



History, as E.H. Carr said, is a great “moving procession”. We can’t look down on it from a great height. We look from within our own part of the procession, a distinct piece of history. The point at which we find ourselves in this procession determines our view of the world: past, present, and future.

This study questions the methods through which architectural history is produced, and how history itself can be practiced. It situates itself alongside practitioners, practices, and theorists of architecture and architectural history in the expanded field. It is interested in site-specific practices of reading and writing, and interrogating other ways of understanding architectural history. It asks what this way of working adds that a traditional history may not, developing a form of architectural history that considers how method can be derived from site, and method can be considered as site.

Here, the focus is the Irish border, which runs 310 miles from Lough Foyle to the Irish Sea. The border has divided the six counties of Northern Ireland from what is now the Republic since 1921. In the late 1980s, following the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement,

writer Colm Tóibín walked the length of the border from Derry to Carlingford Lough. The documentation of this journey became his book *Bad Blood: A Walk Along The Irish Border*.

30 years later I am undertaking the same journey, taking Tóibín’s book as a map and retracing his route, walking the border each year for the next five years in order to understand its architectural, cultural, political, and poetic implications. The project questions how sites (architectures and landscapes) of the Irish border tell the story of its past and present condition, and is due to begin in Summer 2017, when the first full walk along the border will take place.

The timing of this is critical; to be conducted as the centenary of the partition of Ireland approaches in 2021, and also as the UK exits the European Union. It will reconsider the border at a key moment of reflection since its creation, and through a time when its meaning and materiality may change significantly.

Borders are very particular places, ones that can act as a point of separation between two adjacent territories, but also have the potential to act as a bridge between them (Diener & Hagen, 2012). They can also be considered distinct spaces in their own rights, as well as in terms of a series of *practices* (Parker & Vaughan-Williams, 2009).

The Irish border comes with its own set of specifics, from the physical (two thirds of the border is river and stream) to the economic, with towns like Derry, Clones, and Newry being cut off from their natural hinterlands. The way in which the border is seen (and not seen) depending on your scale and vantage point means it has a reach far beyond just a line on a map.

These border walks start with Tóibín’s book, exploring the textual and spatial elements of the book

itself, and how the book and the border can be reread through other lenses. The border is reconsidered not only in terms of time (between the border of Tóibín’s book in the late 80s and that of the present), but also in terms of the social, political, cultural and material sites that make up the architectures and landscapes that frame it.

This research takes the act of walking, alone and with others, as a key aspect of the expanded practice, wanting to, as Rebecca Solnit said, “know the world through the body, and the body through the world.” As Jane Rendell states in her book *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (2006), walking “offers a particular sense of ‘being in the world’, an ecological view that connects [one] to an environment that is both natural and cultural.” It is this view that is interrogated through, as she says, “relating one location to another in a particular sequence, [where] walking provides ways of practising space through time and time through space.” The parallel conditions of time and space are to be seen through: the book as a site; the historical moment of the book in 1987; the border of the present day; and the mode through which the border is experienced i.e. through walking.

It also intends to test methods of how one writes a history that can be seen and read by a popular audience outside of the academy. To test this I will be resurrecting the Irish pedagogical tradition of the ‘hedge school’. These illegal schools originally convened in rural areas of Ireland as a response to the Penal Laws of the 17th century, whereby Catholics were barred from accessing formal education. The new ‘Border School’ is intended as an itinerant installation that will take up residence on and around the border. It forms a part of this project that will be a space for exploring the relationship between the historian, the public, and the historical object; asking what the border was, is, and may become in the past, present, and future.

The core of this broader methodological approach comes back to the relationship between site and method in architectural history. This will consider how this ‘para’ method can derive from, and relate to, the site of the border; and how the above method can itself be a site of research. It will explore how this enables an exploration of the spatial qualities of writing architectural history; examining how these can be situated within, and seen in parallel to, the site of the border. ♥

