

GRS Proposal (Winter 1998) - P.T. Byrne - Pain + Traces: A Centre for Children and the City of Belfast

OBJECTIVES, BACKGROUND AND PROJECT DETAILS

This Project focuses upon the notion of **Healing** through **Architecture** and Urban Intervention. The Goal of this project is to consider the healing potential of Architecture, specifically through conducting an investigation into its use in addressing the sensitive urban schisms found within the fragmented social landscape of a war-torn society. This project endeavours to critically examine the potential for **Architecture** and urban intervention to play a significant role in addressing the **wounds** - social, physical, political - within a fractured urban environment. Specifically I am interested in exploring opportunities for the pursuit of social **reconstruction** and reconciliation in war-torn landscapes through thoughtful Architectural engagement of the urban realm. The unique challenges and opportunities presented by this rebuilding, reclamation, and recovery (in contrast to typical building and urban design in steady-state societies) are to be investigated in order to generate a thoughtful approach to the problem, which may serve as a model for further extrapolation and implementation. The potential for healing through Architecture will be examined at a level that will suggest applicability to more widespread instances of Pain and fragmentation – at a wide variety of scales. Given the wide spread occurrence of such instances and environments throughout the world, and the often-ignored potential for Architecture to address such issues, there is indeed great promise for wider application. This theoretical framework is to be tested through the consideration of a specific site (Belfast, Northern Ireland), and the design of a specific built intervention (a healing Center for Children). This project, and document, essentially consists of two parts – the first emphasizes the development and exploration of a **theoretical structure** for Pain and Creation, while the second focuses on the extrapolation and integration of this framework in the specific Site, **Intervention**, and Design response.

The initial focus is upon an attempt to develop a conceptual framework which allows the addressing of **Pain** as an experience and phenomenon – in all scales of entities from individual bodies to cities and societies. In order to facilitate the consideration of Pain, Creation, and Healing across such different scales the first step is the discussion and implementation of a **Bodily Metaphor** – making Pain a phenomenon of the body, any body. Another vital move in this exploration is the use of a form of conceptual **Dissection** as a tool – allowing focussed and layered examination of the issues and concepts being considered, followed by their eventual reconstruction into an understandable whole.

The fundamental step in this investigation is the development of an understanding of Pain as emerging through **Destruction** and Isolation – which then suggests the possibility of addressing Pain (i.e. Healing) through **Creation** and Expression. The primary reference text for this project is Elaine Scarry's "The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World", although a variety of other references are also consulted. The operations of **Memory** (Acceptance vs. Dislocation), and **Voice** (Expression vs. Isolation) are considered. Central throughout this project is the extrapolation and integration of conceptual frameworks from the **Individual (Child)** through to the **City (Belfast)** itself as a living entity. The notion of **Traces** is developed as a uniting suture among these concepts and throughout the project as a whole. It is argued that the Trace is the expression (or record) of both processes of Destruction (Pain) and Making (Healing) within or upon a body - and is especially evident in the operations of Memory and Expression (no matter what scale of "Body" is being considered).

The ideas developed in this project are to be discussed and evaluated through the use of the city of **Belfast (Northern Ireland)** as a specific case and **site**. The intervention site chosen is located in the heart of West Belfast, and will be developed so as to address the division between Catholic/Republican and Protestant/Loyalist areas. Consideration will be given to the associated edge conditions, barriers and waste lands that have developed between these quarters. Belfast has been chosen due to its long and well-known history of conflict, and its current state of transition - which suggests a potential for change and recovery. The development of a strong sense of the particular and unique conditions describing this case is thus essential. An understanding of the place (particularly site/contextual analysis) is to be developed, and this contextual (historical, social, cultural, and physical) background information is to be fundamental background to the development of the project. The intention of the choice of the site in Belfast is to engage the potential to heal urban scars and social wounds concurrently and interactively.

The investigation will be further focussed through the design of a specific built intervention for the site. The built **intervention** to be developed is a **Children's Centre**, which is sited in the area of the Royal Hospitals in West Belfast, and is to be associated with the

in South Africa, and which recognizes the potential for Architecture and art to contribute to the process of recovery and reconciliation. The situations in South Africa and Northern Ireland have a great deal in common – in terms of a history of violence due largely to disparate peoples occupying the same land, and the accumulation of social scars which records this history in their urban fabric. Similarly, the **United Nations** has often made use of Architecture and the Architectural competition in addressing or publicising, urban scars in places of social unrest throughout the world. A recent example of this sort of endeavor, and one which gained wide exposure, is the Architectural competition which dealt with the scars left by the **Berlin Wall** (specifically the site of Check-point Charlie). This project drew upon local Architects as well as prominent Architects from around the world in an attempt to explore possible methods of addressing this well-known urban wound. This is a particularly significant precedent in that the proposed site in Belfast expresses many striking similarities to that of the Berlin Wall and Check-point Charlie, even at levels beyond physical character (the history of domination by fortification and associated no-man's land, separating two politically disparate groups).

Another set of precedents to be considered, more specific to the program of the design intervention, include **Children's Hospitals** and their associated Play and Arts Facilities and Family Residences, as well as a variety of types of arts **retreats**. Further, an important set of precedents is also to be found in **Memorials, Peace Monuments, and Healing Gardens**. However, perhaps the single most relevant precedent can be found in the **World Centers of Compassion for Children** - a non-profit organization founded by Nobel Peace Prize Winner Betty Williams (of Northern Ireland). These Centres for children focus on the development of safe places which are to be located in areas fractured by poverty and conflict.

The **Output** of this investigation is to include a critical essay and a design component. The **Document** will seek to explore and examine the central ideas of this investigation at a critical theoretical level, and will further seek to develop and evaluate the potential for wider extrapolation of results. The **Design** component of this investigation will endeavour to express and evaluate the concepts developed in this study at the level of a built physical intervention in the urban history of the city. The results of the explorations conducted in this design investigation will be demonstrated through such representational techniques as are found to be most appropriate, including graphic presentation (drawings, photographs), and both physical and computer models.

METHODOLOGY AND TIMELINE

The fundamental procedure to be followed essentially consists of theoretical and contextual research, leading to the preparation of a critical essay and a design project - which both explore the problem at the level of the specific case study and at a more general level; seeking to test results for potential extrapolation.

This Framework can be divided into six basic **phases**:

1 - Preparatory/Preliminary (Spring / Summer 1998):

- A - Problem development and definition of scope,
- B - Initial research and choice of supervisor,
- C - Proposal development and preparation.

2 - Research (mid. Sep. – mid. Oct.):

- A - Literature and precedent review,
- B - Site/contextual investigation (ideally including on-site research),
- C - Initial exploration / development (Document and Design).

3 - Written document preparation (mid. Oct. – mid. Jan.):

- A - Critical investigation of problem (in terms of the general topic and of the specific case study),
- B - Guidelines for wider applicability of results,
- C - Identification of related topics for future study.

4 - Design project preparation (mid. Oct. – mid. Jan.):

- A - Design guidelines and program development,
- B - Conceptual development and architectural resolution,
- C - Consideration of use of design project as a precedent/model for more general (related) application.

5 - Preparation of final presentation material (mid. Jan. – mid. Feb):

- A - Preparation of appropriate representational material (i.e. drawings, models)

Spring/Summer 1998	- Continue research phase (including on-site contextual investigation - contingent upon availability of research support funds (GRS)).
	- Begin to lay framework for writing of critical document.
September 5 th 1998	- Register in PROJ 111/112.
	- Officially begin work on MDP.
September 26 th 1998	- Deadline for finalization of selection of Supervisory Committee Members.
November 30 th 1998	- Completed and Revised Draft of Document.
	- Begin Design Phase.
December 19 th 1998	- Interim Review (with Supervisors and relevant guest critics)
February 15 th 1999	- Post for Defense.
	- Submit written document to Faculty.
Prior to March 1999	- Complete all final preparations (including final presentation materials).
March 1 st 1999	- Exhibition in Nickle Arts Museum mounted by graduating class.
March 8-18 th 1999	- MDP defenses conducted.
April 7 th 1999	- Submit bound copies of MDP final documentation to Resource Center.
May 1999	- Class Convocates.

PROGRESS REPORT

This project was previously awarded GRS support for the Fall term. Since the time of awarding, a significant amount of progress has been made, and the project has developed greatly. A great deal of research and background work has been conducted, in fact this aspect of the project is essentially completed. A large number and wide variety of resources and references have been consulted (locally and internationally), yielding a wealth of information and approaches which have subsequently been reviewed and evaluated. This work, along with the development of a strong sense of the specific site (due largely to on-site investigations), has allowed the focussing and evolution of the project by providing a firm basis and structure. The written theoretical component is largely completed in initial form, and the Design phase of the project is under way. Regular (weekly at a minimum) meetings with Supervisor(s) are being maintained as an ongoing mechanism for pacing and directing project development – the project is progressing on schedule. The only issue thus far which has threatened the progress of the project is the difficult, time consuming, and extremely costly process of obtaining the necessary maps, plans, and other reference materials from the City of Belfast and the Government of Northern Ireland.

The following is a brief **List** of some specific items of Progress to-date within the development of this Project:

- Determined, approached and made arrangements with appropriate **External Supervisor** (Dr. D. Tamlyn, Dean of Nursing)
- Arranged and carried out **travel to Ireland**, making appropriate contacts before leaving
- Conducted successful **on-site investigation** in Belfast, Northern Ireland
- Assembly of **photographic record** of Royal Hospitals site in Belfast
- Met with **Promotions Director** of Royal Hospitals
- Met informally with several different **hospital employees and area residents**
- Collection and Assembly of **maps and plans** of site
- Collection of specific relevant texts (and other **reference materials**) available in Ireland and Northern Ireland
- Investigated and made approaches to **existing organizations** working in this project area
- Approached and consulted **relevant individuals** working in areas related to this project (both locally and internationally)
- Approached for consultation the **Architects** responsible for the new Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children – awaiting response
- Ongoing **meetings** with Project Supervisor and External Supervisor
- Ongoing work in **Theory courses**, which has aided and enriched the development of the document
- Ongoing monitoring of **news** and developments in Ireland and Northern Ireland
- Ongoing volunteer work at the **Alberta Children's Hospital (ACH)**, in the patient Playroom
- Discussion of project with ACH **Playroom Supervisors**
- Developed and **refined** specifics of project