

Seeing Things in *Seeing Things*

Architectural Responses to Seamus Heaney

Andrew Carr

Seamus Heaney's collection of poems *Seeing Things* is a common point of reference for several architects and their work: John Tuomey cites it in the development of the Glucksman Gallery, Níall McLaughlin at the Bishop Edward King Chapel, and Biba Dow in relation to the Marshall House. Each architect reads and departs from the poems in different ways. This paper will describe the poems and their architectural responses, attempting to understand their resonances.

Heaney's collection, *Seeing Things*, is first discussed by describing its structure and identifying key themes and ideas relating to place, memory, time, 'marvels' and metaphors formed from everyday experiences, objects and actions. Select reference, where relevant, is made to the body of critical writing that has gathered around Heaney, although the emphasis of the paper is focused on the responses of each architect to the poet's work.¹ Each architect is then discussed in turn, drawing on their writing, lectures and built work, supplemented by dialogue with Dow and McLaughlin. The paper concludes by placing Heaney back into a more complex context where relations between poet, architect, place and proposition become blurred and entangled.

The architects discussed are all contemporary practitioners: O'Donnell and Tuomey Architects was founded in 1988 by Sheila O'Donnell and John Tuomey. They are based in Dublin and were awarded the RIBA Royal Gold Medal in 2015. Níall McLaughlin was educated in Dublin before moving to London and founding Níall McLaughlin Architects in 1990, going on to win the RIBA Stirling Prize in 2022 for The New Library at Magdalene College, Cambridge. Also based in London, Biba Dow, with partner Alun Jones, founded Dow Jones Architects in 2000. They are perhaps best known for additions to the Garden Museum in Lambeth, London, and skilful, considered additions and alterations to existing buildings.

Seeing Things

Seeing Things was published in 1991, four years before Heaney received the Nobel Prize in Literature. The collection is organized in two parts, bracketed by excerpts, translated by Heaney, from works by Virgil and

Dante. The first part includes twenty-three poems that are of varying length and format, some gathered together under a single title. The second part, *Squarings*, is much more disciplined. It contains four sections – *Lightenings*, *Settings*, *Crossings* and *Squarings* – each of twelve poems and an identical length and structure of twelve lines, arranged in four stanzas of three-line tercets. There are multiple themes and images in the collection that build upon each other and are here introduced, in turn, using short quotations to reproduce Heaney's meticulous voice.

Many of the poems relate to Heaney's biography and recall the places he lived, his family memories and childhood games and activities, such as spinning a bicycle wheel in the mud in *Wheels within Wheels*. In *Glanmore Revisited* Heaney describes moving from Belfast with his family and living in their house near Dublin:

Bare flags. Pump water. Winter-evening cold.
Our backs might never warm up but our faces
Burned from the hearth-blaze and the hot whiskeys.
It felt half remembered even then, an old
Rightness half-imagined or foretold,²

The poem then describes his daughter sleeping in the same cot that Heaney himself slept in. The sense of successive generations is established alongside the presence of a common physical object – the cot an inhabitable place, as much as an item of furniture – that moves between them. The past, present and future are intertwined with the physical and become almost interchangeable. There is also a sense that the house provides shelter and warmth, which contrasts with the less benign presence of the weather and seasons outdoors. *1973* begins:

The corrugated iron growled like thunder
When March came in; then as the year turned warmer
And invalids and bulbs came up from under,
I hibernated on behind the dormer,³

And whatever rampaged out there couldn't reach us,
Firelit, shuttered, slated and stone-walled.⁴

The passage of time is established along with the protective role of buildings that must be continually repaired and renewed to ward off decay. *Lightenings, II* instructs: 'Roof it again. Batten-down. Dig in.' – actions of the living, using buildings to protect themselves from time – as death looms in the excerpts from Virgil and Dante bracketing the collection.⁵ Care is taken in measuring and setting out buildings as stable points of reference:

Touch the cross-beam, drive iron in a wall,
Hang a line to verify the plumb
From lintel, coping-stone and chimney breast.⁶

Beyond individual buildings and interior worlds, a strong sense of place is suggested, of rural landscapes – never cities or settlements – evoked with distinct images and sensations:

Inishbofin on a Sunday morning
Sunlight, turfsmoke, seagulls, boatslip, diesel.
One by one we were being handed-down
Into a boat that dipped and shill shallied
Scaresomely every time . . .⁷

The first part of *Seeing Things* closes with *Fosterling* and – compared to earlier works that often addressed the contested territory of his native Northern Ireland – confirms an often-noted shift in his work ‘from a deeply visceral engagement with the earth and the historical bodies buried in it to a preoccupation with more transcendental matters’:⁸

Heaviness of being. And poetry
Sluggish in the doldrums of what happens.
Me waiting until I was nearly fifty
To credit marvels. Like the tree-clock of tin-cans
The tinkers made . . .⁹

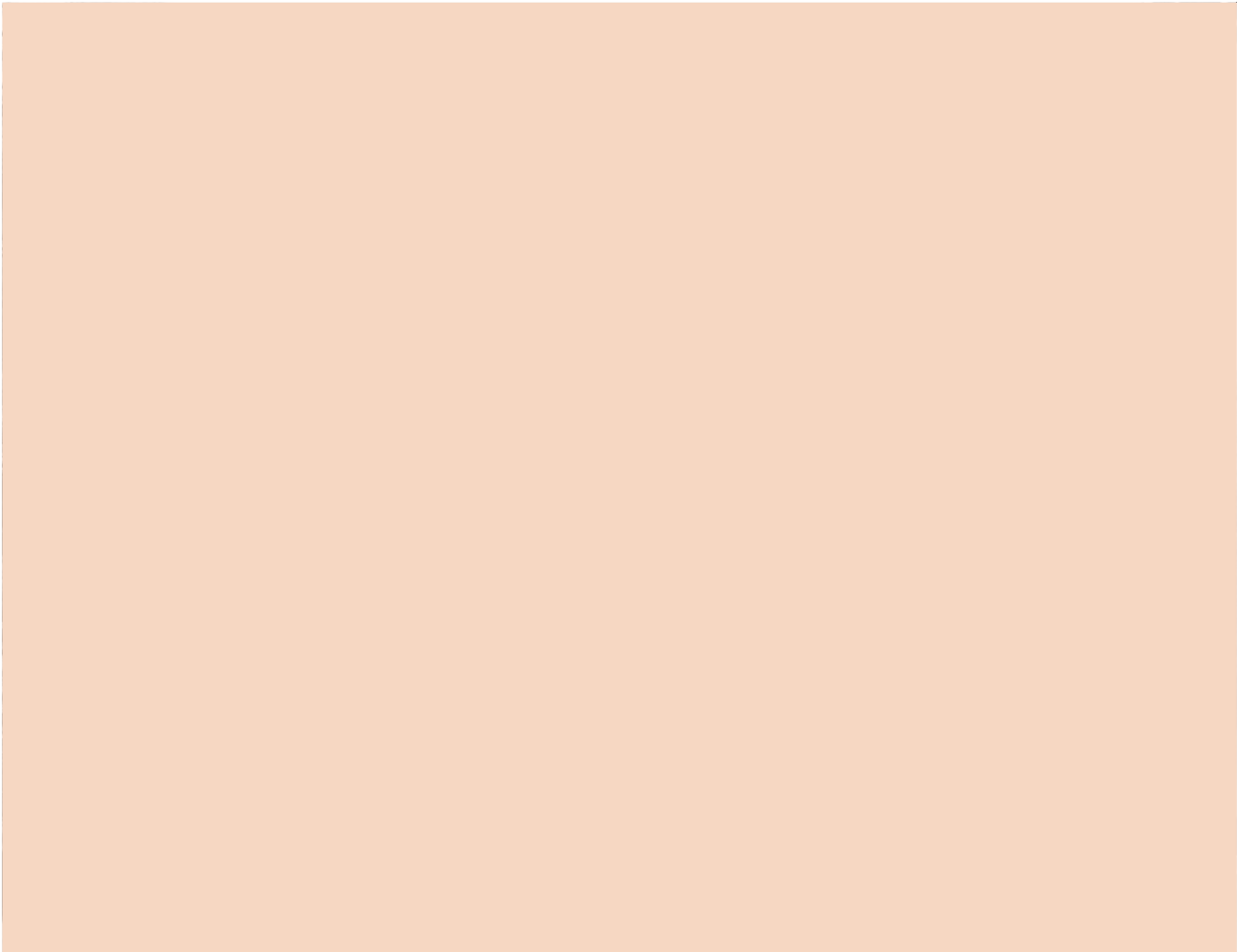
Many of the poems witness such ‘marvels’, often as revelatory metaphors crafted from everyday physical objects and actions, such as the cutting of *The Skylight*, which opens:

You were the one for skylights. I opposed
Cutting into the seasoned tongue-and-groove
Of pitch pine. I liked it low and closed,
Its claustrophobic, nest up-in-the-roof¹⁰

Having established the presence of another, ‘You’, Heaney evolves a narrative about interior worlds that are opened up, repressions and boundaries released:

But when the slates came off, extravagant
Sky entered and held surprise wide open.¹¹

The poem continues by referring to ‘the inhabitant’ as being like the sick man in the Bible story, who was lowered through the roof to be healed. These poems act as parables – truths and metaphors sought from everyday experiences, objects and actions. John Wilson Foster helpfully notes that Heaney has a ‘conscious receptivity to the wondrous inherent in the commonplace’.¹² Here the physical act of adding a skylight becomes literally and metaphorically transformative. Using these ‘restorative tropes’, Charles Weston Prince argues that Heaney alters the elegiac quality imbued in the archetypal vernacular forms of architecture present in his work.¹³



O'Donnell and Tuomey Architects, Glucksman Gallery viewed from Lower Grounds of the university gardens, University College Cork, Ireland. 2004.



O'Donnell and Tuomey Architects, The entrance to the Glucksman Gallery, University
College Cork, Ireland. 2004.

Buildings, places and interiors have a strong presence in the poems. Thresholds, gutters, hearths and roofs are observed, each assuming a potency. Heaney describes as a ‘time machine’ the top of the worn, marked kitchen dresser in his childhood home: ‘It was all sensation, tingling with an amplification of inner space, subtly and indelibly linked with the word “old.”’¹⁴ Inner and outer worlds are here intertwined and temporal boundaries blurred. While for Heaney a response to the physical can become the starting point of a poem, the architects in the pages that follow look to Heaney’s work to help craft buildings.

O’Donnell and Tuomey and the Glucksman Gallery

The Glucksman Gallery at University College Cork, Ireland, was designed by O’Donnell and Tuomey and opened in 2004. It is built among mature trees in the Lower Grounds of the university gardens, a more or less level terrain defined by the banks of the River Lee on one side and an arc of higher ground on another, from where older university buildings are visible among the trees. To try and work within these constraints, weaving a new building into a sensitive landscape setting, O’Donnell and Tuomey ‘saw the possibility of a pavilion building with a minimum footprint standing between the trees’.¹⁵ In his description of the building John Tuomey quotes from *Lightenings*, VIII, in the second part of *Seeing Things*: ‘A ship appeared above them in the air’.¹⁶

In Tuomey’s words, Heaney’s poem provided ‘a direct visual reference for us in our idea for the building – a ship straining above a stone terrain’.¹⁷ The poem describes the monks of Clonmacnoise Abbey at prayer as a ship appears above them, its trailing anchor snagging itself on the altar rails. One of the boat’s crewmen climbs down the rope but struggles to release it. Upon instruction from the abbot the monks help the crewman free the ship; he then ascends back up to the boat, ‘out of marvellous as he had known it’.¹⁸ The poem establishes an above and a below, a worldly and spiritual realm that are momentarily entangled. The exchange between the monks and the ship is enacted in the gallery.

Architecturally, the imagery is used both literally and metaphorically: The gallery is elevated among the trees – hovering overhead – and drops lines of structure down to anchor it to the ground. A void can be read between the mass of the ramped stone base and the elevated timber-clad gallery, establishing a clear distinction between a static plinth relating to the ground and a more dynamic form above: the world of the monks and the timber vessel of the ship. The form of the stone base emphasizes its solidity, vertical joints nudge the eye to the upper world of curved timbers – fixed horizontally, parallel to the ground – that open out at corners, releasing the interior into the tree canopy. Visitors thus ascend from the plane of the everyday world, upwards, into the realms of art and imagination, enacting a reversal of the poem as they descend back to the world below from the ‘marvellous’ above. Tuomey is sensitive to this dialectic and metaphorical play, noting how with Heaney ‘consciousness crosses the domains between matters of fact and of the imagined’.¹⁹

Lightenings, VIII, is slightly atypical of the collection, a recalled ‘annal’ inserted between more biographical recollections that meditate on the land,

the fleeting and the eternal. While the poem is cited by the architects as informing the worlds of above and below, they consider it separate from ‘our idea of the building’. Interestingly, David Leatherbarrow reads the gallery through another part of *Seeing Things*, as a series of ‘crossings’ between building and site, quoting from *Crossings*, xxx. Heaney’s words, ‘The open they came into by these moves’, provide him with a succinct description of the process of design ‘moves’ and the resultant ‘open’, ‘they’, the architects, derived in the form of a building from the crossings of routes within the site.²⁰ *Lightenings*, viii, is never mentioned as a means of understanding the building, but Leatherbarrow’s reading is just as compelling. In their own narratives of other, later projects O’Donnell and Tuomey describe often diverse, incidental origins: Looking at a sleeve in a Vermeer painting Sheila O’Donnell wondered what it would be like living inside it; Tuomey then tried to draw it, and it became the form of a museum. Later, they realized they had both been looking at different sleeves. A walk along cliffs on the island of Inishmaan, prompted them to think of the façade of a university building as a cliff. One wonders if the buildings might have turned out differently if they happened to be reading something or visiting somewhere else at the time.

Tuomey regularly references writers, such as W.H. Auden, E.M. Forster and Robert Frost – alongside other architects and artists – in descriptions of the work and thinking of the practice. Often he discusses how each individual works, rather than their work itself. At the Glucksman we witness both, as O’Donnell and Tuomey borrow Heaney’s imagery and heed his prompting in *Lightenings*, ii, to ‘study the unregarded floor’, seeking to transform spatial relationships otherwise, to become what they describe as ‘the elevated ordinary’ or ‘strangely familiar’.²¹

Níall McLaughlin and Bishop Edward King Chapel

The very same poem is referred to by Níall McLaughlin in his descriptions of Bishop Edward King Chapel, Cuddesdon, Oxfordshire. McLaughlin quotes all twelve lines of *Lightenings*, viii, in his self-authored book *Twelve Halls*, privileging it with a page to itself, and draws the poem as a boat sailing above a gathering of those at prayer on the site of the chapel.²² Sensitive to the theological connotations of Heaney’s lines he suggests that it has a missing word – nave – relating the body of a church and a ship. He describes how:

‘From the beginning, I wanted to create a spatial equivalent to the phantasmagorical image in the poem, that you are at once seeing the ship from below and on the deck of the ship among the masts. The roof is profiled like the keel of a ship stretched taut between the two foci of the ellipse.’²³

It is one of many images and references used to derive and describe the building and was a reference point for McLaughlin long before he came to design the chapel. It was read aloud by his project architect to a panel of Anglican bishops at the competition interview. Its imagery infuses with around forty other diverse references to other buildings, architects, writers and ideas.

Before building the chapel in 2011, McLaughlin's team spent four days making a large hand drawing of its plan on a cast plaster floor. Describing this activity he quotes from *Lightenings, III*, a few pages earlier in *Seeing Things*, which begins:

Squarings? in the game of marbles, squarings
Were all those anglings, aimings, feints and squints
You were allowed before you'd shoot, all those

And ends:

Between your muscles' outreach and that space
Marked with three round holes and a drawn line.
You squinted out from a skylight of the world.

Ostensibly about a game of marbles, the poem describes a sense of preparation and consideration, a decision whether to draw a line here or there. On the plaster floor McLaughlin's team drew lines by hand that would translate into actual spaces formed by the labour of construction workers. These actions echo Heaney's lines concerned with measurement and setting out, here and elsewhere in *Seeing Things*, together with observations McLaughlin articulated for a radio broadcast linking Heaney and architecture. He likened the craft of the architect and poet, noting that architects 'take things from the ground', working with an idea and 'projecting forward into an uncertain place'.²⁴

From these beginnings the chapel was constructed, opening in 2013. It is elliptical in plan. A timber lattice structure is offset from the outer walls to form a perimeter ambulatory and the inner space where, like the monks of Clonmacnoise, worshippers gather, an elliptical boat form evident overhead, surrounded by clerestory light. Whether worshippers make the connection with Heaney and the monks is unlikely but not important. The chapel works on its own terms. A relatively direct reading of the poem in the building is possible, but it is not the first chapel to draw on imagery associated with boat structures. Unlike at the Glucksman, here we remain on the ground, caught within 'a big hull rocked to a standstill', the worlds of above and below coinciding momentarily as we become both crewmen and monks.²⁵

McLaughlin describes the way poems influence his thinking very directly: 'When I read poems sometimes they conjure a situation so convincingly that I feel like I want to, in some way, make that situation. I want to bring the imagined situation in the poem into being.'²⁶

Lightenings, III, assumes a generative presence in the formation of the building but also infuses with multiple other references that have been gathered and overlaid, their density together forming something more complex – what McLaughlin more generally refers to as 'loam' – a process of accumulation likened to the layers of soil building up in a garden that create a nourishing, fertile substructure for growth. As such, while all references might have been present in and around the design process, or exist in the collective consciousness or habits of its participants, there may not be a

direct causal link between each and the outcome of the process as embodied in the work itself. Some links might be obvious – like the poem – others more distant. Heaney’s poem is clearly embedded in McLaughlin’s loam; the imagery itself echoes *Bogland*, an earlier Heaney poem where the bog becomes a collective unconscious where things are dropped and stored, concealed but passed into the future. McLaughlin cites the poem when describing a paved floor-façade to a house in Wandsworth.²⁷ McLaughlin borrows a title, *Trial Pieces*, for a lecture and essay from *North*, a later volume of poems where Heaney uses the imagery of bog-bodies, Iron-Age corpses discovered in the bogs of Northern Europe, as a way of writing about the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Other connections with Heaney can be made, but McLaughlin’s loam is formed more broadly and includes other writers and poets, such as Sarah Maguire, James Joyce, Elizabeth Bishop, W.B. Yeats and Jorge Luis Borges. The chapel grew out of this context too.

McLaughlin admits that *Seeing Things* is not one of his favourite Heaney collections, except for *Lightenings*, *viii*, which he used to introduce his lectures for a decade alongside *St Kevin and the Blackbird*, yet another Heaney poem from another collection that was also referenced in the competition entry for the chapel.²⁸ Here, Saint Kevin sticks his arm out of window, a blackbird laying an egg in his palm causing him to continue to hold out his aching hand, carefully cradling the new creation until the ‘young are hatched and fledged and flown’.²⁹ There is a sense that the chapel was an almost inevitable outworking of these preoccupations, the poems recited as mantras or prayers, patiently being remembered to nurture a new building when possibility allowed.

Dow Jones and the Marshall House

Quiet Marvels is the title Biba Dow, of Dow Jones Architects, gave to a talk in 2022 as part of the Presence, Person, Beauty lecture series.³⁰ McLaughlin had given the previous talk, borrowing his title – *Old Timber to New Fires* – from T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*. Dow derives her title from the last line of Heaney’s *Lightenings*, *viii*, which we have already encountered – ‘out of the marvellous as he had known it’. In the talk, Heaney’s work is described as a ‘lodestone’. It has informed both a building designed by Dow Jones and something of their sensibility.

The Marshall House, Suffolk, was built in 2001. A long thin rectangle on plan, the building has a simple pitched roof of clay tiles. Blackened timber walls, punctured with modest window openings, rest on a brick plinth that extends inside to create the ground-floor surface, and upwards to form hearths and chimney stacks. The first floor, staircase and dividing walls are constructed with solidly detailed timbers. It is a modest, unassuming house with strong material properties. It might easily be mistaken for a much older building. There is something about the house that is very Heaney-like: It adopts a vernacular form. Its materials are used very simply and directly. There is a language of ‘gutters’, ‘ridge-tiles’, ‘tongue-and-groove worthiness’ and ‘hearth-blaze’ that reprise in Heaney’s words. The brick ground-floor surface recalls a similar floor in *Squarings*, *xi*:

I was four but I turned four hundred maybe
Encountering the ancient dampish feel
Of a clay floor. Maybe four thousand even.³¹

Heaney goes on to close the poem:

Out of that earth house I inherited
A stack of singular, cold memory-weights
To load me, hand and foot, in the scale of things.³²

The Marshall House could easily be the one that Heaney describes. Dow quotes these same verses to describe the importance she places on making things with her hands to appreciate their material character, often legible in the marks of tooling and repair, noting too how she is moved by things that are worn, such as ‘a step softened by passing feet’ connecting us ‘through material and habits and places across time’.³³ While Dow does not directly link these verses with the house she does describe it using *Markings, III*, in part one of *Seeing Things*:³⁴

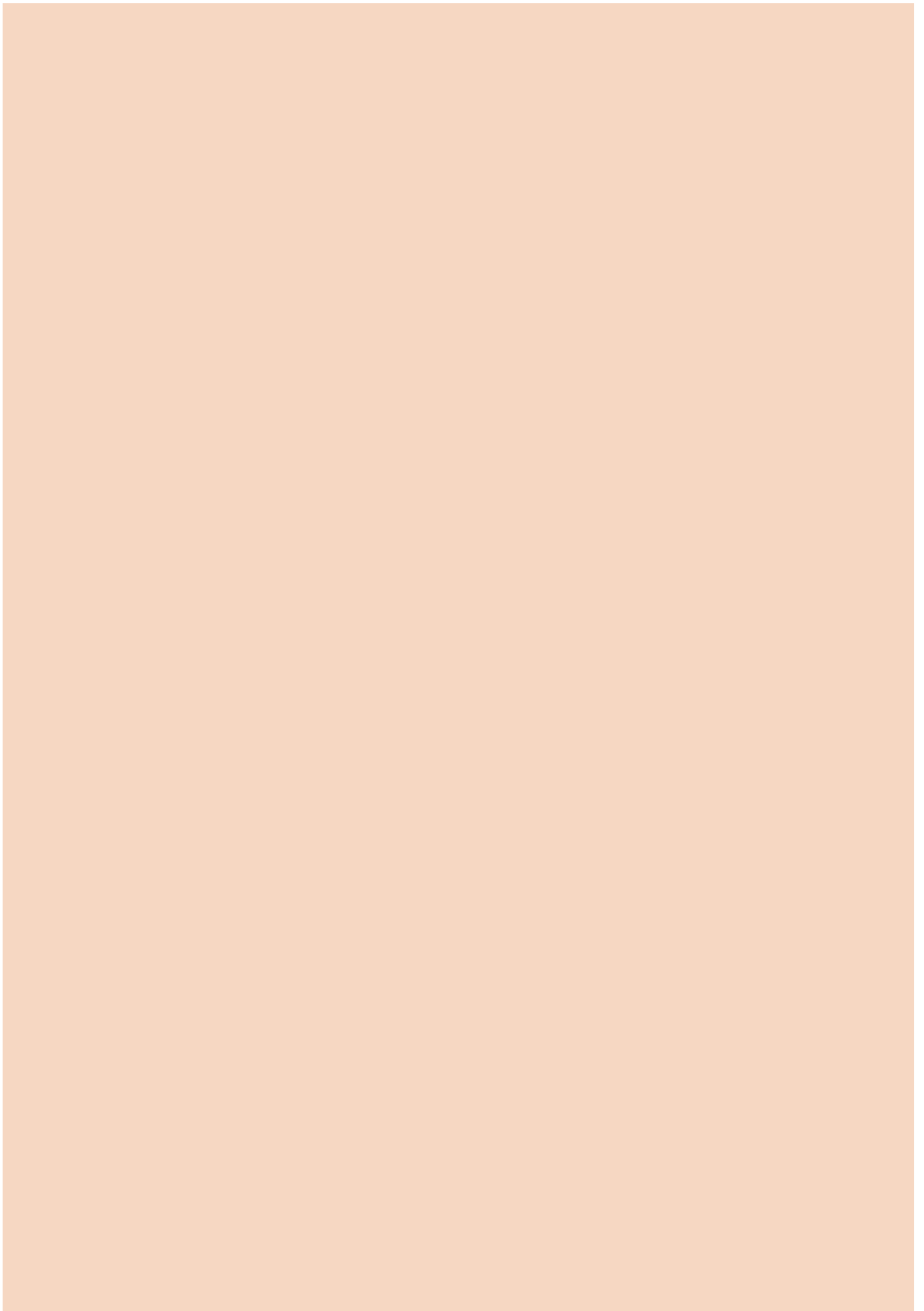
All these things entered you.
As if they were both the door and what came through it.
They marked the spot, marked time and held it open.³⁵

The words cause her to project the house forwards and back in time, ‘marking’ the site with a lasting brick plinth, hearth and chimney, should all else be wasted. To underline this potential future Dow shows an image of just such a hearth in Dungeness.³⁶ A new place is marked and made, establishing a physical presence in an ‘unbounded’ site. Dow’s quote is from the beginning of the third part of the poem. Its earlier parts describe children marking out a football pitch, transforming ‘bumpy thistle ground’. The second part associates this with:

The tight white string. Or string stretched perfectly
To mark the outline of a house foundation,³⁷

There is a clear sense of the careful setting out of lines and right angles that govern the labour of spades, mowers and ‘freshly sawn new board’, which has a direct resonance with the activity of an architect and the importance Dow attaches to making. It recalls too the connections Heaney makes between simple physical acts, material properties, places, memories and metaphor. One of his best known and earliest poems, *Digging*, was conceived while driving a car and changing gear to turn a corner.³⁸ Shifting from third to second then first gear caused Heaney to think about shifts through three generations of his family. The poem describes his grandfather digging peat, Heaney visiting him and watching him work as he reflects on his own tools:





Dow Jones, Marshall House, Suffolk, Interior view, 2001.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.³⁹

Like O'Donnell and Tuomey's sleeves and cliff walks, an incidental act of changing gear becomes a poem describing the everyday physical activity of his grandfather, Heaney finding metaphors in – what Dow notes as – the 'space between the words and imagery', alert to connections between place, matter and people as 'He summons the essence of things'.⁴⁰ It is harder to say if the Marshall House is metaphorical, but it certainly provides a ground for metaphors, the likes of which are found by Heaney.

Marvels, Essences and Entanglements

Heaney's work has an international reputation and is well known within Ireland. It is no surprise that each architect is aware of his work, but more curious that each should choose, in their own work, to refer not just to Heaney, but to one of his collections specifically. So why are they drawn to *Seeing Things*?

In some senses, Heaney, like Joyce, is just too present, immediate and easy to reach for when discussing Irish architecture, epigraphs and quotations from them both being regularly appropriated in architectural writing. While this simple juxtaposition might prime our understanding of a building, it does not necessarily follow that there is a meaningful connection between a poem and a building, or a dialogue between the architectural and poetic imagination. The work of architecture does not somehow become poetic, nor the work of poetry become architectural. (We should note too that Dow has little connection with Ireland.) The buildings designed by each architect are not necessarily derivative of those described by Heaney in his poems. They respond to Heaney in other ways.

Lightenings, VIII, is a well-known, memorable part of *Seeing Things* and easily lends itself to architectural appropriation; its strong spatial imagery is also referred to in another O'Donnell and Tuomey project, 'The Vessel', a stacked timber plank structure installed at the 2012 Venice Biennale. The reference was here less direct, but Heaney's work was included on a 'table of affinities', acknowledging his presence alongside other influences in a similar way to McLaughlin's loam. Significantly, this poem is the one cited by McLaughlin when asked why he considers Heaney's work to be 'architectural'.⁴¹ Heaney here evokes a spatial presence, in a way that could be likened to the activity of an architect. Dow observes something similar when reading *Markings*, III. Heaney's poems might feature buildings or use an architecturally analogous structure – like in the rigid twelve-poem, twelve-line discipline of the second part of *Seeing Things* – but what becomes apparent are parallels

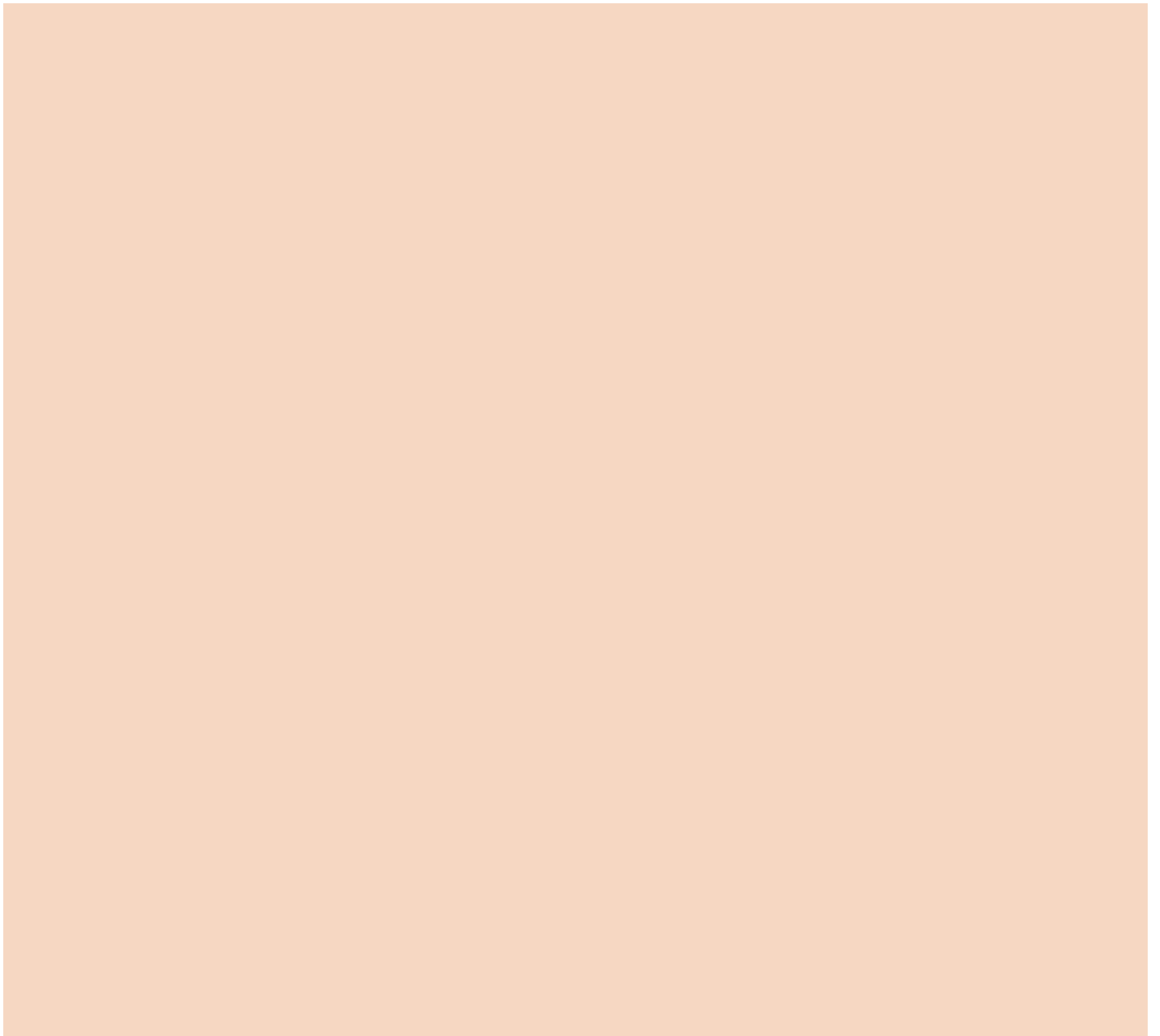
between the craft and production of a poet and that of the architect; properties of structure, rhythm and tone coinciding among the worlds constructed by words and buildings.

Broadly, O'Donnell and Tuomey at the gallery and McLaughlin at the chapel respond directly to *Lightenings*, VIII. Dow, by contrast, absorbs a more general sense of *Seeing Things*, is less interested in formal suggestions and more rooted in essences and processes – an intrinsic poetry of things in themselves, in a building, its parts and its life. Her approach has more affinity with Heaney's tendency to see buildings as vessels that embody and carry memory, mark place and provide shelter. Heaney's 'marvels', which might not involve a building at all, transform our perception of the everyday and mundane, as we witnessed in *Skylight*. For Dow too, marvels are observed and found in the ordinary, in the 'essence of things'. In an apparent contrast, at the gallery and chapel the marvel of the poem becomes a means of informing design thinking and transforming the eventual presence and experience of a building: *Lightenings*, VIII, offers the architects of the gallery an insight into the possibilities and qualities of above and below as they nurture its form, whereas at the chapel the situation conjured by the poem is concretized and overlaid with other influences and inflections. In both cases, the resultant architectural form is suggestive, rather than closed, metaphorical rather than analogous. Polemically, the gallery and chapel could be considered metaphorical responses, whereas the house is conceived as a ground for metaphors, or marvels, although we could think of the chapel and gallery in a similar way. While Heaney may have been present in the gestation of each building, his presence is not required as we experience each one – they work on their own terms. Simple distinctions mask a more complex set of interactions and transactions which are taking place between buildings, poetry, architects and poets.

It is perhaps too obvious to state, but easy to overlook, that none of the architects build their buildings. They draw them and these drawings are used, by others, to construct the worlds they have imagined, as McLaughlin and his team rehearsed on the plaster floor. None of them appear to write their buildings into being, or if they do it is in the form of a contract or specification document, never a poem. In this sense Heaney's poems could be considered borrowed drawings, a means of exploring and arriving at something that does not already exist, an observation lent from another that might be translated into architectural form or method. Like the poet, architects are, as McLaughlin notes, 'projecting forward into an uncertain place'. Heaney reminds architects of something similar, remarking that:

... each new structure involves, in a deep metaphorical sense, a re-creation of the world, and so contributes towards the bringing into being of a certain kind of world.⁴²

The three architects we have discussed, and their respective buildings, assume a reciprocal connection with Heaney and the poetic. This connection does not necessarily rely on the appearance of buildings in his poems but in an architectural presence or potency given by his words. This potency allows each to think about architectural framing differently. An



architectural element, such as a floor, does not then just become an aesthetic surface, a technical assembly or result of purely practical considerations, but assumes a poetic presence too. The nature of this presence might be as a carrier of memory and time, as the floor is used and worn – in the case of Dow – or part of the construction of a larger, transformative ‘marvel’ – a metaphorical application of the poem seen at the Glucksman and Bishop Edward King Chapel. In each, the architectural and poetic imagination coincides. Heaney’s marvels might be found in many places, perhaps simply in the revelation of a designer reading one of his poems – while for Heaney the physical might prompt a poem, here, a poem might prompt a building.

On the surface, each ‘use’ of Heaney’s poetry seems one-directional – an architect borrowing inspiration for their own creative process from the creative labour of another. Typically a single line, but sometimes a broader sense, or way of seeing, become a point of departure. However, Heaney’s collection has its own debts that complicate a simple reading. *Seeing Things* was partly written at Bótharbuí, which Heaney describes in *Settings*, XIII:

Hazel stealth. A trickle in the culvert.
Athletic sealight on the doorstep slab,
On the sea itself, on silent roofs and gables.⁴³

A family retreat in West Cork, Ireland, Bótharbuí was designed and used by Robin Walker, partner of RIBA Gold Medal winning Scott Tallon Walker and the subject of another of Heaney’s poems, *An Architect*. Walker taught at University College Dublin, alongside O’Donnell and Tuomey. McLaughlin was taught by him there and would go on to work for him. Dow’s connections are less obvious but, alongside her partner Alun Jones, taught with Patrick Lynch who edited a monograph on Walker, with Walker’s son, and curated an exhibition and film on Bótharbuí at the Venice Biennale in 2008, with a specially recorded soundtrack of Heaney reciting his poems.⁴⁴ A year later Heaney laid a foundation stone inscribed with his penned words at O’Donnell and Tuomey’s Lyric Theatre in Belfast.

A complex intertwining of people, words, and buildings thus becomes evident, the roles and work of poet and architect reciprocal. Heaney’s work is often noted for its sensitivity to places and memory, which here seems to stem from, and fold back into, the creative work of others, informing new places. Just as buildings and architectural elements resonated with Heaney, each of the architects has drawn from him, providing a potent image for O’Donnell and Tuomey at the Glucksman Gallery, a spiritual setting for McLaughlin at Bishop Edward King Chapel and a poetry in making and material presence for Dow Jones: Things seen in *Seeing Things*.

- 1 For a succinct overview of Heaney's work, see: Bernard O'Donoghue (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney* (Cambridge, 2009), 11-12.
- 2 Seamus Heaney, *Seeing Things* (London, 1991), 31.
- 3 Ibid., 34.
- 4 Ibid., 31.
- 5 Ibid., 56.
- 6 Ibid., 56.
- 7 Ibid., 16.
- 8 Henry Hart, 'What Is Heaney Seeing in Seeing Things?', *Colby Quarterly* 30/1 (1994), 33-42.
- 9 Heaney, *Seeing Things*, op. cit. (note 2), 50.
- 10 Ibid., 37.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 John Wilson Foster, 'Crediting Marvels: Heaney after 50', in: O'Donoghue, *The Cambridge Companion*, op. cit. (note 1), 207.
- 13 Charles Weston Prince, *Resonant Forms: Architecture in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney and Derek Walcott*, unpublished doctoral thesis (University of Toronto, 2000).
- 14 Seamus Heaney, 'Place, Pastness, Poems: A Triptych', *Salmagundi* 188/189 (2015), 539-556.
- 15 John Tuomey, *Architecture, Craft and Culture* (Kinsale, 2004), 58.
- 16 Heaney, *Seeing Things*, op. cit. (note 2), 62.
- 17 Tuomey, *Architecture*, op. cit. (note 15), 58.
- 18 Heaney, *Seeing Things*, op. cit. (note 2), 62.
- 19 Tuomey, *Architecture*, op. cit. (note 15), 58.
- 20 Heaney, *Crossings*, xxx, quoted in: David Leatherbarrow, 'Landings and Crossing – The Lewis Glucksman Gallery', in: Sheila O'Donnell and John Tuomey, *O'Donnell + Tuomey: Selected Works* (New York, 2007), 176-185.
- 21 Tuomey quoted in: Shane O'Toole, 'The Elevated Ordinary', *Architectural Review* 1432 (2016); Tuomey, *Architecture*, op. cit. (note 15), 90.
- 22 Níall McLaughlin, *Twelve Halls* (London, 2018), 22-23.
- 23 Níall McLaughlin, 'Incarnations: Bishop Edward Chapel Cuddesdon', in: Lisa Godson and Kathleen James-Chakraborty (eds.), *Modern Religious Architecture in Germany, Ireland and Beyond* (London, 2019), 117-136.
- 24 Níall McLaughlin, *Night Waves*, BBC Radio 4 programme (2004).
- 25 Heaney, *Seeing Things*, op. cit. (note 2), 62.
- 26 Níall McLaughlin, 'Swimmers', *Poetry and Architecture* lecture, RIBA (2014).
- 27 Níall McLaughlin, 'Shem and Shaun', *Arch-ive* interview (2020).
- 28 Níall McLaughlin, e-mail correspondence with author (2024).
- 29 Seamus Heaney, *The Spirit Level* (London, 1996), 24.
- 30 Biba Dow, 'Quiet Marvels', *Presence, Person, Beauty* lecture (2022).
- 31 Heaney, *Seeing Things*, op. cit. (note 2), 9.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Biba Dow, 'First Hand', *Architecture Today* 277 (2017) 0.
- 34 Biba Dow, 'Summer Nights 2009', *Architecture Foundation* lecture (2009).
- 35 Heaney, *Seeing Things*, op. cit. (note 2), 9.
- 36 Biba Dow, 'Legacy, New Horizons', in: *The Cultural Significance of Architecture*, The Dalibor Vesely Memorial Conference: Session 3 (2016).
- 37 Heaney, *Seeing Things*, op. cit. (note 2), 8.
- 38 Seamus Heaney, in: 'The Four Sides of Seamus Heaney: Poet of Place', BBC Radio 4 programme (2023).
- 39 Seamus Heaney, *Death of a Naturalist* (London, 1966), 13.
- 40 Biba Dow, e-mail correspondence with author (2024).
- 41 Níall McLaughlin, discussion with author (2024).
- 42 Seamus Heaney, 'From Maecenas to MacAlpine', in: John Graby (ed.), *150 Years of Architecture in Ireland: RIAI 1839-1989* (Dublin, 1989), 72.
- 43 Heaney, *Seeing Things*, op. cit. (note 2), 69.
- 44 Patrick Lynch and Simon Walker (eds), *Change is the Reality: The Work of Robin Walker Architect* (London, 2021).