pp. 216-218.
2. Nicky Keogh, Cabra Historian, Walking Based Interview 16th June 2021, FD1, pp. 126-128.
3. Sharon Murphy, Curator, 10th June, 2021, FD1, pp. 154-155.
4. Fiona Loughran, Cabra resident, Walking Based Interview, June 18th, 2021, FD1, p. 166.
5. Shane Lynam, Photographer, 18th June, 2021. FD1 p. 167.
6. Shane Lynam, Photographer, 15th January, 2024. FD6 p. 152-153.
7. Paul O'Farrell, Cabra Development Officer, July 13th, 2021, FD1, pp. 185-188.
8. Silvia Loeffler, Artist, 21st August 2021, FDI, pp. 219-220.
9. Neidin, Cabra resident, 30th August 2021, FD1, pp. 221-222.
10. Bradley, GSB teacher, 31st August 2021, FD1, pp. 225-227.
11. Michael Hill, Curator, 15th September 2021, FD1, pp. 235-236.
12. Paul O'Farrell, Cabra Development Officer, 21st September. FD1, p.240.
13. Mark Curran, Photographer, 30th September 2021. FD1, pp. 246-247.
14. Irene, Cabra resident, 1st June, 2022. FD3-4, pp. 62-63.
15. Paul O'Farrell, Cabra Development Officer, 13th October 2022. FD3-4. pp. 94-95.
16. Jan McCullough, Artist, 22nd October, 2021. FD2, pp. 22-23.
17. Bradley, GSB teacher, 25th November, 2021. FD2, pp. 46.
18. Paul O'Farrell, Cabra Development Officer, 21st January 2022. FD2, pp. 114-115.
19. Paul O'Farrell, Cabra Development Officer, 2nd February 2022. FD2, pp. 142-143.
20. Aedh Eangach, Deputy Principal, 17th February 2022. FD2, p.156.
21. Margarita Cappock, Curator and Writer, 8th April 2022. FD2, p.194.
22. Anthony Haughey, Artist, 4th May 2022. FD2, pp.250-251.
23. Ciaran Perry, Independent TD (TBGS), 19th September 2023, FD6. pp. 61-62.
24. Roisin White, Artist (TBG&S), 11th January 2024, FD6, pp. 148-150.
25. Dr Daithi Downey, Head of Housing Policy, Dublin City Council 1st March 2023. FD5, p. 26.
26. Helen Carey, Curator (FSAS), March 28th 2023. FD5, p. 84.
27. Fiona Loughnan, Lecturer, NCAD, 13th May 2023. FD5, p. 151.
28. Trish Lambe, Director PhotoMuseum Ireland, 30th January 2024. FD6, pp. 156-162.
29. Dr Orla Fitzpatrick, Writer and Photographic Historian, 14th February 2024. FD6, pp. 167-168.
30. Simona Castelli, Grafton Architects, 10th June 2024. FD6, pp. 249-250.
31. Des Twomey, Plus Architecture Dublin.
32. Sara Greavu, Curator of Visual Arts, Project Arts Centre, 29th June 2022. FD3, pp. 80-82.
33. Neasa Hourihan, Green Party TD (FSAS), 11th October 2022. FD4, pp.85-88
34. Dr Cian O'Callaghan, Associate Professor in Urban Geography, Trinity College Dublin. FD3, pp.148-150.
35. Bernard Neary, Cabra Historian and Writer, 26th July 2022. FD3, p.98.
36. Sharon Murphy, Curator, 26th July 2022. FD3, pp. 100-101.
37. Niall McCormack, Graphic Designer, 16th August, 2022. FD3, pp.140-141.
38. Dr Brian Ward, lecturer, BA Architecture, Technological University Dublin.
39. Ety Fulham, Cabra resident, 20th February 2023. FD4.

Appendix 3: Facebook call out



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Link to further documentation of exhibition *Best Laid Plans*.

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