



Exhibition  
Team

African  
Futures  
Institute



# The Well-laid Table

Curatorial workshop held in London in March 2022 at the White Collar Factory. Image by Erica Wszolek.



Richard Sennett describes cooperation as ‘an exchange in which the participants benefit from the encounter. This behaviour is instantly recognisable in children building a sandcastle or men and women laying sandbags against an impending flood. Instantly recognisable because mutual support is built into the genes of all social animals; they cooperate to accomplish what they can’t do alone.’<sup>1</sup>

All human endeavour carries risk and reward. Although it sounds beneficial, cooperation can slide into collusion and competition just as easily and quickly as it builds community. Genuine cooperation, as Sennett describes it, ‘is difficult and demanding; it tries to join people who have separate or conflicting interests; who are unequal or who simply do not understand one another. The challenge is to respond to others on their own terms.’

Over the past six months —and looking ahead — the AFI has been engaged in a challenging and unusual period of intense collaboration between different groups of people located in different places in the world. Born out of necessity during the global pandemic, we’ve quickly become accustomed to this new way of working, yet at the same time, have had to develop new techniques and strategies to ensure meaningful cooperation. We are reminded of Alvin Boyarsky’s concept of the school of architecture as a ‘well-laid table’<sup>2</sup>, his metaphor for an educational model that confronts diversity and divergency head-on.

At ‘our’ table are academic/practitioners working in Dublin; emerging researcher-practitioners working in Accra, Dakar, Lagos and London; practitioner-writers working in Accra; practitioner-academics working in Johannesburg, London and Oxford; a graphic designers based in Johannesburg; operations managers and events coordinators in Accra and interns; assistants and research assistants working between London, Los Angeles and Accra .

This endeavour requires a new kind of hierarchy and organisational structure, which is unfolding over time and across space, both virtual and real. With so much time spent on Zoom or in our respective offices and bedrooms, we miss getting to know one another in the way that a good dinner party or social event can do. So, over the next month, we invite you to join us at our well-laid digital table, getting to know us better through the means we have at our disposal.

Bon appétit, or as we say in Ghana, ‘you are invited.’

<sup>1</sup> Sennett, R. Together: ‘The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation’. London: Penguin, 2012. P.5

<sup>2</sup> Sunwoo, I., From the “Well-Laid Table” to the “Market Place:” The Architectural Association Unit System’. Journal of Architectural Education, vol 65, Issue 2, March 2012. [O] <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1531-314X.2011.01196.x> Accessed 11 July 2022

Portrait credit:  
Ste Murray



Emmett Scanlon is an architect, committed to advancing the cultural production and the critique of architecture. His work includes spatial and exhibition design, writing, criticism, policy development, production design, public art, broadcasting, and education.

In 2021 he founded Story, Building, an independent platform for the critical discussion of architecture, working across print, digital and live events. Emmett is Assistant Professor of architecture at University College Dublin. In 2021 he was the first studio-based Professor in architecture to be awarded the President's Award for Teaching Excellence.

He was Advisor to the Arts Council (Ireland) between 2006-2020 and was instrumental in a range of research, policy, and funding initiatives to build audiences for architecture, and to support the work of architects in Ireland and internationally.

He is an Associate Artist (2022) with theatre production company THISISPOPBABY. In 2018 he was Assistant to the Curators Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara for FREESPACE, the 16th International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia.

[www.emmettscanlon.ie](http://www.emmettscanlon.ie)

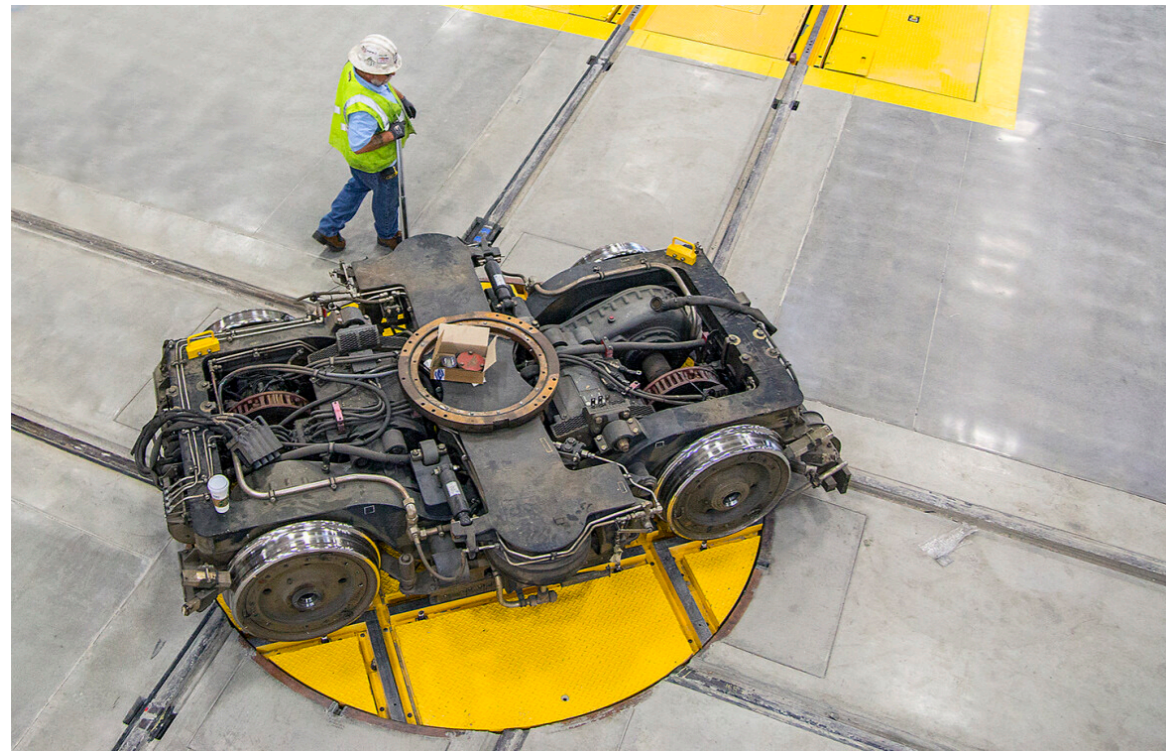
Your turn, table  
by Emmett Scanlon

I like words and objects. They are a kind of family, mine, assembled, loyal. It is boring but when I begin to write something I look up words to see if I really know their meaning, if I have misunderstood, or if there exist meanings of words of which I am yet unaware. A word is not fixed to me, it is alive, it moves. I like objects for the same reason. I am interested in the agency of objects and the idea they are 'vibrant matter'. Objects do things we do not intend or expect. Objects have social lives; their own biographies; they have agency, the act; they come into existence for groups of people to get work done; they are not just stuff and should not be dismissed as trivial; they are key to how we come to understand our individual and collective identities, our human exchanges, our place on this planet.

In writing this text and thinking about tables, I thought of turntables, the things vinyl records sit on. Vinyl records are my first engagement with objects of design in a conscious way. My first record was given to me aged six, and I became a collector. There is a kind of comfort in the repetitive standard, the fact that even today vinyl is broadly the same as it always has been since it was invented. A round disc is magically etched with sound; at home a stylus and turntable are needed for the listener to hear, the record itself becoming an object, at that moment, which acts, enabling the musician and the listener to connect. Turntables are successful domestically, but elsewhere too. Vinyl and the DJs that played it, are among the things that built disco and dancing. They were the triggers for new building typologies and for millions of people, the gateway to finding new ways of belonging, moving, often for the first time, like a record plays, from the margin to the middle.

Image 1) Engineered Turn table in testing laboratory. Courtesy and copyright of Handling Speciality Manufacturing Limited.

Image 2) Vivian Maier. 1977. Chicagoland. Courtesy and copyright estate of Vivian Maier Howard Greenberg Gallery.



Besides the record itself, there is the sleeve, an object of simplicity or real complexity, an endless landscape of potential and design variation. These sleeves mediate the music culturally, placing it in some other creative context; they also gather footnotes, filling the gaps in between what your ears hear, your heart feels and the detail your mind needs to know (who wrote it when, who played drums, who is thanked). They are, for some reason, also just totally beautiful in a way I no longer care to theorise.

In 1975, a teenager invented the 'scratch' in his bedroom when playing records, being asked to stop abruptly, called by his mother. At this moment, the Grand Wizard Theodore turned the turntable into an instrument, and four years later the world had hip-hop. Right then, the turntable found some yet unrealised potential, something it was not designed to do, no one knew it could do, as did the vinyl, expanding music beyond recognition, by accident yes, but also human touch, endeavour and instinctive attention. A scratch, an action of potential damage, an inherent risk, started a cultural revolution. I like to think that at that moment, the vinyl record found its own voice and said aloud, 'now, it's your turn, table.'

Working on an international exhibition with Shelley McNamara and Yvonne Farrell, altered fundamentally how I think about collaboration, in all forms of practice and education. I used to think collaboration meant that I should do what I do best, and you, you should play to your strengths, together we could make a great team. This is how I had been trained since school and in University, to accept this is how the world worked, the best are picked first to be on the team, the worst last, but in a way that might be obvious to others already, that international exhibition erased that.



Collaboration is not about being the best, it is about showing weakness and being vulnerable. More than this, it is about working with others not to extract the best out of them, or, more cynically, mine their potential like capital. Rather it is about divesting your strength and capital to support them to embrace the things they do not understand or have yet to translate into action or activity, accepting you too need this in return. 'In Flesh and Stone' Richard Sennett<sup>1</sup> writes about 'syncope', de Mondeville's idea that when an organ of a body was ill, another organ would work harder to compensate, the heart would support the sick liver and so on. Medically impossible, it remains a compelling and beautiful notion of collaboration. So, I return to another set of collaborations, with the anticipation of that first revolution, my face side-down to a vast, hot table that I would never otherwise hope to grasp or understand, waiting for the scratch.

<sup>1</sup> Western Civilization. 1994.

Sennett, R. Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in

Image 3) Leslie Bryce. John Lennon listens to a 7" record on tour in a hotel room with a turntable on a sink. This photograph was taken as part of a series between 1963-68 for The Beatles Book, the monthly publication of the band. This photo was never released. To read more: <https://www.vintag.es/2015/09/rare-and-unseen-photographs-taken-from.html>

Image 4) Joanna Piotrowska. 2017. Untitled, from the Frantic Series. Courtesy of the artist and David Dradziszewski Gallery.





Alice Clancy is an architect whose practice involves education, photography and curation. Collaboration is at the heart of all aspects of her practice.

Alice works as an Assistant Professor and Director of Teaching and Learning at the School of Architecture, Planning & Environmental Policy at University College Dublin. At UCD, together with colleagues, she coordinates architectural design studios, workshops and lectures in photography. She has taught, lectured and reviewed at schools of architecture and design across Ireland and the UK.

In her photographic practice, she focuses on the careful and considered communication of design, working with designers and inhabitants to explore how light and occupation animate and ultimately transform each project. Her work has been widely published.

Her curatorial work includes working as Assistant to the Curators Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara for FREESPACE, the 16th International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia 2018.

[www.aliceclancy.com](http://www.aliceclancy.com)

An image of my worktable from a few years ago. The table has a glass top. Gathered on, under and around it are fragments collected while practising, photographing, curating, teaching and studying architecture... from places where my practice segued, expanded and was challenged... Ireland, Italy, South Africa, Kenya, the US, Denmark, India and Russia. I have worked at this table for fourteen years, since I decided to settle in Ireland and started to venture beyond design practice.

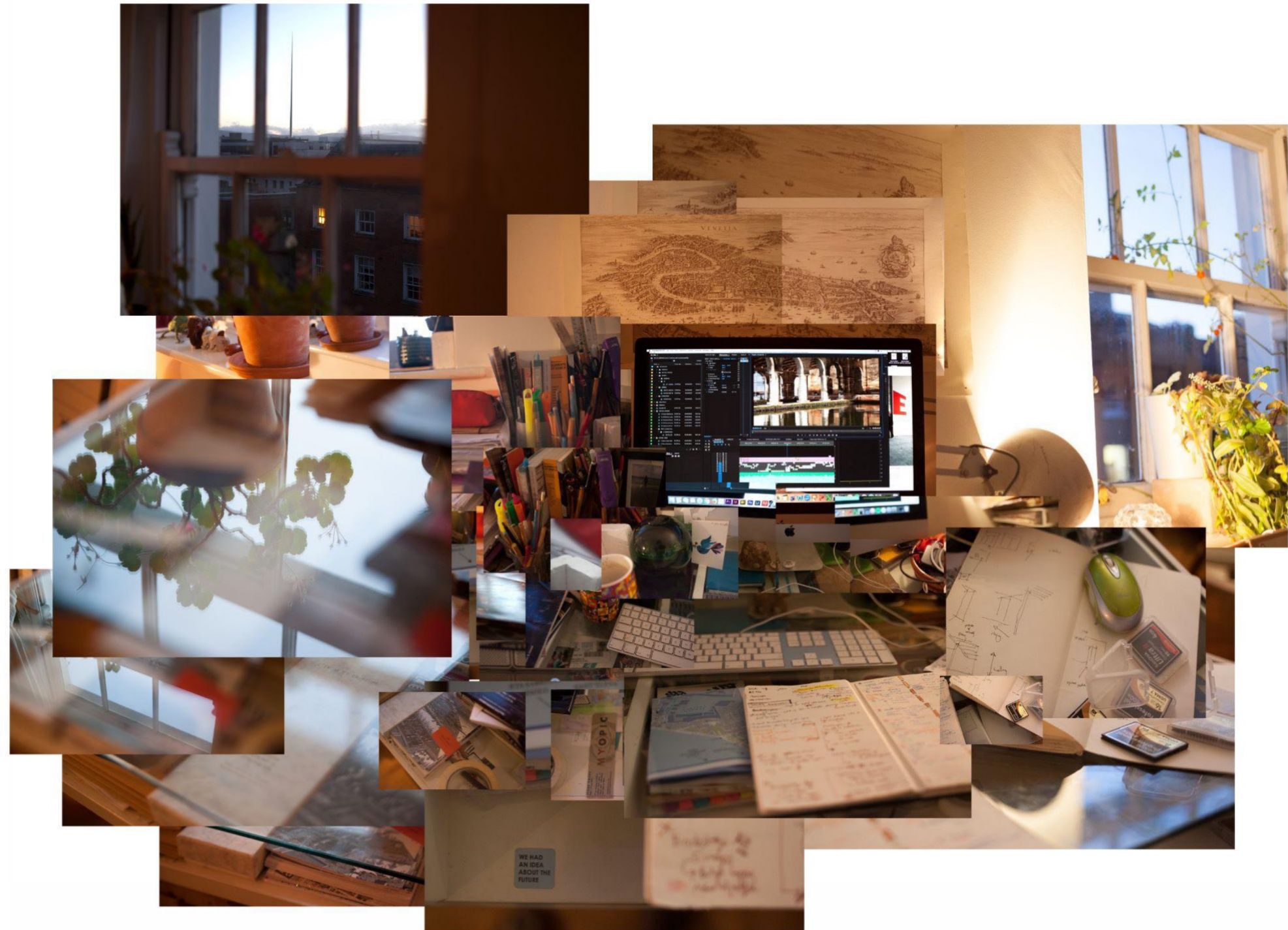
In the image, I had paused work, distracted by the reflection of the evening light and the view skimming the rooftops of Dublin's north inner city towards Kippure Mountain, and took some photographs.

It feels as though the world has shifted on its axis since then. As I now piece together this image of what is to me, a Well-Laid table, it is like peering into another time.

I no longer work there, but the table and the fragments came with me and have been orbiting, shuffling and reforming in different constellations around where I work now.

The world has been fragmenting, shuffling and reforming too. It feels as though there is no one clear view anymore; no single point perspective, no neat edges. Once one viewpoint is understood, another emerges to counter or expand on it. Some of this fragmentation feels fresh and constructive, some of it feels hopelessly destructive. But within this constant fragmentation, uncertainty, shuffling and reforming is a type of multifaceted freedom and a contradictory beauty, as the world shifts, settles and shifts again, and we squint and adjust our focus and ideas accordingly. This is what draws me to this new project under the directorship of Professor Lesley Lokko.

Image 1) Alice Clancy. 2018.  
Worktable. Photographs  
taken 18/12/18 17.03-17.21.  
Image made 09/06/22,  
18:05 - 20:24.







Portrait credit:  
Ste Murray



Laurence Lord is an architect and founding partner with AP+E, a design and research office based in Ireland and The Netherlands. AP+E is driven by a strong interest in the social and cultural value of architecture. Along with Jeffrey Bolhuis, Laurence founded the office in 2013, the work includes exhibition making, regional strategies, adaptive reuse, and curation. The work of the office has won awards and been extensively published in newspapers, journals & online. Laurence is a lecturer at the School of Natural and Built Environment at Queen's University Belfast.

Laurence co-curated Free Market, the Irish National Pavilion at the 16th International Architecture Exhibition, la Biennale di Venezia in 2018. Free Market is an ongoing research project into the public spaces and potential development of market towns in Ireland, which toured Ireland in 2019. Laurence won the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland Future Award in 2021.

[www.ap-e.eu](http://www.ap-e.eu)

Recently I have come to terms with the fact that it is okay not to know what you want to be when you grow up. Career plans are useful, but limiting. Actually a livelihood with multiplicity is a wonderful thing. It allows for cross pollination of ideas, learning from other positions and a broader understanding of the whole.

In practise we inherently do this in our work – we cross cultures, we borrow concepts, we offer outsider perspectives and we constantly evolve our positions. Actively absorbing from one type of project to reapply to a completely different one. We bring our own stories, our own agendas and any culture we have been lucky enough to grasp to the conversation.

Architects are forever changing though. When viewed through a certain lens the bandwidth of the profession has radically reduced. We have divested risk, we have subsided into specialism or even worse, courted luxury. You could even say that we have pulled away from the table of most influence. But I think that this is changing.

Increasingly those architects that are not practising in a traditional way are drawing focus. The value of a diverse discourse which moves past shape and finish and authorship and artifact is becoming more prominent. This broadening inclusivity of what it means to operate as an architect will only help understanding for the planet's growing spatial concerns

This is what I'm interested in. It's the idea of 'multi'. It's the multiplicity of views, the personal histories, the cultural dexterities, the hidden talents that can all be supported. We come to exhibitions to learn and mine ideas and ultimately to witness change. Presumably when you work on an exhibition it is to do much the same just over a longer and more intense period of time. What is not to like?

Image 1) Matthew Thompson. Shan-Zehn Table. Copyright of the artist.



'...the Maison du Peuple in Paris's suburb of Clichy, designed by Marcel Lods, Eugène Beaudouin, and Jean Prouvé (1938) was a building intended for a wide range of uses for a working-class part of the city: a "facility" that would change in order to accommodate them. Hence the upper hall, which was voluminous, with the character of an aircraft hangar or a factory, could be partitioned in a variety of ways through sliding and folding partitions. The roof could even be slid open to the sky, to allow the liberation of interior activities right down to the ground floor: the spaces on the ground floor, largely used for a market, were low, but this space could be opened to the great hall above (and to the sky beyond that)... The spirit of the building was consistent, regardless of how it was arranged and how its interior "form" was changed.'

Mark Pimlott - 'The Public Interior as Idea and Project'

Image 2) Stefan Haug. Maison du Peuple. Copyright of the artist.



Image 3) Matthew Thompson. The Crossroads Tavern. Copyright of the artist.





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# The Well-laid Table

Part 2  
Researchers,  
Operations and  
Assistants  
Coming  
Soon