

## Spirit of Place

*Whiskey, Irish for droplets of pure pleasure.*

-WB Yeats

Across different cultures, alcohol is often found by names deriving from Latin *aqua vitae*, as an important alternative to unhygienic drinking water before the arrival of modern sanitation system. No exception, the term *whiskey* is Anglicized version of the Gaelic '*uisce beatha*', meaning water of life. And in Ireland, it goes further. As comfort to the poor and luxury to the rich, drinking remains an essential part of the Irish community. In midst of increasingly diversifying community and changing social environment as anticipated in National Planning Framework 2040, whiskey offers an intimate lens into present and future possibilities of society in Ireland.

An essential economic activity of any Irish town, until the 18th century, every town is said to have had own (in most instances illegal) distillery.<sup>1</sup> This varied in sizes from single, small pot distilling of grain or potato, *Poitin*, by individual farmers to more formal mid-sized distilleries of one building or collection of two to four buildings.<sup>2</sup> Established in 1784, Bushmills distillery is still considered an important industry and landmark of Bushmills town, and the regional Glens council considers development of a brand for Bushmills village with the distillery at the core, the distillery becoming the village's "character, heart and soul." Adding to this, there are also numerous pubs across Ireland that provide merry sanctuaries from the wet and cold weather. Rather than borrowing a vague notion of its setting in picturesque landscape, new distilleries have the potential to more actively embody the characteristics of the place and engage with the residents. A distillery can become the new social space of the place, especially in the Irish countryside where communal facility is often lacking.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Spirit***

The proposed mid-sized distillery downsizes and deconstructs, and the production of whiskey broken down into seven different stages and spaces.<sup>4</sup> This contrasts with the large, campus type industries in the peripheries of the big towns. They are also the type of whiskey production space through the 19th century to present for few distilleries, serving the demands of the markets such as USA, Japan and neighboring European countries. The spaces of deconstructed distillery are allocated in consideration of the topography,

the arable character of the land, and the required footprint of each production space, from 15,000 liters of barley getting distilled to 400 liters of bottled whiskey. The distancing, of one stage of production from the next, simultaneously acts to maintain flexibility in the number of participating landowners, and the size of production. It overlays a new structure that weaves the countryside sparsity, and preserves the original land divisions and house locations. Thereby incorporating its immediate environment set in-between two adjacent distillery spaces, the distillery seeks to create a totality of its context. Borrowing from Norberg-Schulz, *place* for the distillery is a qualitative, total phenomenon, beyond referring to a locality.<sup>5</sup> It is a totality of concrete things "having material substance, shape, texture, and color." A place forms a particular identity under local circumstances of concrete things and background, and thus is differentiated from the other. Norberg-Schulz describes this identity as "spirit".

Raw material is carried from one space to the next through a pipeline system, an open series of metal arches holding up the pipe off the ground. By its directionality and open fragility, this system constructs consciousness of each stage of production, and of the surrounding context of fields, houses, and the weather. It creates moments of serendipitous encounter between the visitors, the commuting workers and the locals where it crosses the fields, the paths and the roads, and forms small spaces of seating or sharing facility of distillery by-product like fertilizer and animal feed. The pipe system stand upon the fields as alien industrial structure upon the lush pastures but can potentially develop a unique aesthetical character in and as observed in Berlin's 60km long pink water pipes, or the colorful pipes of James Stirling's Stuttgart Gallery. Such moments of encounter is also performed in the interior of the distillery where the whiskey production brought is brought back into the domestic scene. The central space of the distillery navigates between the realms of production and domesticity, creating moments of encounter. Blurring the strict separation of domestic living space and efficient production space, the distillery introduces area of overlap in the kitchen and the raw material preparation, and the living room and the material-receiving space. Different stage of production, requiring distinct temperatures, materials and tools, create unique spaces and experiences in the encounters.

## ***Place***

When the old Irish farming system of shared land-use, *Rundale* was in practice, one would say the artifact here is the field itself, responding with flexibility and sustainability to varying soil qualities, seasons, and population. The fields structured the land, the houses and the paths. This is to which farmers oriented and identified themselves. Today, farming

has lost much value in the region. In Donegal County, the number of farms decreased by 68% between 1951 and 2010, showing the highest farm loss in Ireland.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, in building a distillery in the Irish countryside, Palazzo Della Ragione would be treating it a *tabula rasa*.<sup>7</sup> The collectiveness in western rural Ireland has been joint, productive work to overcome the hostile environment. The fragmented form of the distillery in constellation network, becoming the artifact of the rural, is adaptable to present land conditions, and to the uncertain changes trade conditions and production scale.

The possibility of the new distillery working in the village scale as a co-operative consolidation of parts, and the potential to form a wider local, and regional network of shared logistics and flow of people in macro scale, present a different form of development for the western Irish countryside as opposed to the mono-centric development of the east of Ireland.

## ***Architecture***

Rethinking the architecture of production in countryside opens an array of possibilities regarding social and economic future of not only the countryside but also of whole Ireland. Distillery, while acting as an economic anchor to re-establish the connection to the place in the dying countryside, also hold the potential to become a physical, social platform of exchange between people of different backgrounds. Architecture consolidates the countryside sparsity and provides unique spaces and experiences for the encounters of the people. This is not blindsiding the economic logics of the production, since this very nature of fostering meaningful interaction impart to the value of the final product, as displayed by the effort put in by existing distilleries to bring visitors to experience the process in person. In post-capitalism society of today, architecture of production holds a new spectrum of functions to explore as means of extreme efficiency to mobilizer of people.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In rural Ireland, for the poverty-ridden farmers distilling was almost a necessity as an additional income, catering for a very local market. Distilling was so prevalent in poorer Gaelic part of Ireland that English parliament act in 1556 describes whiskey as being of no good to be drunk daily “now universally throughout this realm of Ireland made.” See Peter Mulryan, *The Whiskeys of Ireland* (The O’Brien Press Ltd, 2016), 25-30.

<sup>2</sup> *Poitin* means small pot in Gaelic.

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<sup>3</sup> Until the 20th century, most western Irish farms maximized the use of the deprived land through a requisite system of joint farming called *Rundale* system. Collective in purely productive sense, the settlement clusters lacked communal character in social aspect. See F. H. A., Aalen, et al, *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape* (Cork University Press, 2011), 79-88.

<sup>4</sup> The whiskey is produced through stages of grain storage, malting, mashing, fermentation, distillation, maturation and finally bottling. For details, refer to Peter Mulryan, *The Whiskeys of Ireland* (The O'Brien Press Ltd, 2016), 165-170.

<sup>5</sup> See Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (Rizzoli, 1997), 6-23

<sup>6</sup> The persistent loss of population from agrarian towns to bigger towns is seen as a chronic problem in Ireland. See Central Statistics Office of Ireland, *Life in 1916 Ireland: Stories from statistics*, and *Census of Population 2016 – Profile 6 Commuting in Ireland* (<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp6ci/p6cii/p6www/>, accessed 5 October 2018)

<sup>7</sup> See Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City* (MIT Press, 1984), 130.

<sup>8</sup> In post-capitalism of knowledge centered society, the person is central, as the mobile embodiment of knowledge. See Peter F. Drucker, *Post-Capitalist Society* (Suffolk, Butterworth-Heinemann, 2013), 191-196.