



Modernism in Dublin 1960-1979: The infill building

A comparative case study of the ESB Headquarters Fitzwilliam Street and Stephen Court St. Stephen's Green

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the belief expressed by certain historians (Keogh, Ferriter, Olley) that 1960s and 1970s modernism in Dublin made no effort to integrate with its context and aggressively erased part of the urban fabric and city's culture. It uses the typology of infill schemes to question this belief.

The research consists of a comparative case study of two infill buildings: The ESB Building, Fitzwilliam Street by Stephenson Gibney, 1965 and the Stephen Court Building, St. Stephens Green by Robinson Keefe Devane, 1971. The paper aims to determine the origins of the architecture of these two buildings, in order to understand how, if at all, they were adapted to the context of Georgian Dublin. It should help inform contemporary architects about how to treat architecture in the city, about the ethics of demolition and about the issue of contextualism.

The findings of the research show that, although denied by certain historians, these buildings did make an effort to adapt to their context. In the case of the ESB, the architects had ambition but were stifled by client concerns and brief requirements. The debate it created on conservation would influence the thinking behind the award-winning Stephen Court building, which (according to Frank McDonald) is accepted to integrate more successfully by the majority.

The research shows the pragmatic attitude towards conserving the city held by the modernist architects of the buildings themselves. They argue that dysfunctional and dilapidated buildings should not be restored but replaced. They were strongly opposed to the 'museumification' of structures, a logic that surely can be applied to their own buildings today. Conversely, the flexible nature of these buildings can often easily allow for conversions of use, giving them a new life.

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Introduction

In his 1994 publication *Twentieth-Century Ireland: Nation and State*, Dermot Keogh speaks of Dublin in the 1960s:

“Dublin was defaced and deformed within a decade. Some of the ugliest buildings in Europe had been erected in what once had been an elegant city. All that had been in the name of progress and development. The past was not supposed to include Georgian Dublin or any other remnants of British culture”.¹

The architecture of Dublin of the 1960s and 70s that has left a lasting impression in the minds of the general public are the imposing, large scale neo-brutalist or ‘hyper-modernism’ creations². Such buildings are contrasted to the ‘architectural renaissance’ of the succeeding generation of Irish architects, headed by the Group 91 architectural collective, who imposed an urban and architectural regeneration of the Temple Bar in Dublin. What distinguished this period from the decades before it was a desire by architects to re-implant a European character on Dublin, with more emphasis placed on contextualism³.

The architects of the 1980s and 1990s claimed contemporary architecture in Dublin had, before then, ignored its context and made self-referential architecture⁴. John Olley describes the Modernism of the 1960s and 1970s as “autarchic objects”⁵. The assertive, bombastic schemes with their monumental and iconic aspirations were at odds, according to Olley, with the refined, humble character of the Georgian. The Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein described how the builders of the Georgian architecture of Dublin, unlike their modernist successors, had “the good taste to know that they had nothing very important to say”⁶.

In the 1960s and 70s, under the leadership of Seán Lemass and later Jack Lynch and Liam Cosgrave, Ireland moved from a traditional inward-looking stance to an internationally extroverted one. Lemass enforced a modernisation of Irish industry and strengthened ties with America and the rest of Europe. With his programme for economic expansion of 1958-1963 Lemass aimed to transform De Valera’s protectionist domestic policy into a competitive international trading policy. His vision for Ireland was to overcome the handicap of size, geographical location and island character in a practical, patriotic approach⁷.

¹ Keogh, 1994 p.278

² Mullally (2014) Una Mullally describes the public’s “fury at how terrible many of our modern buildings are, mourning what was destroyed to build the likes of Hawkins House, the ESB offices, car parks and modern housing” She claims that during the late 20th century “Craftsmanship was replaced with craftiness, beauty with speed, design with economy, and an appreciation for the appropriateness of a building in its context was replaced with a lack of consideration emblematic of greed.”

³ Rowley, 2012

⁴ Cahill, 1989 Gerry Cahill wrote of the 1980s in Ireland: “The recession we have experienced has stopped (I hope permanently) our headlong flight into architectural mediocrity that the office boom of the 1960s had begun”

⁵ Olley 1997 p. 46 Olley writes: “Modernity in architecture and urban design terminated a tradition that had favoured the creation of urban spaces, streets and squares by carving them out of the built fabric and, in its stead, planted a landscape of autarchic objects”

⁶ Wilson, 2000 p.63

⁷ Keogh, 1994

Lemass' major aim was to secure a place in the European Economic Community. This objective effected every level of Irish society and culture, including its architecture⁸. It was not until 1973, under Lynch's leadership that Ireland gained access. Ireland's brief economic growth of the 1960s was arrested by the Oil crisis of 1973 and later in 1979⁹.

With a severe housing crisis in Dublin, a trend was to relocate housing in a purpose built construction and to demolish the existing, replacing it with a modern construction. The disregard for Georgian fabric is partly attributable to a resurgent nationalist rhetoric, where Georgian architecture was seen as a reminder of Ireland's colonial heritage, to be erased¹⁰. These demolitions resulted in an activism in conserving the city. The occupation of demolition sites on 45 St. Stephen's Green and part of Hume Street in 1970 lasted for six-months. In this climate of historic demolition the Irish Georgian Society was founded to preserve Georgian Architecture in 1958¹¹. In *The Destruction of Dublin*, Frank McDonald claims: "The only reason Dublin remained for so long the beautiful eighteenth-century city the English built is that the Irish were too poor to pull it down"¹².

In the 1960s and 70s Irish architects looked overseas, to America. Rowley defines the main sources of American influence on the architecture of the time as twofold: "individual influence"; from the various architects who studied under a particular modernist master in America and "collective influence"; how aspirations for an American style aligned with Lemass' vision for a modern Ireland. Modern architecture was seen to symbolise the strengthening of Irish-American relations¹³.

Despite the clear American influence, there was also a European influence to the architecture of the time, through the theories of Structuralism. This resulted in a departure from the 'pure' modernism of the preceding decades. The architects most renowned for promoting structuralism internationally were the Dutch Aldo Van Eyck and Herman Hertzberger¹⁴. The Structuralists believed that disparate cultures and civilisations could be inter-connected across time and place through interpretations of meaning. Robin Walker of Scott Talon Walker beginning his manifesto for Street infill design with Robert Woulfe Flanagan in *A city in crisis* with the statement:

"Communities are basically the same everywhere. They enjoy a common hierarchy of functions which give expression to their existence; and whilst the functions and size of community may vary, there exists an order within any community which makes areas within it comprehensible and identifiable. This factor we understand by 'character'"¹⁵

⁸ Ferriter, 2010

⁹ Keogh, 1994 p.334 Prior to the crisis in 1973 Ireland imported over 70% of its primary energy requirements. When the crisis hit, the price of oil increased by ten times its value in 1972.

¹⁰ Olley, 1997 p.46 Olley writes: "The political rhetoric of independent Ireland sought disjuncture from the country's colonial past. Modern movement urban design disengaged itself from surviving city fabric. Each was a denial of history".

¹¹ Ferriter, 2010 p.591

¹² McDonald, 1985 p.6

¹³ Rowley, 2011 (*From Chicago to Dublin and back again...*)

¹⁴ Frampton 1992, p.297. In 1967 Van Eyck wrote "It seems to me that past, present and future must be active in the mind's interior as a continuum. If they are not, the artefacts we make will be without temporal depth or associative perspective"

¹⁵ Walker & Woulfe Flanagan, 1975 p.39

The structuralists believed that the distinction of buildings as recognisable elements through 'character' allowed continuity between historic and modern styles and also between the corporate architecture of America and Imperial architecture of Georgian Britain. In short, the architects of the later-modern period strove to create a language that evoked neither a sentimental antiquarian attitude to the past nor a sentimental technocratic one towards the future.¹⁶

There is an argument that modernism was incapable or unwilling to harmonise itself with its historical context. This generally applies to 'pure' or 'ideal' modernism, which generally stands alone from its context as definite, new and permanent¹⁷. In the case of Modernism in the city however, the ideal site was corrupted and the buildings were forced to express an attitude to their context¹⁸. The modernist artefacts of Dublin have aged considerably today, with limitations in the construction industry refusing the 'timeless' quality they desired. Very often, as in the case of the ESB, the buildings had to satisfy requirements of contextual harmony as part of their brief. Therefore they cannot be described as 'pure' modernism, they were embedded in the social context of Ireland. They were rather 'adapted' modernism, American influenced but referencing the city in some manner.

¹⁶ Frampton 1992, p.297

¹⁷ Pallasmaa, 2000 Juhani Pallasmaa describes "In its quest for the perfectly articulated autonomous artefact, the main line of modernist architecture has preferred materials and surfaces that seek the effect of flatness, immaterial abstractness and timelessness... The architecture of the modern era aspires to evoke an air of ageless youth and of perpetual present"

¹⁸ Redfield, W. 2005

Introduction to Case Studies

Much of the debate surrounding the modernist architecture of Dublin in the 1960s and 1970s is absorbed by Stephenson Gibney's controversial, high-profile designs. The ESB building was the first in the series that gave Stephenson the title of 'enfant terrible' of Irish modernism. For this study, one of the Stephenson Gibney's most controversial projects is re-examined in an objective light and compared and contrasted with a similar sized infill building that often escapes discussion. The buildings are analysed under the following areas: their historical context, influences on the buildings and a technical appraisal of the buildings.



Case Study 1: The ESB Headquarters Fitzwilliam Street

Until 1964 Fitzwilliam Street held the distinction of being the longest intact Georgian façade in the world. That was before the Electricity Supply Board of Ireland, on the counsel of the architectural historian Sir John Summerson, commissioned the demolition of 16 Georgian buildings at its centre. Summerson published a report on Fitzwilliam St. for the ESB and noted that the buildings in question were of little architectural merit, aside from completing the street vista¹⁹. In 1965, to much public outcry, the Board replaced the terrace with a 120 metre long neo-brutalist headquarters. The building was a winning design in a national competition by Sam Stephenson and Arthur Gibney. The drama surrounding the ESB Headquarters had a catalysing effect on the notions of conservation in the city and the approach to context-sensitive design. It was a dilemma that dogged the modern movement for the remainder of its tenure in the capital²⁰.

The ESB building's form had wide-ranging influences. In a series of articles for the Irish Independent in 1963, the Irish Architect J. Neil Downes attempted to explain the genealogy of the building. He traced it back to the introduction of reinforced concrete buildings in Paris, such as the Flats and Drawing Offices on rue Danton 1899 by Arnaud and Hennebique and the flats on rue Franklin 1903 by Auguste Perret²¹. Downes further connects the ESB to the

¹⁹ Summerson, 1970

²⁰ Walker, 1997 p.29

²¹ Downes, 1963



Images: 1: ESB HQ Fitzwilliam Street 2014; 2: Rue Franklin, Auguste Perret 1903; 3: St. James Apartments, Denis Lasdun 4: Town Hall Hilversum, Dudok; 5: US Embassy Grosvenor Square, Eero Saarinen

Dutch De Stijl movement, isolating Dudok's Town Hall in Hilversum 1924 as an archetype (which in turn was heavily influenced by Dudok's admiration for Frank Lloyd Wright). The De Stijl fascination for the tension between horizontal and vertical elements can clearly be seen in the ESB façade, a horizontal building composed of repeated vertical elements²².

Perhaps the most evident influence on the ESB however, and one that influenced many other entries to the competition, was a project by the American architect Eero Saarinen from 1955: The US Embassy on Grosvenor Square in London. Saarinen, and later Kevin Roche who worked with Saarinen, was a continuous source of inspiration for the work of Stephenson in particular²³. In this project a harmony was created with the pseudo-Georgian buildings of Grosvenor Square (which had been demolished but were to be rebuilt) by maintaining the heights of the adjacent buildings, by using Portland stone typical of Georgian buildings and by adopting the scale and rhythm set out in the Georgian façade through in the structure of the new building²⁴.

Stephenson Gibney's design deliberately echoes the dominance of vertical elements characteristic of Georgian buildings with the vertical emphasis of the elevation imposed by brise-soleil. These frame contemporary windows which mimic the original Georgian proportions. The building's pre-cast concrete bays were pigmented to a pink hue to better compliment their neighbours. Corrosion of the reinforcement meant repairs had to be carried out on the concrete skin in the 1980s. Stephenson Gibney's favouring of lavish materials can be seen in the polished granite entrance lobby and thin bronze window frames.

The winning design was chosen by its assessors for its ability to fit "politely but not too self-effacingly into the general street picture"²⁵. The ESB design shows a vision for a contemporary office block, assertive and modern yet still acknowledging the past. Upon completion it received praise in the architectural community²⁶.

The argument that a building is only as good as its brief is resonant in the case of the ESB. Stephenson and Gibney were tasked with creating a façade and devising circulation for a pre-determined office layout. From the outset, a large office building trying to imitate a series of domestic buildings creates a conflict of function and expression. Architects such as Daithí Hanley argued the competition was merely confined to a façade design and not a unified architectural scheme²⁷. This debate of the façade was set in motion from Summerson's report, where he advised architects to: "evolve types of façade designs – not necessarily 'Georgian' in character – which are not in conflict with their preserved neighbours and which yet have positive values of their own"²⁸

²² Downes, 1963

²³ Rowley, 2011 (*Kevin Roche design and development*)

²⁴ Saarinen, 1962

²⁵ Hanna, 2013 p.108

²⁶ Building, 1972 *Building* journal praised the ESB: "The forecourt, the handling of the vertical and horizontal lines of the façade, the fragmented roof and the sympathetic colouring of each element add up to a successful answer to Sir John Summerson's challenge"

²⁷ Hanley, 1966. Hanley writes "As outline plans for each of the four floors of these houses were given in the competition conditions – and, as the façades were not to rise above the line of the existing parapets, it was virtually a competition for façades"

²⁸ Summerson, 1970

Downes believed a building that is a “half-truth”, neither old nor modern, is more damaging than a completely modern building that makes no attempt to reference the existing. He uses the examples of the Gothenburg Town Hall extension by Eric Gunnar Asplund 1937 and St. James’ Place Apartments by Denis Lasdun 1960 as examples of assertive buildings that integrate but do not imitate. He writes:

“The true answer lies in the new building being aware of its neighbours and creating a sympathy and rapprochement by suitable contrast rather than a uniformity”²⁹

²⁹ Downes, 1963



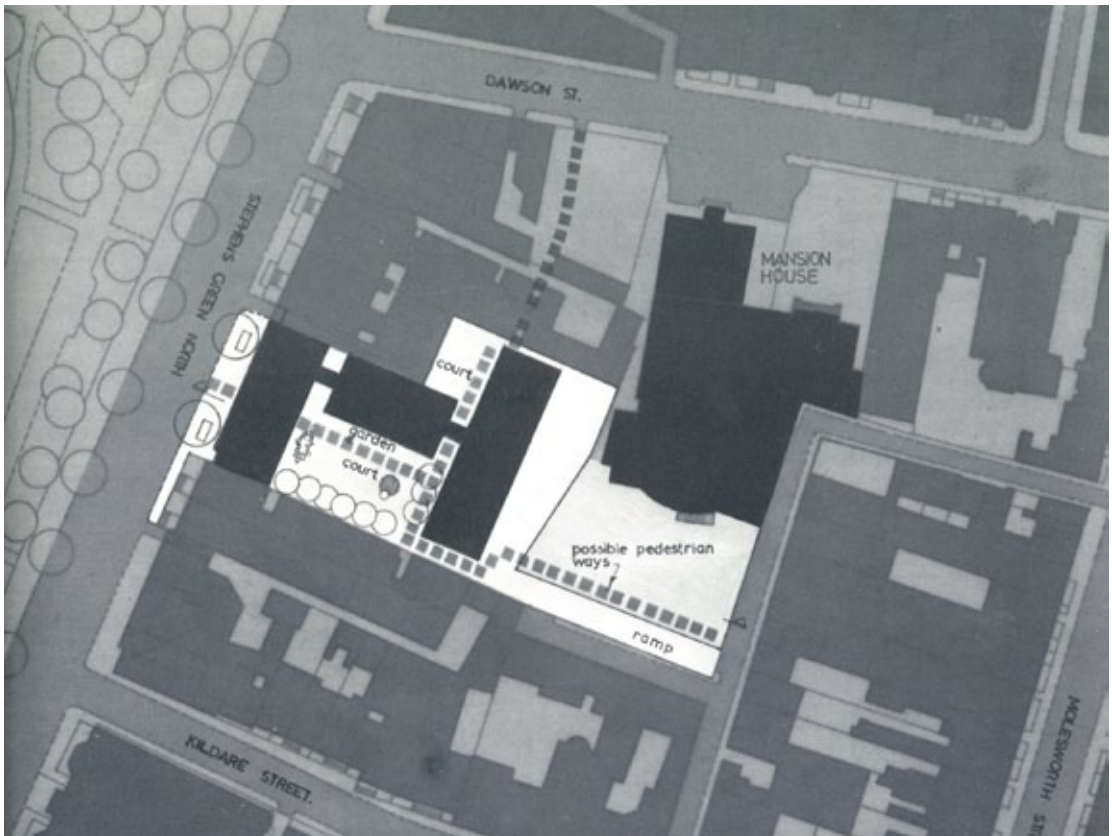
Case Study 2: Stephen Court, St. Stephens Green

The Stephen Court building was an office block leased by Irish life on the North-eastern terrace of St Stephens Green. Stephen Court is situated on a plot formerly occupied by four Georgian townhouses. The building received substantial praise for its success at integrating itself in an area of prestigious architectural character without resorting to historical pastiche or imitation. This success led to the building being awarded a 'Highly Commended' Award in the RIAI European Heritage Year Medal³⁰. Frank McDonald praises the building in *The Destruction of Dublin* writing: "almost everyone agreed that this award-winning building, set around a sculptured courtyard harmonised rather well with the established environment of the green"³¹.

The strongest influence on Devane's work is his mentor, Frank Lloyd Wright. In 1946, Andrew Devane travelled to America to work for and study under Wright in his Taliesin school. Upon returning, Devane explored a Wrightian expression of form through material technique in his buildings. The Stephen Court building was the first in a trilogy of projects where Devane strove to develop a new style, followed by the Irish Life Centre on Abbey Street and the AIB Headquarters in Ballsbridge. With this evolving of architectural expression, there was an element of experimentation in the Stephen Court building. Devane was playing with various materials and textures which he would repeat and refine in the succeeding two projects.

³⁰ Coyle, 2002

³¹ McDonald, 1985 p.82



Images: 1:Stephen Court 2014; 2: Wainwright Building Louis Sullivan; 3: Café in Stephen Court 2014; 4: Site Plan of Stephen Court with urban strategy

The origins of the building's appearance are evident in the work of Frank Lloyd Wright's master, Louis Sullivan. Sullivan developed a language of high-rise buildings that is clearly influential on Devane's work. This language is exemplified in the Wainwright building of 1891³². Devane reduced the façade to a series of brick piers and vertical strips of glazing and aluminium, comparable to Sullivan's tower aesthetic. The windows and transom are recessed with aluminium frames. The transoms and tinted glass read together as one vertical strip. These vertical elements are bound by a concrete arcaded plinth on ground level and a heavy concrete strip at parapet level.

In addition to this aesthetic influence, the form of the Stephen Court building is derived from the architecture of St. Stephens Green. The building meets its neighbours with a recess, as typical of the other buildings on the square, detaching itself from its historical neighbours. The façade is symmetrical with protruding and recessed elements, a modern interpretation of a Palladian composition.

The columns are filleted with a radius of 100mm. This is an influence of Wright, who treated the concrete cantilever as though it were a natural, tree-like form³³. The Mushroom columns of the Johnston Wax Museum are a crystallisation of this thinking. The canopy of the Stephen Court building reaches out over the street as an organic feature, the sinuous joining of column and beam resembling a plant form. The use of curves provides a respite from the otherwise relentless rigour of grid-based minimalist buildings.

Technically, the building is innovative in its execution and use of materials. The concrete is purposefully roughly textured, with a bush-hammered finish. The bush-hammered finish adds a warmth of laboured texture, a specific aggregate using white sand and granite was employed to give the concrete a white finish, possibly to mimic the Portland stone or granite of the Georgian.

The windows used were bronze anodised aluminium frame that blend in tone with the sand-faced Coalisland bricks and almost read as an extension of the brick. The mortar used is blackened to blend further with the brick colour. The use of the same façade system on each side of the building has meant the aluminium panels under each window have weathered irregularly on different aspects of the building, with the absence of shading or sheltering devices.

The interior of the building is an exercise in minimalism, with narrow aluminium frames supporting large expanses of glass. The concrete colonnade has channels cast to allow glass to disappear into it without a frame. This innovation of material finishes and construction were common in the modernist buildings of the 1970s, as Simon Walker notes:

"One aspect of modern construction at this time that should not be forgotten is the often extraordinary level of craftsmanship that still existed in the trades; it was exploited to the limit in the deceptively difficult task of realising 'minimalist' buildings"³⁴

³² Frampton, 1992 p.55 Frampton describes this language as expressed in the Wainwright building of 1891: "the façade, no longer arcaded, is articulated by gridded piers, clad in brick, while transoms are recessed and faced in terracotta so as to fuse with the fenestration. The piers rise out of a taut two-storey stone base and terminate abruptly at a massive and ornate terracotta cornice"

³³ Idem p.188

³⁴ Walker, S. 1997 p.29

Although to many passers-by the building is read as merely a block facing onto the street, it is in reality one of three blocks, forming a C-shape in plan, sheltering a raised landscaped courtyard on the interior. The two blocks hidden from street view are in fact one storey higher and the rear block is lifted off the ground with the concrete colonnade providing sheltered parking spaces.

Devane, influenced by Wright, placed an emphasis on exterior spaces and landscaping in his work, writing: “exterior space is the city dweller’s quotient of nature”³⁵. When the building first opened this courtyard hosted an iconic fountain and sculpture by the artist Ian Stuart. Today it has a designated smoking area, some greenery and further parking spaces. Devane envisioned the courtyard could be part of a public pedestrian route, linking Schoolhouse Lane to Stephens Green North. This exterior route was lost with recent constructions sealing off the site, and with the security implications the public route would have had on the operations of the Chase Manhattan Bank, one of the building’s first tenants.

³⁵ Devane, 1997 p.77

Comparison of Case Studies

In comparing the two schemes, it is important to note that the ESB established a set of priorities for contextual integration and harmony that no doubt strongly influenced infill schemes to come, including the Stephen Court design. The following themes are identified to assess their success at integration: Façade treatment; Scale & Proportion; Urban concept & Landscaping; Relationship with the street; Technical Execution.

As seen in the case of the ESB, much of the debate surrounding whether these buildings are successful at integrating in the city, or worthy of conservation, revolves around the aesthetics of the façade. While the ESB opted for a repetition of vertical elements in concrete, Stephen Court uses brick, a staple material of St. Stephen's Green and a formal composition of protruding and recessed elements. Stephen Court presents an evolved version of the Georgian Façade, where the ESB presents an abstraction of it.

Pastiche design, often suggested as a method of 'repairing a damaged painting' became temporarily fashionable after the controversies of modernist infill. The architects of the 1960s and 70s suggested there was a dishonesty to pastiche design³⁶. Downes wrote in 1963 "such imitation is immediately present and destroys by its obvious dictatorship the very sympathy it is supposed to create"³⁷.

The question of scale and proportion effects the building's success significantly. Although the ESB design acknowledges the former plot lines through recesses, the identical nature of each bay means that the facade stretches out like an accordion, its length approximately ten times its height. The Stephen Court building retains a dignified scale, its length to height at a 2:1 ratio, similar to some of the larger Georgian townhouses of the area, such as the neighbouring Shelbourne hotel.

The debate on integration also places an important emphasis on how the building *meets* the city. The design of exterior spaces and landscaping was an opportunity to 'give back to the city' providing urban amenities for the public. Stephen Court provides a small plaza to the street and is structured around a landscaped courtyard with modern sculpture. This addition creates a protected amenity for the employees of the office block itself. The ESB had opportunity for a courtyard behind its main façade, it is instead in use as a carpark.

In building in the city, the architects had to address the commonly held belief that 'pure' modernism cannot engage or include the street³⁸. Stephenson and Gibney's design is indeed defensive to the street, brick panels and opaque glass deterring pedestrians from interacting with the building. Devane, however, uses a colonnade to provide a buffer space allowing people to interact further with the building - sheltering from the rain or shading from the sun. The plaza to the front of the building provides a small public space, clearly intended for loitering, with the planters providing seating. This, combined with Devane's urban strategy for

³⁶ Barry, 1975 p.55 Francis Barry writes: "Architecture based on the gratuitous assembly of dead parts, however expertly manipulated, will just not do in our beautiful city"

³⁷ Downes, 1963

³⁸ Idem. Downes writes "Modern Architecture is not a street architecture. It is indeed fundamentally a denial of streets and street architecture as we have understood these things in the past and as the Fitzwilliam street vista is one of the greatest examples in existence today"

the building drawing pedestrians through its interior courtyard, culminates in a dynamic, active street frontage, atypical of the oppressive office blocks described by Ferriter and Keogh.

It can be argued that this is still not enough, and the public space is too small and requires further programming. A common criticism of hard public spaces of the period are they are a lacklustre attempt at humanising oppressive buildings and end up producing sterile spaces that are rarely used. It is reassuring therefore to see the space being occupied by chairs and tables of the café, after forty years human life is slowly corrupting pure modernism to suit its needs. Rowan Moore describes this effect in his publication, *Why We Build*: “Urban populations have a way of subverting, appropriating, and overrunning whatever structures are set up to manage them”³⁹.

The assessors of the ESB competition’s primary concern of the success of the chosen design was the technical resolution of the scheme. This would prove prophetic for the ESB building with repairs carried out on its concrete. The much admired bronze window frames in place today are in fact replacements of the original dark aluminium frames⁴⁰. Today the buildings ‘F’ energy rating means the ESB are eager to revert to a more sustainable, environmental model. The failings of the concrete façade could be attributed to the under-developed state of the concrete industry at the time of construction, which had evolved significantly by the end of this period. The Stephen Court building was innovative in its use of materials and technology, with certain techniques re-used or improved by Devane in the Irish Life Centre and the AIB HQ Ballsbridge.

³⁹ Moore, 2012 p.185

⁴⁰ Building, 1972

Conclusion

The contemporary architect attempting to create a harmonising, dignified infill building faces a fundamentally challenging task. The building on one hand must express a contemporary character but equally not be at odds with the historic character of Georgian Dublin. The architects of the time were certainly conscious of this challenge when designing⁴¹.

While the 1960s and 1970s were responsible for gargantuan context-less schemes being released on the city, Keogh's statement that "the past was not supposed to include Georgian Dublin" isn't reflective of the seriousness with which many of the architects of the period strove to achieve a harmony with the existing fabric in their infill projects. This harmony was an attempt to preserve the legacy of the Georgian architecture lost to the ravages of time or incapable of providing a desired function. Simon Walker describes this as the "beginnings of contextualism" that would be essential for the architectural ethos of the generation to come⁴².

Whether or not the architects achieved the harmony they strove for is a more nuanced issue. While Stephen Court is somewhat inconspicuous in its use of material and form, the ESB is bold and assertive with ambition in providing a new solution through the abstraction of historical character.

The Modernist architects' own logic in replacing the existing Georgian fabric due to shoddy construction can be applied to the replacement of Modernist buildings today that need extensive refurbishment to meet environmental and construction standards. Furthermore the Modernists' distinct opposition to the museumification of buildings, no matter how significant, would infer their opposition to a similar fate to their own buildings. Devane writes: "Age and infirmity will not justify universal euthanasia, still less a programme of massive civic embalment"⁴³.

From a practical perspective, the decisions on conservation of buildings will be dictated by economical, political and democratic processes. A result of the controversies invoked by Modernism in Dublin is more involvement of the public in planning processes. This was one of objectives of the 'City in Crisis' collective. Arthur Gibney, jointly responsible for the ESB building, reflected in 1988: "Modern cities lack monumentality and a means to tell the future about public values because of an absence of collective will...The only way to interpret the collective will and values of any democratic society in planning terms is by involvement of citizens in the planning process"⁴⁴.

The fact that Dublin needs to sustain an office community in its city centre in buildings originally intended for residential merits the introduction of a new, harmonious architecture, justified by the flexibility of modern design to adapt to future changes. The Stephen Court

⁴¹ Devane, 1975 p.74 Andrew Devane describes "For better or worse, fundamental propositions and decisions must be made in each case by planner and architect – sometimes agonisingly difficult decisions which relate to the whole unrealised concept and content of creative work on the one hand, and to the inescapable rights, realities and wrongs of the existing environment on the other"

⁴² Walker, S. 1997 p.34

⁴³ Devane, 1975 p.74

⁴⁴ Gibney, 1988

building originally provided a shop on ground level, which became a bank and later a café, without any major changes needed. Recently a fire in one of the building's upper levels burned out an entire floor without any serious structural damage to the overall building, a testament to fire engineering that is not provided in the Georgian. Robin Walker used flexibility and engineering as a justification for the Georgian's replacement in 1962:

"The architectural talent available to the city can, with modern structural techniques, which offer a flexibility in a building's use quite unknown to the past, construct a more durable, more lastingly useful and aesthetically far superior precinct than the squares of the 18th century speculative builders"⁴⁵

As Dublin's architecture evolves and regenerates in the future, lessons learned from Modernism can forge an influence on the city. While the ESB focused mainly on a sympathetic façade design, there are a number of factors which should bear equal importance if a building is to last. These include an attention to the relationship with the street, sympathetic use of materials and construction, urban strategy and scale. Although many of the above were overlooked by the Modernists, the architects of this generation should nonetheless kindle an aspiration for harmony equal to the architects of the 60s and 70s⁴⁶.

⁴⁵ Walker, R. 1962

⁴⁶ This Spirit is encapsulated in Walker and Woulfe Flanagan's statement in *A City in Crisis*: "If Dublin has in general a distinctive architectural character it does not result from a superficial similarity in its buildings, but from an essential fibre running through the art of all its periods. Whether the buildings of the city are in brick, stone, steel or concrete, it is the understanding and expression of this essential fibre that will maintain harmony and ensure the retention for the future of the established architectural character of Dublin" Walker & Woulfe Flanagan, 1975

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6. Stephen Court, 2014 - photograph taken by author

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7. Wainwright Building, Louis Sullivan - retrieved 26/06/2014 from:
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8. Café in Stephen Court, 2014 - photograph taken by author
9. Site Plan of Stephen Court - Scan from Delany, P. (ed) Dublin: A City in Crisis. Dublin: RIAI Publishing p.79

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