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We welcome this publication on creativity and social practice which is published to coincide with the second annual showcase of work from students on the MA in Social Practice and the Creative Environment. Since the inception of this programme in 2010, MA SPACE has offered students a unique postgraduate experience engaging with projects that range from local to global. MA SPACE is unique and one of the few programmes worldwide to focus exclusively on the specific area of Social Practice. There is growing interest in the study of the combined subject areas of contemporary art practice, cultural production and social engagement.

This publication provides a series of key texts on social practice within the contemporary context and to document the exciting work of this group of students. Developing from the twin, narrowly-defined terms of community art, and public art, social practice has moved from facilitation to a more complex practice that responds to a variety of spaces, situations and communities of practice. Past graduates from our MA SPACE programme are a visible part of Limerick art scene, taking part in Eva International and dynamically engaging with newly formed creative clusters. These graduates are also, crucially, embedded in and contributing to regional social, ecological and economic discussions through projects and collectives such as Art Links Limerick, The Urban Tree Project and the Ideas Choir Project. With the awarding of a national designation of Limerick as City of Culture in 2014, we look forward with great interest to the contribution of MA SPACE graduates and students towards the events of this landmark year.

To conclude we salute the graduates of MA SPACE 2012, and look forward to their future practice as artists and designers within the city, the region and at national and international level. We also congratulate the MA SPACE staff; social practitioners Marilyn Lennon, Sean Taylor and Paul Tarpey and cultural theorist David Brancaleone, and the wide range of visiting lecturers who assist the development of this unique programme including Anab Jain of UK/India design company Superflux, Deborah Szebekp of UK design company Think Public, Claudia Eipeldauer of Austrian collective Wochenklausur, Bik Van der Pol, and international filmmaker Gideon Koppel.

Mike Fitzpatrick, Head of School
Tracy Fahey, Head of Department

Limerick School of Art and Design, LIT
Limerick Institute of Art and Design Launched their MA in Art and Design in 2010, which focuses on Social Practice and the Creative Environment. This unique programme is designed to fulfill student demand from art, design and related fields, nationally and internationally. This is a one year full-time/two year part-time taught MA programme, multidisciplinary in nature which focuses on the growing area of social practice.

The course offers you a strong theoretical and critical grounding in the area of social practice, equips you with appropriate research skills, educates you in the roles you will play within communities/situations/spaces, and ultimately, offers you a deep level of authentic experience and situated learning through the delivery and documentation of your self-chosen social practice project. The programme is delivered by both LSAD staff and a varied range of visiting lecturer specialists through an exciting mix of active learning, field research and engagement in the wider world.

Social Practice is an art and design practice that involves engagement with communities of interest. Social Practice is embedded in broad social goals, networks and cultural practices. It requires the democratization of the relationship between creative practitioner and community and a sharing of expert and lay knowledge.

Initially the course leads you through the critical and theoretical frameworks current in the field of social practice. Semester One is designed to fuel your practice by providing the context for engagement in a variety of professional social contexts. You will meet key artists, designers, policy makers, agencies and brokers of public situations, who will put forward models of best practice. The second stage of the course places you as a practitioner working in your chosen area of interest; you will undertake a project, which is your main focus of reflection and documentation.
Requirements:
Candidates entering the course must have:

A minimum 2.2 honours degree in their chosen Art, Design, Humanities, and/or related fields of study e.g. Architecture, New Media, the Performing Arts, Multi-Media etc or
Equivalent qualifications including the pre-NFQ NCEA National Diploma. Applicants with equivalent qualifications on the European and International frameworks will also be considered. International students must evidence a proficiency in English language.

All qualified candidates will be interviewed in order to assess their interest in or previous experience in the area of Social Practice, and their potential contribution to the group dynamic.

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Course Structure:
Module 1
Commentaries – Critical Grounding, Taking a Position.
This module introduces you to the critical thinking underpinning contemporary art and design practice and its relationship to social and cultural issues.

Module 2
Transactions, Roles and Research.
This looks at the different roles, ethical and logistical responsibilities involved in social practice.

Module 3
Practice - Analyse, Contextualize, Assimilate.
Delivered by guest lecturers, this looks at case studies of art and design practitioners with a focus on social engagement.

Module 4
Social Practice: Major Project.
An exciting opportunity for you to engage with a community/situation/space and deliver an art/design project.

Module 5
Documentation: Critical Reflection and Evaluation of Major Project.

The programme is composed of 5 modules, will run for one year (September to September). Part-time students can complete the programme over 2 years.
As another cohort of masters students on the MA in Social Practice and the Creative Environment (MA SPACE) come to the end of their academic studies, we reflect on a number of pertinent issues that continue to frame and shape the on-going delivery of our programme, we also endeavor to further develop a sense of its full potential and relevance within contemporary art and design practice. The questions raised by these issues are not easily resolved, but formulate the territory that this programme navigates with each new group of postgraduates that come on board. As staff and students we increasingly find ourselves operating with openness; to getting lost in the heat of creative exploration, to embracing possible failure through the negotiation of a social contract, to searching for the fluency of an inclusive social and artistic language, and in the quest for a quantifiable aesthetic within the ‘creative turn’ or in political engagement.

Straddling the opposing poles of the singular vision of the artist or curator versus the collaborative practitioner, we ask how is a programme like MA SPACE conceptually situated? Where does MA SPACE position politics, ethics, critical rigor, authorship, participation, aesthetics or validation. How does the programme team ensure that our postgraduates take an informed academic position when engaging with the social? When is transgression or collaboration in Socially Engaged Art a valid methodology? How do we prepare practitioners for the challenging roles and the positions taken in an emergent area of practice that is still struggling to form agreed frameworks and modes of action, which in themselves seem to be critically and politically contested. How do we advance meaningful debate and pursue this dialogue rigorously whilst a significant language of practice is still under construction for our discipline? Can this even be made possible within the institution of the art school? How do we begin to balance the academic debates around Social Engagement practice with an intellectual discourse that is both aesthetically objective and critically constructive to the development of the discipline and the education of its practitioners? And moreover, in this pedagogical context how will these questions be answered if we do not turn the critical lens back on ourselves as educators?

It is currently contested that Socially Engaged Art must democratize the relationship between the practitioner and a community of interest, through the sharing of expert and lay knowledge and resources. Whether this democratic collaborative relationship is at the core of practice is debated, with terms such as ‘partnership’, ‘delegated power’ and ‘citizen control’ held forth as standards of
citizen participation (Eight Rungs on a ladder of Citizen Participation), in contrast to a more individual approach to aesthetics or political expression described as ‘delegated performance’ by Bishop where members of the public are engaged and directed by an artist or curator.

In Socially Engaged Art practice critical opinions mostly fall into one of two polarizing categories; artists must abandon their sense of aesthetic autonomy and collaborate with the civic in a dialogical, democratic manner, or artists must engage aggressively with direct politics in order to be effective. Critics of a dialogical practice, suggest that there are ‘naïve’ practitioners who are too easily satisfied with the feeling of ‘doing good’ in a community, and are unaware that socially engaged art practice, under supplementary historical titles, has a long artistic and design heritage and can be critically and aesthetically dissected using the tools of art, design and theatre history.

Defenders of conversational or dialogical methods cite the ‘new aesthetic, informed by the collective experience of the feminist educational experience”, which was artwork that sought to “move beyond simple theatricality (or spectacle) and (to include) elements of networking, working within real-life environments, and communicating with mass media” (Gaulke).

Socially Engaged Art, in fact draws on multiple professions and disciplines from Sociology, Ethnography, Political Studies to Geography and more in order to find definitive pathways to working with politics, art and the social. Agonism for example is a political theory that emphasizes the potentially positive aspects of certain forms of political conflict. Mouffe writes that in an agonistic form of politics one searches for a form of consensus, however it’s a consensus that is conflictual because there will always be conflicting interpretations of the principles of democracy, liberty and equality, and there is no rational way to come to a consensus on the true interpretation. Bishop pushes this further by promoting a more transgressive approach, an art practice that concentrates on negation, for example performances, enactments or aesthetically resolved spectacles that illustrate the negative such as exclusion, exploitation of labour, power abuse etc. in society in order to spotlight it, rather than providing models for democracy.

Within these approaches the question of documentation, tracing and validation, evidence of work carried out and evaluation, are raised. The visibility or tangibility of the work itself has been cause for debate amongst opposing critical camps. The philosopher Stephen Wright argues for, a kind of “stealth” art practice in which the artist is a secret agent in the real world, with an artistic agenda. Wright further claims that “Envisaging an art without artwork, without authorship, and without spectatorship has an immediate consequence: art ceases to be visible as such.” (Wright & Helguera) Alternatively Ranciere argues that in art theatre and education alike there needs to be mediating objects that stand between the idea of the artist and the feeling and interpretation of the spectator, “this spectacle is a third term, to which the other can refer, but which prevents any kind of equal or distorted transmission” (Ranciere).

For us on MA SPACE, both positions are valid in as far as it can be justified by a body of research and a well critiqued process. We don’t prescribe how postgraduates address the topic they choose to engage with, we don’t advocate one particular methodology; we would not suggest that either are necessarily correct, rather we test the viability against a context. Developing an objective critical facility through the rigors of process means that our postgraduates begin to evaluate their intentions or claims against the actuality of putting a concept to the test in the real world. In group critique sessions, research, intentions and outcomes are continuously tested. In Module One of the MA SPACE programme, (Commentaries – Critical Grounding, Taking a Position), postgraduate students are exposed to theoretical frameworks in which to locate and defend their own position in relation to an evolving practice. Each postgraduate locates their own compass to navigate the theory and apply it to practice.

“In approaching the Mystery, the true artist understands that the object of inquiry will recede at a speed exponentially related to the effectiveness of the approach. The more we learn about who we are, the longer our glimpse of what is to be known, the more we understand how futile is our attempt at understanding”. (Waters)

This emerging discipline is a contested space, with any amount of interests contending for the dominant narrative; hence one finds the seemingly competitive tone of the descriptors of both the critics and the practitioners who claim Socially Engaged Art Practice. The contradictory descriptors make reflection a more difficult task than asking questions.

On MA SPACE we are acutely aware that we are straddling a polemic, during the programme our postgraduates are asked to research, implement, document and reflect on a socially engaged project set in the ‘real world’. Each student chooses a situation, a topic or a community, and begins to foster a critical engagement with their project on an on-going basis. The questions of politics,
ethics, critical rigor, authorship, participation, aesthetics and validation are tested within a framework of engagement on the programme, therefore expectations are not set in stone around the delivery of a packaged and resolved project. The research, implementation, documentation, presentation, its visibility or tangibility is dictated, defended and reflected on by each postgraduate case by case.

Bueti suggests that time needs to be reintroduced into current artistic, critical and curatorial production, as time is recognised as an essential element in participatory and collaboratory practices. Diverse knowledge, generosity and exchange, and the development of fruitful long-term relations require not just physical time but steadfast consistency, the speed of pace is different for everyone. (Bueti, Jacobs) On MA SPACE we accept that the duration of any project may extend beyond the timeframe of the programme. This is a mirror of the unpredictability of real world practice, time managing multiple entities, finding oneself at the mercy of external conditions and personalities, budgetary restrictions and influences that create havoc, all add to the challenge of working in a social, artistic context and is a steep learning curve to our students. Therefore there is a flexibility built around the assessment of the postgraduates work, assessing work at various stages of gestation, focusing on documentation of and reflection on the process rather than on end product. The right for project outcomes to fail to deliver as initially expected, for disappointments and surprises to be digested and measured against the sometimes unrealistic expectation of reaction, has to be enshrined within the process, in the understanding that the dynamics that are at play are understood by the postgraduate and reflected on.

Within the programme over two separate modules, (Module 2: Transactions, Roles and Research and Module 3: Practice-Analyse, Contextualise, Assimilate) our student are introduced to practicing artists, designers, cultural workers and also professionals outside of the field of socially engaged art but whose discipline shares commonalities and goals. The educational methodology on the programme is dialogical, our assumptions about the nature, conditions and practice of Socially Engaged Art are continuously open to debate and modification, through discussion both within the teaching space, amongst our peers, and in the real world application of a creative practice. Continuous enquiry is essential, through empirical work, case studies and critical reflection to avoid the institutional pitfalls of “a horizontal relationship between persons”, in the educational context. (Freire)

Through these exchanges a more diverse language of practice is developed as well as an awareness of the broader situations that are at play in the social realm. Our graduates also need to be aware of on-going ethical and political debates centred on definitions of culture industries and by extension the implementation of cultural policies, as they become professional members of a wider cultural community. For instance there has been considerable deliberation about the ubiquitous city of culture model based on Richard Florida’s contested ‘creative city’ concept. This model is rolled out into a plethora of urban contexts by cultural policy makers and local government, depositing ‘creatives’, the new visionaries, who will attract potential cultural tourists, up the profile of a city and perhaps even ultimately solve economic and social problems. (Florida, Hawkes) We encourage our student to question the relationships that build within cultural entities that address the ethical, political and economic realities of practice. For example the Hamburg artist manifesto ‘Not in Our Name’ highlighted this phenomenon of excluding local and embedded artists in shaping cultural policy (Manifesto Not in Our Name, Marke Hamburg! NioN, 2010: 324-5).

In this very short text, our aim has been to reflect on a small number of the pertinent issues that continue to frame and shape the on-going delivery of our programme. Finally here we turn the critical eye back on ourselves for a moment.

One of the reflections that we, as programme developers have considered is whether the ‘laboratory’ metaphor we operate under is a suitable context for the delivery of MA SPACE. The popularity of artist-run schools such as Tania Bruguera’s Catedra Arte de Conducta, Olafur Eliasson’s Institut für Raumexperimente in design, the Kaos Pilots, prove that social practice has moved out of the white cube and into the educational system to become a vital influence on contemporary education. These artist led schools stand on the shoulders of Beuys’s and Freire’s experimental pedagogy, Beuys formed the Free International University of Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research in 1973 and Freire proposed the Pedagogy of the Oppressed in 1968, Beuys famously said, “to be a teacher is my greatest work of art” (Lippard). According to Eliasson, as a laboratory, his Institute promotes experimentation as a means to “make the voice of art heard” while its participants form a relationship with the members of the community. The curators promoting this “laboratory” paradigm, adopting this curatorial modus operandi include Maria Lind, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Barbara van der Linden, Hou Hanru, and Nicolas Bourriaud. (Bishop) We may not as yet call the activities on MA SPACE a ‘work of art’, we deliver under normal constraints, however there are opportunities to think about and pursue alternative models or metaphors. Limerick, and the unique social conditions that operate in the city has become for many of our postgraduates an active ‘laboratory of practice’. For example a number of graduates from 2011 were selected by curator Annie Fletcher from the Van Abbermuseum to participate in eva International, Biennial of Visual Art 2012. The curator recognised that these emerging practitioners have demonstrated a sustained, embedded and discursive practice that contributes to
regional social, ecological and economic negotiations. However, does this mean that what we’re doing on MA SPACE is a correct approach; it means that there is success or validation for the selected graduates, but as educators we are still critically occupied with the thorny question of in what context is Socially Engaged Art made visible to a wider audience.

In respect to the Beuysian model of artist led education or the Kaos Pilots Design led school, we are not yet in the possession of enough hard research to effectively determine the impact of this approach on main stream creative education. So currently we find ourselves in an experimental position, learning by doing and reflecting as we go. Will this model still be relevant in five\ten\fifteen years’ time? Who knows, the appropriate question is, are we flexible enough to adapt, grow and envision a new type of Art Institution or educational mode.

Socially Engaged practice is a contested discipline, this paper is a discreet attempt to begin to frame the debates within the territory of MA SPACE. Naturally we speculate on the capacity to explore new forms of education within our art institution, coupled with exploring the potentiality for a new understanding of what may be possible.

Dr. Marilyn Lennon and Sean Taylor, Joint Programme Leaders, MA in Social Practice and the Creative Environment (MA SPACE) September 2012.

Sources:
Freire Paulo, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Continuum. 1970
NiON Manifest: Not in our Name, Marke Hamburg! Not in our Name (Hamburg). 2009. URL http://nionhh.wordpress.com/about/.
Jacobs, Mary Jane, Cultural Gifting, essay from Bik Van Der Pol: With Love From The Kitchen, NAI Publishers, 2005.
Buetti, Frederica, Give me the time (For an aesthetic of desistance) art & education, August 2011, http://www.artandeducation.net/paper/give-me-the-time-for-an-aesthetic-of-desistance/
When describing the origins of his modus operandi in an interview back in 2005, Polish artist Artur Żmijewski recalls the influence of the radical pedagogy of Professor Grzegorz Kowalski at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, where, “The most important quality was curiosity and a desire to learn. Ethics and morality are suspended, since they aren’t conductive to knowledge. As in anthropology, say, it is important to study, describe and attempt to understand human behaviour and ritual rather than judge and valorise it.”

In 2006 Claire Bishop argued that the social turn in contemporary art had prompted an ethical turn in art criticism which she saw as ultimately problematic, giving precedence to the processes involved in the realisation of the work, as opposed to the actual end product i.e. the art. There has indeed been a notable shift from object based to more context based arts practices in recent years and to artworks that use different forms of collaboration and participation, or what can be generically termed socially engaged artworks. With this social turn there has been a distinct focus on the ethical implications of artists choosing to work in this manner, their relationship to their participants or collaborators, the power dynamics involved, the authorship of the work, whether the participant gets paid and so forth.

The increased interdisciplinary nature of such collaborative arts practices, which often draw on the social sciences such as ethnography, anthropology, psychology etc further, complicates this type of art practice and how it is written about. One could argue that contemporary art criticism is struggling to articulate a language or theory around this ever expanding field of socially engaged arts practice. In his manifesto ‘The Applied Social Arts’ Artur Żmijewski accuses art reviews of lacking competence, arguing “They need sociological, philosophical and psychological expertise... Critics do not often know enough, and this lack of knowledge can lead art back to aestheticising.”

So where do we position ethics within this social turn in contemporary art practice? What has motivated critics (and artists too) to be so defensive around the role of ethics within arts practice? How important are the aesthetics? Do we need to talk about ethics separate to aesthetics? Is there a role for transgression within this type of arts practice?

Joanna Warza, associate curator of this year’s 7th Berlin Biennale applies the term “agonistic curating” to the team’s curatorial methodology. “We understand the curator as a position that not only involves ‘taking care’ but also..."
inviting disagreement, confrontation, losing control over meaning or a way of giving away space and means”.

The term ‘agonism’, used by the French political theorist Chantal Mouffe, calls for a reconfiguration of our understanding of democracy, from the commonly perceived harmonious pluralist perspective, to one which recognises conflict, antagonism and difference as essential parts of the democratic order. While antagonism is understood as a we/them relation involving conflicting sides who share no common ground, Mouffe’s agonism perceives of a we/them relation where adversaries may share common symbolic space within which conflict can take place. This idea of agonism is a useful starting point for how one might approach the work of artists such as Artur Żmijewski, Renzo Martins, Santiago Sierra, who have all elicited controversy and at times moral outrage, from both critics and general public, for their apparent disregard of a moral or ethical framework within their participative arts practices.

But before I discuss these arts practices further, I think it’s important that we examine the word “ethics” and what we think this word implies. According to the Collins English Dictionary, ethics is 1. The Philosophical study of the moral value of human conduct and of the rules and principles that ought to govern it. 2. A code of behaviour considered correct especially that of a particular group, profession or individual. Which makes me wonder, how does one define the word “moral” or “correct”? According to the same dictionary, moral is 1. Concerned with or relating to human behaviour especially the distinction between good and bad, or right and wrong. How does one define good or bad? One could go on forever, my point being that they are all highly subjective terms and very much dependant on the myriad situations and contexts within which human beings live within particular cultures at particular times. Ethics is a value and is loaded with prejudices, inequalities, abuses and hierarchies. Ethics as a repository of ideology is just as likely to be a carrier of evil as of good. What was seen as morally acceptable behaviour in Germany during the Nazi regime is seen as totally reprehensible to the rest of the world. What we consider “moral” or ethical in western more secular society today is often completely at odds with what is considered moral or ethical within a Middle Eastern Islamic society.

The French philosopher Alain Badiou argues that ‘there are no ethics in general’. Instead there are processes by which we treat the possibilities of a given situation. In his book ‘Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil’ (2001) he argues that the bedrock of present day ethics – the concept of human rights – is morally bankrupt. Badiou argues that our prevailing ethical principals serve ultimately to reinforce an ideology of the status quo and fail to provide a framework for an effective understanding of the concept of evil. Instead he proposes a positive doctrine that he calls ‘The Ethics of Truth’ which is a process by which we treat the possibilities of a given situation. Badiou’s four conduits for which there can be truth are art, science, politics and love.

One could argue that artists such as Artur Żmijewski, Renzo Martens, Santiago Sierra in their apparent disregard of a moral or ethical framework in the making of their artwork, are in fact pushing us the viewers and indeed their participants into a larger ethical dilemma, that of being in the world together. How do we negotiate our own “ethics of truth” so to speak, in a given situation?

Recently I had the opportunity to see Artur Żmijewski’s infamous Game of Tag (1999) in this years 7th Berlin Biennale, which is also curated by Żmijewski. Like many people I had heard a lot about this work over the years, as well as read about it and seen video stills and had formed my own opinion about this work without having actually seen it. The video depicts a group of naked adults playing a child’s game of tag, in a gas chamber of a former Nazi extermination camp. These self consciously naked adults run around and laugh at times in this absurd game, yet we sense that they are aware of their surroundings. The viewer comes away feeling simultaneously appalled yet bemused and absorbed by this short four minute film.

In explaining his decision to include this work in this years Berlin Biennale, Żmijewski writes that earlier this year the director of the Martin Gropius Gallery in Berlin removed Game of Tag from a group show of Polish/German art in his gallery that was curated by Anda Rottenberg. At the time, the Director accused Żmijewski of not respecting the dignity of the victims of the Holocaust. In answer to this action, Żmijewski writes that Game of Tag “is about a part of history that is untouchable and about overly painful memories, where the official commemorations are not enough…It is about creating a symbolic alternative: instead of dead bodies we can see laughter and life. It is about how we engage with this brutal history and work with imposed memory”.

In response to the controversy at the time, anthropologist Joanna Tokarska-Bakir wrote to Żmijewski “Your video is a way of dealing with the violent appropriation of the Holocaust, through a shock re-coding of that which has become congealed in the solemn interpretations controlled by the ‘high priests’.” Żmijewski explained his decision to include this work in this
year’s Biennale as a reaction to this impulse to censor, self censor and close off discussion’. 

Clearly one must rethink an ethics of processes when considering such work, that goes beyond what art historian/writer Dr. Anthony Downey terms the ‘moral communalism’ and ‘ethical absolutism’ of neo liberalism and the ‘Big Society’ agenda. Within this Big Society agenda, socially engaged art is often perceived as a useful tool to promote social cohesion, inclusivity and so forth. But why shouldn’t socially engaged art also provoke, transgress, antagonise even? 

In his essay “An Ethics of Engagement: collaborative arts practice and the return of the ethnographer”, Downey speculates on how we might start to deconstruct these “soft ethics” of neo liberalism within socially engaged arts practice and rethink an ethics of aesthetics so to speak. Taking the pseudo ethnographic practices of controversial artists such as Renzo Martens, Olaf Breuning and Artur Żmijewski, Downey argues that the aesthetics involved in these artworks cannot be divorced from the ethics, nor can they necessarily be resolved in relation to the ethics.

He takes Renzo Marten’s infamous Episode III - Enjoy Poverty (2008) as an example. This ‘mockumentary’ of sorts depicts the artist travelling around the Congo. The clear message of the film is that poverty is a resource in the Congo that needs to be exploited by the Congolese. Martens advises a group of Congolese photographers (whose main employment is producing photos of local weddings and other celebrations, for seventy five cents per picture), to take photos of the poverty that surrounds them, including death, malnourished children and victims of rape. He informs them that these images sell for as much as $50 each from UN sanctioned media in the Congo.

The most visible sign of community participation in the film is witnessed when the artist arrives in a village bearing boxes and engages the help of a group of impoverished villagers to assemble a large neon sign that reads ‘Enjoy Poverty’. The villagers appear delighted by this surrealist sign and use it as the occasion for a party. Clearly Marten’s film can be read as exploitative and disrespectful of the Congolese villagers in its pursuit of the artist’s goals. Yes as Martens argues, this exploitation perfectly mirrors the exploitative relations of power between the Congo and the West, the legacy of colonialism, as well as the dubious role played by aid agencies there.

In this year’s Berlin Biennale, Martens has taken his engagement with the Congo a step further with the launch of A Gentrification Programme by The Institute for Human Activities. This five year gentrification programme, launched at the start of the 7th Berlin Biennale, takes place in a small village in the Congolese rainforest. In an interview with Artur Żmijewski for the publication ‘Forget Fear’ (produced as part of the Berlin Biennale), Marten’s explains how he intends to “gentrify” this remote Congolese village, through creating an arts space, residency programme, therapeutic space etc, which will benefit artists, the western companies who operate there, as well as the impoverished locals, who have been exploited by these western companies for generations. One could indeed view this very deliberate and quite cynical act of “gentrification” as unethical or at the very least disingenuous. However Martens counters with the argument that Biennales aren’t funded by city councils to encourage artistic collaboration between artists and the locals. Rather they are funded because they put a city on the map, attract tourists, and generate money. Similarly Martens intends to mobilise and experiment with the modalities of art production for gentrification purposes pointing out, “I think it’s good for art to understand the terms and conditions of its own production, and allow it to fold back on itself”.

What is the overall effect of such provocative artwork? Is it to shock the viewer out of complacency, or does it merely reinforce the viewer’s disgust and disdain for such power relations in the first place? Are they intended to force the viewer into action? Artur Żmijewski claims for the 7th Berlin Biennale “We present art that actually ‘works’ makes its mark on reality and opens a space where politics can be performed”.

In a recent interview the artist Santiago Sierra stated “I can’t change anything. There is no possibility that we can change anything with our artistic work. We do our work because we are making art, and because we believe art should be something, something that follows reality. But I don’t believe in the possibility of change.”

Whether one agrees or not with either of these positions, in his essay “An Ethics of Engagement” Downey makes the point that in an era where the political arena seems increasingly compromised, it seems that aesthetics, specifically in relation to interdisciplinary arts practices, is being more and more called upon to provoke insight into both politics and ethics.

Rather than treating them all as separate entities, Downey calls for a more sophisticated theory for addressing precisely this relationship between aesthetics, ethics and politics. He calls for a theory of collaboration and participation that employs ethics not as an afterthought by which these practices are critiqued, but as a central part of the aesthetic and social and political dimension of the art work. In effect an ethics of engagement. Something to work towards? Perhaps.

Liz Burns curates the visual arts programme for Fire Station Artists’ Studios in Dublin. She completed her MA in Visual Arts Practices with IADT in 2009 and also pursues an independent curatorial practice.
Footnotes


2. If it happened only once it’s as if it never happened, Zaceta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, Kunsthalle Basel, Hatje Cantz (2005). Pg 83.


4. In 2007 Zmijewski wrote a manifesto, first published in Krytyka Polityczna, an influential left wing journal founded in Poland in 2002. This essay can be downloaded on www.krytykapolityczna.pl

5. 7th Berlin Biennale Newspaper: Act for Art: Forget Fear. (April 2012) pg 9


8. For the Common Good? The Politics and Ethics of Co-opting Civil Society within contemporary collaborative practices. Dr Anthony Downey: Key note address at CREATE’s Art and Civil Society symposium 7th Dec 2011. To download précis go to www.createireland.ie


12. www.art-agenda.com/reviews/santiago-siera’s-noglobaltour

Background.

Increasingly, the social dimension is finding its place in the practice of contemporary art. Today, the relation between art and politics is at the centre of philosophical debate, aesthetics and art criticism, as is suggested by issues of Radical Philosophy and of Third Text. When Jacques Derrida took the floor in the colloquium Whither Marx?, explaining that he did not wish to “flee from a responsibility” – was that an early sign? That year he published Specters of Marx (1993); in which emancipation is the unfinished project of modernity in a ‘disjointed or misadjusted now’, the present that was “out of joint”; the time “when a new-world disorder is attempting to install its neo-capitalism and neo-liberalism”. Derrida’s Specters of Marx addresses two central aspects of Karl Marx’s legacy: Das Capital’s critique of commodity culture and his revolutionary legacy. As Derrida says, “I know of few texts in the philosophical tradition, perhaps none, whose lesson seemed more urgent today. Who has ever called for the transformation to come of his own theses? Not only in view of some progressive enrichment of knowledge, which would change nothing in the order of a system, but so as to take into account there, another account, the effects of rupture and restructuration?”

Moreover, it is not enough to decipher our time, there is an injunction “to act and make the deciphering into a transformation that “changes the world”. But the catalyst for a renewal of critical debate wasn’t Specters of Marx; paradoxically, it was the translation into English of Nicolas Bourriaud’s Relational Aesthetics (1998) which took the opposite view to Derrida’s, stating that: “in our post-industrial societies, the most pressing thing is no longer the emancipation of individuals, but the freeing up of inter-human communications, the dimensional emancipation of existence”.

The most authoritative rebuttal was Jacques Rancière’s who first came to public attention for his contribution to Louis Althusser’s Reading Capital (1965) and is now an influential presence in contemporary aesthetics and international art circles. Rancière’s work divides into two strands; theorising alternative forms of politics in an unjust society; and critical art practice. There’s a place for critical art, however problematic, through a “redistribution of the sensible”. Art helps us see the world differently – and this is its critical power. Practically speaking, Rancière’s growing prominence in debates has tipped the balance against artistic autonomy or art for art’s sake (the idea that intervening in the social can never have an aesthetic dimension), once defended by Clement Greenberg and

Towards a Dialectical Aesthetics

An excerpt from the upcoming text, Towards a Dialectical Aesthetics

David Brancaleone
Peter Bürger (who in the 1970s, following the ideas of Theodore Adorno, wrote that art could no longer be political, just when artistic practice was at its peak of social engagement). For, even if art alone cannot effect radical change, it can have, as Terry Eagleton argues, a vital role in assisting the process of change and emancipation. It does so by reflecting the society’s value system, by questioning it either directly, by allusion or metaphor and drawing out its contradictions which form the gap between how society wishes to present itself through public channels and how we can sometime perceive it actually is in reality, through glimpses or insights (a dialectical approach).

After Postmodernism.

In the contemporary intellectual landscape, what is being re-defined is the very possibility of human agency (what it is possible to achieve, the extent to which we can change events or redirect their course), extended to the fields of art, after a long period in which a dominant orthodoxy denied art practice any social dimension. The current re-negotiation of the body of knowledge and related ideologies known as postmodernism is also impacting on socially engaged art; the theme for Documenta XII was: ‘Is Modernity our antiquity?’ and the title Altermodern at Tate in 2009 was a very confused displacement. At last, conceded one art historian, “it is important to recapture some sense of the political situatedness of artistic autonomy and its transgression, some sense of the historical dialectic of critical disciplinarity and its contestation – to attempt” as he puts it, “again to provide culture with running-room.”

While postmodernism had the merit of introducing greater complexity into debates and sometimes interesting perspectives, it also relativised them: ultimately no one issue was considered any more significant than any other; broad issues gave way to single issues, devoid of a context in which to place them. Any attempted defiance of postmodernism’s image regime was absorbed or ignored. Chaos theory, invoked by Nicolas Bourriaud (“they do not want to see that the world is nothing other than a chaos”), might also explain the total abdication of social responsibility which comes across in more subtle pronouncements like this one: “The modern way of seeing is to see in fragments. It is felt that essentially reality is unlimited, and knowledge is open-ended. It follows that all boundaries, all unifying ideas, have to be misleading, demagogic; at best, provisional.”

But two specific cultural influences were Jean-François Lyotard’s aesthetics of the sublime (we are helpless in the face of catastrophe, of complexity and undecidability, in a post-Holocaust time of “after Auschwitz”), and Francis Fukuyama’s triumphant The End of History and The Last Man which had claimed that “liberal democracy may constitute the “end point of mankind’s ideological evolution” and the “final form of human government,” and, as such, constituted the “end of history.” Liberal democracy was free from fundamental flaws. “The ideal of liberal democracy”, he proclaimed, “could not be improved on.” After the fall of the Berlin Wall, history was dead and so by reflecting the society’s value system, by questioning it either directly, by allusion or metaphor and drawing out its contradictions which form the gap between how society wishes to present itself through public channels and how we can sometime perceive it actually is in reality, through glimpses or insights (a dialectical approach).

Art into a social and political space.

Today, as a regime of art, postmodernism is over and even the word “postmodernism” has dropped out of sight. Now even the postmodern sociologist Zygmunt Bauman is claiming that the postmodern era has given way to what he calls “liquid modernity.” Conferences such as “Rethinking Complicity and Resistance: The Relationship between Visual Arts and Politics”, University of Aberdeen (October 2009) signal the “explosion of interest in political theory and the exhaustion of the postmodernist model” and confirm that “activism, militancy and engaged art are back on the agenda”. What can art say about politics, and what can and can’t it do as politics? What artistic strategies aim at intervening in the political? At the Association of Art Historians’ Conference: The Modernist Turn: Counter/Other/Alter/Meta Modernisms in Art History and Practice, convenors stated that “unquestionably, there is a broad renegotiation of the modernist project within contemporary art history as well as curatorial discourse, art practice and criticism. And the 2010 Istanbul Biennial hinged entirely on politics and economics, enlisting the ideas of Marxist playwright Bertolt Brecht to put political engagement back on the artistic agenda.

At the forefront in the recent revival of social critique is the work of Alain Badiou, for having attacked the cultural hegemony of postmodernism with a new philosophy of the transformative subject and the exceptional revolutionary event. Being and Event (2005) dares to think about radical change. Whereas postmodernists or post-structuralists had rejected any notion of truth and were theoretically ill-equipped for thinking in terms of the new, Badiou has put truth and knowledge back on the agenda. The main consequence of his ideas is not to consider radical change utopian (from the Greek “u-topos”, meaning: “no place”), but a possibility rooted in
the real. His Manifesto for Philosophy (1999) was his first attack levelled at postmodernist thought which he accused of “sophistry” (or pointless rhetoric). His criticism of Lyotard and others was that they had reduced the scope of philosophy to relativism and language games and diminished the political dimension to an ethical one, so that situations that require political choice are only understood in terms of moral dilemmas. Despite its flaws (for example: who decides the event? How do we make the shift from ephemeral event to the practicalities of change in the social dimension?), Badiou’s theory invites us to consider that something unprecedented can arise, a framework, an interruption in one’s life that produces change – a new ethos, a new way of being. Truth-events – radical breaks from the existing state of affairs – may be produced by science, politics, psychoanalysis, and art.

Increasingly, we are witnessing a greater involvement by artists in the social dimension, outside the logic of the studio, formerly the only workspace, from site-specific to situation-specific work, from individual to collaborative. The context of this shift is that for the past ten years society is expressing radical resistance to global policymaking that nobody wants. On a global and a local level, society suffers the contradictions and conflicts within the public sphere, namely privatizing public space (on-line and off-line) in name of neoliberal policies which view the world only in terms of competition, individualism and private enterprise in a capitalist global economy. Alex Callincos has noted the revival of social critique after the Seattle and Genoa anti-capitalist protests and the growing resistance to global capitalism. For the art historian Julian Stallabrass, the mass movement of protest, from Porto Allegre to Seattle and Genoa marked: “the return of a cogent opposition to capitalism, and with it a vanguard art”. And now a second wave is underway, marked by the Arab Spring of 2011 and by the global Occupy Movement across Europe and the US in 2011-2012.

Nicolas Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics.

After mentioning Badiou, Rancière, the Arab Spring and the Occupy Movement, Nicolas Bourriaud’s 1990s ideas about art seem outmoded and even somewhat twee. By comparison, Relational Aesthetics puts forward a microcosm of fluffy social harmony and consensus; the idea being that we can at least create an oasis of conviviality (limited of course to events in the art gallery environment) within an unfair society, one to which Bourriaud is resigned. He has promoted the work of contemporary artists who replaced so-called “utopian” agendas with “micro-utopias”, emancipation and democracy being the automatic outcome of a viewer involvement. One artist brought to prominence by Bourriaud is Rirkrit Tiravanija whose installations consisted in cooking vegetable curry for the audience in a space presented as a temporary dining area. Untitled (Still), 1992 was his first major installation at 303 Gallery in New York. The gallery office and curator were put in an exhibition space where he set up a temporary kitchen, cooking curries for the audience, leaving the rubbish as part of the installation.

Relational Aesthetics has been criticised for justifying and promoting a form of art which only gives people the simulacral impression that they are engaging in something worthwhile, when, as Julian Stallabrass says, it is no more than “the representation as aesthetics of what was once social interaction, political discourse, and even ordinary human relations repackaging social interaction as aesthetic performance.” Stallabrass’s criticism is aimed at representing social interaction instead of enacting it. (One example of an alternative paradigm is the work of Cuban artist Tania Bruguera who creates political situations rather than represent them). Enrico Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s version of antagonism.

The art critic Claire Bishop has rejected Bourriaud’s paradigm of art (building community among artists and viewers), partly because of its lack of criticality. She prefers the model of art that is antagonistic within an “antagonist democracy”, whereby democracy would develop in conflict while staying substantially unchanged.

An artist who exemplifies her idea of “relational antagonism” is Santiago Serra. In Workers who cannot be paid, remunerated to remain inside cardboard boxes (Berlin, 2000), refugees seeking asylum in Germany were exhibited, but hidden in a box, thus making them invisible presences; as invisible as they needed to be to avoid deportation in their daily life outside the gallery space. Serra’s Wall enclosing a space (Venice, 2003) also created a situation you had to deal with: a bricked up entrance to an (empty) gallery space. What to do? How do I get in? Well, only if you could prove you were a Spanish citizen, would you be allowed access through the back. There may be islands of peace for some in a divided society, but not for others. In this way, Serra makes explicit how social relations are always already politicised. These works also involve an enactment, rather than an artist’s representation through painting, film or photograph.

However, Bishop’s relational antagonism relies on Chantal Mouffe and Enrico Laclau, postmodern theorists who rule out emancipation in favour of an ill-defined democratic freedom. Contrary to what one might suppose, you will find in their writings that the idea of antagonism is linked to the impossibility of the social and is an integral part of their postmodern project which sought to detach antagonism from any materialist theory of a conflictual society. Moreover, for them, antagonisms are not internal, but external to society; or rather, they constitute the limits of society, “the latter’s impossibility of fully constituting itself.” Postmodern antagonism is the ‘experience’ of the limit of the social, thus curtailing opposition to the level of healthy disagreement within a liberal democracy,
regardless of how illiberal it proves to be in practice. In their Hegemony and Socialist Strategy (1985), the relations between state and civil society are governed by hegemony, understood as the prevailing of certain social actors on others. But they borrow Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony to naturalise it, by giving up the idea that you can have transformative action, because society is no longer divided and even the concept of society is as problematic for them as it was for Thatcher who said in an interview with Woman’s Own (1987) that there is no such thing as society, while she was busy demolishing it with her programme to privatize social welfare, the sale of public housing and contracted out hospital services.

**Grant H. Kester’s dialogical aesthetics.**

Grant Kester’s Conversation Pieces theorises art which is not object-based, but collaborative, durational (often ephemeral), and not necessarily aesthetically pleasing. He doesn’t entirely reject Bourriaud’s simplistic model, but thinks that if art really wants to be participative and an encounter, this can only occur through dialogue. Consequently, Kester also seeks justification in theory by explicitly enlisting Jürgen Habermas’s ideas of “communicative action”, Jean-Luc Nancy’s of “inoperative community” and Mikhail Bakhtin’s literary theory of “dialogism” (but Kester deftly chooses to ignore the dialectic within Bakhtin’s “carnevalesque”). Yet in Habermas’s conception of social space, where is the room for change, given that conflict between groups of people on different sides with conflicting interests is rejected (since you can no longer think in terms of “exploitation”)? Habermas’s idealised social interaction takes place in what he calls “the lifeworld”, a neutral public space beyond constraints which, ultimately, appears to be only the fruit of his imagination. So Kester seeks to justify a version of socially engaged art as social pacifier and limited to “liberal” politics, by combining the idealism of Habermas with Nancy’s (supposed) impossibility of community, joined with Bakhtin’s dialogism.

One of Kester’s examples is unconvincing. Suzanne Lacy’s The Roof is On Fire, Oakland, California, (1994), convinced blacks and Latino teenagers to meet and talk about discrimination, media stereotypes, and under-funding of schools. During her sequel, Code 33: Emergency, Clear the Air (1999), 150 demonstrators turned up across the road to protest against the denied appeal against Mumia Abu-Jamal’s death sentence, and some protesters joined the performance. That is when the police stopped the dialogue and began the search (for activists). When Kester’s theory was contradicted by the real world of specific situations, he had to define this turn of events as “extradialogical”. Consequently, if a dialogical model is unable to cope with conflict in an inherently conflictual society, something more is required.

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18. However, despite the title, Nicolas Bourriaud’s 2009 Tate Modern exhibition Altermodern shows no signs of an expanding field outside the postmodern paradigm. Despite its claims, it is quite traditional. For Bourriaud, the distinctive aspects of now are globalisation and nomadism, in some vague sense of a new, apolitical, internationalism.
29. The word “dialogical” refers to Mikhail Bakhtin’s literary poetic which had drawn attention to the multiple voices in texts, or to the polyphonic nature of the novel genre, as made up of several voices, in addition to the author’s own. This theory was transmitted to the West by Julia Kristeva’s version of it as: “intertextuality”, explained in her essay: “Word, Dialogue and Novel”. She was one of the two main channels for Bakhtin’s ideas in the West in the late 1960s (the other was Istvan Todorov). Kristeva’s interpretation of dialogism as a relational concept would explain its transmission and understanding as such in the West. She contrasts dialogism with Hegel’s dialectic, something that would make it even more attractive to postmarxists keen to avoid Marxian contradiction, ciphers and symptoms, which concepts provide a link between the particular case and an external context. Incidentally, Kester avoids the other related concept developed by Bakhtin, carnivalmism or carnivalesque. It is useful to observe that Kester’s dialogism coincides with Kristeva’s, in pointing to the openness of a text, extended to author and audience as participants. Whereas, the carnivalesque (the other central concept which emerges in Bakhtin’s study of Rabelais, one way to describe it would be as a subversive or rebellious type of intervention, ranging from the written text on the page (Rabelais’s rowdiness) to the street and in both respects, signifies forms of rebellion and breaking with an established order, using creativity, satire, irony and so on. The carnivalesque, one suspects, harbours Bakhtin’s version of the dialectic, expressing alterity and protest against the status quo of a society. Julia Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue and Novel” in Toril Moi (ed.), The Kristeva Reader, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986, pp. 34-61.
“The field of art has become a field of possibilities, of exchange and comparative analysis. It has become a field for thinking, alternaity and can crucially act as a cross field, an intermediary between different fields modes of perception and thinking, as well as between very different positions and subjectivities. It thus has a very privileged, if tenable and slippery, but crucial positions and potential in contemporary society.”

In its expanded search for meaning art has gone in search of new publics and new public spheres, to establish new communicative platforms and networks and new spaces for spectatorship and participation, and new grounds for interpretation and reflection, and authorship.

These new grounds of art making, of dialogical, conversational, socially engaged, collaborative, participative practices, all have the potential to open new understandings of communication, for the translation and reception of ideas. However they may also diminish the role of the artist and undermine the power of the artwork.

“In times of expansive global capitalism, corporatization of culture, the demolition of the welfare state and the marginalization of the critical left, it is crucial to discuss and assess modes of critique, participation and resistance in the crossing fields of culture and politics specifically, the intersection of political representation and the politics of representation, of presentation and participation”.

In this essay I wish to touch on, if somewhat briefly, a number of issues; firstly in this search for new audiences and a desire to develop more democratic art practices we may be losing site of the role of the artist as an autonomous agent within a society pushing up against its limits; secondly the function or ability of the artwork to bring new thinking and understanding into the world, and finally that collaborative/participatory practices, while fruitful, can be a fraught area of practice because of the nature of its complex set of relationships.

On collaboration

“In contrast to cooperation, collaboration is driven by complex realities rather than romantic notions of a common ground or commonality. It is an ambivalent process constituted by a set of paradoxical relationships between co-producers who affect each other”.

Collaborative practices don’t have only a number of forms of realisation, they vary greatly; examples are wide ranging from complex artistic relationships, confrontations, participatory practices and socio-political methodologies. From the bureaucratic, managerial, socio-political interventions of Wochenklausur, to the quiet aesthetised
researches of Bik Van Der Pol or the industrialized, corporatised creations of SuperFlex. Even within these new boundaries categorized as “dialogical or conversational practices” by Grant Kester, sensibilities fluctuate greatly. What is interesting specifically, in these practices, is the manner of the collaboration, the researches and the forms of participation, the methodologies used and how these in-depth relations create a range of complex sets of outcomes. Reading about Stephen Willats’ work, or Suzanne Lacy’s practice as an example, it becomes startlingly evident, that new insights are generated through the most basic of intersections, between artist and the collaborator(s), be they teenagers hanging in the park, to old people habitating in tower blocks. The nature of this intersection comes primarily from a face-to-face meeting, direct dialogue and direct exchange but teased out and built up over extended periods of time. These new set of insights are reached or emerge, generated at the intersection of a variety of perspectives and catalyzed through some form of collaborative exchange and production. For a lot of these artworks I would nearly go as far to say that the artwork is not simply found in the form, action or that what remains but rather in the transmission of the ‘unknowable’ or as Sarat Maharaj calls it “Xeno-epistemics”, non-knowledges, and what I want to call the ‘immaterial affects’ of the collaborative process. So what can we garner from Maharaj’s understanding of this new form of cognitive production.

“Faced with the concept of intuition – a term that is usually used traditionally to refer to the possibility of knowing something without going through a logical reasoning process. From the combination of the terms “xeno” (which means strange, foreign, other) and “episteme” (which means knowledge), this expression achieves integration of both the idea of specific cognitive production and the search for a type of knowledge that does not avoid contradiction and difference, nor is it consumed by rational and empirical criteria”.

Sarat Maharaj believes that through this new mode of xeno-epistemics, new knowledge’s could be identified with the type of cognitive experience that can be articulated through the processes of art production. It involves the artist, the artwork and a level of investigation that is outside of oneself.

So it is important to recognize the immaterial nature, intangibleness or affect of some of these forms of art making and forms of knowledge production, especially with socially engaged practices where there are minefields of human interactions, complex relations that even the most experienced practitioners can stumble over. The very nature of collaboration itself can be one of these because of its own immateriality. Where does one’s involvement start and end? Where does the artwork exist, start or end?

The inability to circumscribe certain elements of ownership to oneself or to another in the realisation of any artwork during collaborative exchange can create a natural fear of this unquantifiable immateriality. To combat this restrictive situation the host must create a location where these polarities do not interfere in the generation of exchanges and dialogues. This doesn’t mean production without discourse or even discord. These non-consensual encounters, ‘agonistic’ positions, can also be beneficial. Charles Esche, Director of the Van Abbe Museum, has advocated for many years now, one such form of openness, radical hospitality’, in his re-modeling of the art institution. Brokered from his interpretation of Derrida, he contends that a complete surrender by the host (in his case the art institution) of its position and power is a prerequisite for parties negotiating these collaborative exchanges.

But its still worth remembering that there is another meaning of the term ‘to collaborate’ – to cooperate reasonably or traitorously, as with an enemy occupying one’s country. The idea of collaboration between disciplines, particularly in corporate business, and also true between departments in universities, where intellectual copyright is paramount, could also be seen as traitorous acts. This leading to secrecy between specialized departments is what Edward Said calls “the cult of expertise and professionalism”, propagating systems of non-interference, compliance and states of secrecy, which he desires to see an end to. The solution he suggests is through the interfering of the amateur or non-professional.

On the incidental person

And who possibly is best positioned within contemporary society, is still protected for its freedoms of thinking and action, that could be this ‘amateur’ or ‘non-professional’, but the artist. I think there is something useful in a re-interpretation or re-imagining of the Artist as this ‘amateur’ or ‘non-professional’ in Johan Latham’s envisioning of the ‘Incidental Person’. And that these practices of collaboration and interference, while fraught, are of paramount importance to us at present.

The Artist Placement Group (APG) emerged out of London in the 1960s and was set up by artists John Latham, Barbara Steveni and Ian Breakwell, later to be joined by Hugh Davies and Stuart Brisely to mention but a few. The APG were a politicised group of individual artists interested
in working outside of the gallery system. They recognized
the marginalized position of the artist in society and wished
to enable themselves and others to change this perspective
by ‘placement’, within society, within industry and within
governmental departments. This would be a precursor
to most socially engaged art practices, site specific
residencies, new art methodologies on art in communities
and public spaces.

Artists placed themselves into industries, with
access to the day-to-day workings of the corporations
and organisations, were paid a salary and were allowed
“sufficient autonomy” to be “free” to act on their own
“open brief” – “distinct from being employed but also
distinct from being patronized.” This was the role of the
‘incidental person’. A position forced open by artists, to
develop new art practices with affects and secreted into the
everyday. These placements resulted in a variety of artists’
reports, films, photographs, interviews, and poetry and art
installations. And APG where hugely successful in their
venture, with artists placed in the Department of
the Environment, in British Steel, the National Coal
Board, the Scottish Office in Edinburgh and the London
Health Department.

John Latham’s rhetoric around these ‘placements’
revolved around his ambitious, if not slightly quixotic belief
in the ability of artists to envisage long-term solutions
where industry and governments where incapable of seeing
anything other than short-term, problem-solving strategies
or simply capital managerialism. A key motivating force
behind this program was undoubtedly the qualifying
of ‘the work’, the activity of the artist, their ‘labour’.
Understandably in an era of conceptualism, fluxus,
performance, and sound art, actions without products, artist
were beginning to imagine themselves as more than a sum
of their artworks. This was the artists re-asserting a position
within society that their process-based practices forced
out. By making a comparative analysis of the labours of
the everyday man, the post-industrial worker, artists could
equate and relate their position in society. It is worth noting
at that same time, the late sixties, in the U.S., artists and
critics like Carl Andre, Robert Morris, Lucy Lippard, and
Hans Haacke were also considering the politicisation of
artistic labour and were beginning to identify themselves
as “art workers.”

Ideologically Latham’s Incidental person shifted the
parameters where the practices of the artist (the ‘outside’)
could be subsumed into society (the ‘inside’), with limited
recourse or compromise having to be made by the artist;
they still maintained their autonomy. This interstitial space
held by the autonomous ‘incidental’ individuals at the heart
of industry created an anomalous solution to the isolated
position that artists’ have eternally possessed, ‘outside’ of
society; it was the professionalisation of the
‘non-professional’, the artist. Or if you will, to borrow
phraseology from a completely different source and
argument but fought on similar grounds, Jan Vervoert,
talks about the symbolic right ‘to exclude oneself from
inclusion’, and this can be in some respects be prescribed
to this understanding of the role of the ‘incidental person’.
Ironically by being placed ‘inside’ industry it would only
reaffirm the artists’ position as an outsider, when compared
to the rest of the workforce, through the disparities of their
labour, and even their very function.

This vaulted location, of being ‘other’ can be highly
advantageous as artists, art groups and organizations,
like WochenKlauser, can attest to. When action involves
circumventing social and bureaucratic hierarchies and
quickly mobilising people into positions of political,
administrative or media responsibility to accomplish
concrete measures, art de-structures, or simply by being
de-structured, reanimates, crosses over and creates anew.
Having a non-threatening orientation, being seen as an
‘amateur’ or ‘non-professional’ within the professional can
allow for a breakdown of traditional power structures and
protocols, create situations within the interdisciplinary
where interference, and more importantly, collaboration,
(conflictual, agonism, etc) can create non-empirical
approaches to the production of meaning and learning
leading to new knowledge production. This leads to the
significant understanding that the type of knowledge
production that art making and artwork propitiates, can be
differentiated from what generates “economic Knowledge”,
separate from empiric knowledge, back to Maharaj’s Xeno-
epistemics. And it is here the strength and significance of
the role and activity of artists, non-professionals and the
incidental person lies.

How our notions of understanding, production,
audience, communication, interpretation, participation
and reception are now formed within the art world have no
longer become just relative to the world of art, on its own.
In these global capitalistic times where our understanding of
a free civil society has radically changed in the floundering
face of capitalistic hegemony and even modern democracy,
we need the possibility to think things differently. We need
to look to new forms of producing understanding and
knowledge. Artists need to be actively connected to society
without being manipulated by it.

The ability for art to create new thinking, new
knowledge is now of critical importance. The position
of the artist and the role of the artwork are now more
needed than ever before. We now need an art that is not
just concerned with the artworld, but with the world. But
we must not lose sight of the extraordinary position the
artist holds in society, the role of the non-professional, the
incidental person; we must not lose sight of the power of an
artwork to bring new understandings into consciousness and
being, and we have to be cognisant that we don’t diminish
these positions by allowing them simply to become social
band-aids to cover over the cracks in our fracture
and fragmenting world.
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Footnotes
1. Spaces for Thinking – Perspectives on the Art Academy” Simon Sheikh
3. This is a direct reference to two pieces of work by Stephen Willats called “Pat Purdy and the Glue Sniffers Cam” 1083 and “Brentford Towers” 1985.
5. Said, Edward from Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community, From the Anti-Aesthetic – essays on Post Modern Culture edited by Hal Foster, pg
6. A Book by Julia Bryan-Wilson called “Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era” will be published later in the year on the subject.
In the subject of engaged interdisciplinary practice, definitions of the citizen artist have appeared for debate in Limerick in much of the recent work of MA Space. Variants of this debate also appear in much of the Limerick School of Art and Design’s off-campus undergraduate projects and course work which engage thematically with place and exchange.

Such activity has prompted the introduction of Social Art for entry level students. LSAD recognises a possible multidisciplinary option within the field of art and design which can complement the established presence of the Masters programme in Social Practice and the Creative Environment. A programme discriptor from MA SPACE states that Socially Engaged Art practice democratises the relationship between the practitioner and a community through the sharing of expert and lay knowledge and through the sharing of resources. This pathway of civil engagement is embedded in undergraduate and postgraduate studies.

Students and practitioners continue to respect a public agenda where the legacy of Suzanne Lacy’s mid 90s statement on ‘new genre public art’ remains. She has encouraged the publicly-engaged artist to ‘act in collaboration with people with an understanding of social systems and institutions where entirely new strategies must be learned.’ This basic outline remains for any talk on the position of the citizen artist in relation to their endeavors in the landscape as well as an accommodation of contrast in the intersecting diverse socially engaged work by trained artists.

The continuing remit of Eva International remains in forums and workshops that have explored creative citizen exchange over the years. The CATA project (EVA 2012) which links communities of interest around the Shannon river is a good example of the expanded function of art described in 2000 by that year’s EVA curator, Rosa Martinez, as ‘situations that foster transferential plasticity, allowing emotions to become forms of action which modify power relations and re-invent sociability.’ CATA was successfully run by a group of MA SPACE graduates.

Contrasting Martinez’s encompassing description is a simple outline of the term social engagement by Boris Groys who states that it is ‘an attempt by artists and creatives to regain common ground with the audience by enticing viewers out of passivity, accessing in this process, political or ideological tools’.

Programmes such as MA Social Practice and the Creative Environment (MA SPACE) celebrate the city as laboratory where the creative citizen engages in a definition
of location set out by Rosalyn Deutsche, who recognises place as 'the site of performativity and of criticality rather than a set of naturalised relations between subjects and places'. Due to the specifics of interaction in the nature of socially engaged work, the dialogue that occurs in this type of laboratory work is often found in the overlap between social work, culture work, and the commons. Research in this programme and work led by city centre art spaces recognise this overlap and recognise it as the core meeting area for citizen artistry.

The new physical reality of Nama and its related consequences have obliged the citizen artist and the professional creative to share unfamiliar common ground as the profile of an enforced economic landscape becomes increasingly politicised. The landscape becomes more than a contemplative environment when civil debate is prompted by the physicality of artwork outside any remit of sanctioned public art. Nama territories can be regarded as the place were the creatives and the artist citizens meet. Creatives have responded to the economy-versus-society debate in work that resonates more than just material from observation and commentary. They process Deutsche’s definition of location and base action in the context of public enquiry, in some cases even using the framework of the ideal of the dwelling itself as material.

Beuys’s dictum, ‘Everyone is an artist’ was based on an insistence that public life is composed of ‘the everyday inter-relationships in the material processes of citizens.’ His statement emphasised ‘all the process inherent in a citizen’s day to day exchange’. This example reflects the universal regulation of the creative act as beyond specific authorship and makes us sensitive to the positioning of an audience in a prescribed space. At present we can find the citizen artist as a neighbour leaning on the fence in NAMAland, realising that space may be questioned, defined and fought for.

Here are two examples of interest in this landscape, There is a similarity in the ethics of intervention, even though the first involves social engagement and the second involves Fine Art.

Collaborative community work demonstrates socially engaged practice at work, as evident in Vagabond Reviews, Alibe Murphy and Ciaran Smyth’s recent engagement with a community in Ballybane Galway. The local people, working with the artists, transformed a house on a council estate into a space for community dialogue over 18 months.

In a similar way, Elaine Reynolds’s ‘On / Off States’ was a material based sculptural process that activated a house on a ghost estate in Leitrim in which programmed lights flashed SOS for a weekend. Both interventions demanded creative engagement in citizen-orientated subject matter albeit with different measures of civic engagement, participation and accountability. Both Vagabond Reviews and On/ Off States have been discussed inside and outside their specific project boundaries. So, collectively due to the linked phenomenality of subject matter, is this creativity authored by professionals who can be called citizen artists?

Some questions:
Rosa Martinez’s encompassing description of engagement was certainly of its time. Now that definitions of creative engagement with place have become more user friendly can we fairly expect it to be legitimised by council funded artist placement schemes and events such as Eva?

Has the language of socially engaged practice been assimilated to the extent that it appears in guideline format for ‘per cent’ for art schemed art work? If so should a definition of the citizen be threaded through this process?

If there is collaboration between creatives foregrounded exclusively in the civil landscape, what name does this activity go by and who legitimises the breadth of it?

Whereas the socially-engaged artist has access to language that investigates, engages and develops contracts with communities of interest, new modes of address are emerging at the other end of the spectrum. These modes are constructing citizen dialogue as they seek creative endeavours from place itself. This place, perhaps also populated by Beuys’s performative citizens, is the now the one described by Clare Doherty as an ‘event in progress’.

The legacy of 60s happenings artist Alan Kapow are of descriptive note here. He responded to the changing landscape of the time by creating ‘open artworks’ by which the artist that chose to work in society abandoned the traditional role of the author to become a mediator for multi-layered work that is framed by its context.

Socially-engaged projects such as ‘How Capital Moves’ by Kennedy Browne, ‘Hotel Ballymun’ by Seamus Nolan, and ‘Namaland’ by Connor McGarrigle are compelling reflections of the living debate taking place among Irish citizens in the new NAMA reality. Namaland has been heavily covered in the wider media and both Kennedy Browne and Nolan’s practice have been described as ‘Scanning Society’. A consequence of this dissemination is that the phrase ‘what is left?’ is now accessed as a type of citizen resource. Why would it not be?

As political imperatives force us to create an unwilling accommodation with the reality of NAMA,
we find ourselves driven to seek definitions of solidarity between the creative, the citizen artist and the citizen. Saskia Sassen writing on Occupy New York for Artforum states that ‘to Occupy is to remake, even if temporarily, territory’s embedded and often deeply undemocratic logics of power, and to redefine the role of citizens, mostly weakened and fatigued after decades of growing inequality and injustice’.

There is also an increasing public familiarity with the profile of socially-engaged artists like Alfredo Jarr, who states that his practice is specifically divided into equivalent thirds. These are museum pieces, intervention and teaching. In Jarr’s work Art Culture = Capital 2010 he said he promoted a space where the three audiences invited by this type of practice overlapped and even ‘imploded’.

Mick Wilson describes the multiple meanings of the term Civil Society ‘as a reduction around the issue of community’. It is ‘association on the basis of identity and belonging’ for some, and alternately, a networked integration and social cohesion of individuals pursuing interests led by the concept of ‘social capital’ for others.

Wilson outlines three overlapping paradigms relating to this multiplicity. The community arts paradigm, the public culture paradigm, and the public intellectual and activist paradigm. It is the latter which sees the arts as the bearer of an independent critical voice aligned to ‘various constituencies in modes of protest and dissent’.

As the crossover extends to design and commercial work it continues to generate new examples. Versions of projects and descriptions of projects such as Javier Rodrigo’s Transducers are much more familiar to the general public than before.

Although framed by academia, Rodrigo says, that they intend to ‘break out’ of the traditional institutional and other limits to rethink ‘interconnected spaces in which to experiment with new models of citizenship’. They give rise to alternative ways of building new spheres of action and collaborative learning linking individuals and knowledge’s that are very different from each other. The intention of such projects is to promote learning based on dialogue and collaboration. Other groups such as the curatorial collective What, How and For Who speak of trying to work out a parallel cultural policy and infrastructure in civil society.

The principle crosses over into the commercial sphere. UK design groups Thinkpublic and Superflux insist on building responsible definitions of citizenship into the briefs for their projects when they secure public sector or community contracts. Creative commentary by multi-practitioners such as the Deterritorial Support Group, again in the UK, also factor.

What validates these concepts? The search for alternative political models. Curator Maria Lind mentions that art functions as a venue where the political is allowed to be enacted, if sometimes covertly, recognising that ‘politics is completely steered by economics. And the economy follows a capitalist logic’. We must continuously remind ourselves that we as citizens live in a society and not an economy.

Is this a definition of the citizen artist? Creating projects that have at their core an awareness of the term citizenship as all-inclusive with a responsibility towards new models? Is this a type of acceptable socially engaged art that is validated in the pedagogic drive of systems such as Javier Rodrigo’s Transducers?

What is the other side of the sporadic unregulated activity that is undertaken on a specific theme? Is it in singular creative protests? Or acts that visualize the personal by those who pick their own territory of self-initiated action? What of those who organize their own discourse and activity? There are many versions of this from the wider Occupy movement to the local. Who is called upon to validate these acts?

Some Questions to finish on. What is the profile of a non-institutional Citizen Artist? How do we see the case of the developer Joe Mc Namara? He dramatically protested his rights as he saw them as a liberal-individualist within his own self-designed guidelines and officially applied for planning for his sculpture led Achill-henge under aesthetic guidelines. His behavior was not artist-led but his protest was. He sought and was refused official validation as part of a project that holds many fine art/folk/craft and situationist references. He became his own judge and jury, unfettered by the guidelines of social practice yet deep in the landscape of it. Mc Namara’s own contentious identity as a developer and his relationship to stalled construction projects the Island of Achill complicates the issue further. (see Micheal Lewis article in Vanity Fair Feb 2011 http://www.vanityfair.com/business/features/2011/03/michael-lewis-ireland-201103)

The social practitioner and educator Pablo Helguera has mentioned that unethical artistic paths that are sometimes necessary to challenge assumptions for freedom of expression and Alfredo Jarr mentions that is difficult to find the balance between content and spectacle. Do these apply to McNamara’s creativity? Is this citizen led because Mc Namara’s definition of citizenship is perhaps one based on a misguided reading of ‘the extent that a person can control one’s destiny within the group in the sense of being able to influence the government of the group’.

What is the difference between a citizen artist and artist citizen? A citizen artist engages in issue-based work in an often-contested space in an attempt to converse with a singular subject on his or her own terms. Suzanne Lacy reminds us that there was a default explanation for so-called progressive public art that was used by its practitioners. The activity in a space between the artist and the audience was sometimes described as the artwork itself. Can citizen artists as issue based commentators also access this permission?
If Citizen Artists operate outside this ‘author-function’ who regulates Citizen artwork? How do vernacular citizen artists function in communities of practice (collective learning) and communities of interest (those who share common goals). Is the the authority of institutionalised social practice necessary to creatively explore any notion of citizenship?

To Conclude

Annie Fletcher in an interview with Sarah Pierce on the theme of EVA 2012 (Visual Artists May –June 2012) quotes Franco Berardi who encourages resistance to a false notion of progress and an assessment of the complexity of the present Artists and the role of culture in general could be useful in looking at the now. The complexity that artistic practice can bring is increasingly important.

In education, ‘what the artist should know’ can be assisted by continuing to visualise and profile work by citizen creatives in tandem with recognised social practitioners as part of socially engaged programmes. Definitions of the citizen artist will arise in the outreach of academic language meshing with the vernacular methodology of the street11.

Writing on artists repositioning themselves Brian Holmes states ‘In seeking to become catalysts for change, artists reposition themselves as citizen–activists. Diametrically opposed to the aesthetic practices of the isolated artist, consensus building inevitably entails developing a set of skills not commonly associated with art making. To take a position with respect to the public agenda, the artist must act in collaboration with people, and with an understanding of social systems and institutions. Entirely new strategies must be learned: how to collaborate, how to develop multilayered and specific audiences, how to cross over with other disciplines, how to choose sites that resonate with public meaning, and how to clarify visual and process symbolism for people who are not educated in art. In other words, artist-activists question the primacy of separation as an artistic stance and undertake the consensual production of meaning with the public’12.

The significance of convergence between the vernacular and the language assisted activity of the socially engaged practitioner highlights, as ever, a definition of place that recognises the diversity of located contexts and shared issues between the nominally titled socially engaged artist and the issue based citizen artist. The complexity mentioned by Annie Fletcher in the public agenda includes, but does not invite ownership of, an outsider creative practice. This practice is continuously foregrounded by a profile that holds the primacy of the citizen first. In reviewing a collective overview of this type of activity (in Limerick for example) it could be suggested that an unregulated vernacular version of a socially engaged agenda is recognised by the institution. A raw version of practice in other words. However this regulation is not sanctioned by the institution or civic authorities. The citizen artist remains primarily a Citizen. A Citizen with issues.

Paul Tarpey is a Senior Lecturer at Limerick School of Art and Design, and also lecturers on the MA SPACE Programme

Footnotes

1. A Genealogy of Participatory Art in An introduction to Anti Philosophy By Boris Groys 2012 P200
10. The definition of citizenship according to political scientist Arthur Stinchome.

An Annie Fletcher quote can link here ‘It is our role as human beings to try and find solutions together but our job as cultural practitioners is to unleash complexity in smart and accessible ways – to spark the imagination and reveal other stories and other possibilities. It is about a moment of imagining but also a moment of digestion. As a human being you have certain obligations in society: solidarity, to be together and to try and think through things. As an artist, your role is to be the artist.’ (The Visual Artists News Sheet May –June 2012)
Introduction
This article draws on research in local communities in Limerick City over the last 10 years – both in poor and relatively more affluent neighbourhoods. The research was based on work “on the ground” in communities, mainly door-to-door household surveys. The experience provided opportunities to see what communities are like at first hand - the housing, the streets, open-spaces and use of space and facilities - to listen and talk to people about their communities, their concerns and aspirations for themselves and their families. Research conducted in this way is not only about gathering data but also about building relationships with people and places. The processes and the social engagement required are important in shaping the researcher’s views. It also generates a commitment to make use of the research, to advocate for change with a view to improving things for the local communities studied. The experience suggests that we should give more thought to our role here – are we just using the information to contribute to academic discourse? Or is it also our responsibility to use the findings and insights from research to stimulate debate, to develop new connections between the academic community and the public, and to influence change?

Research in Limerick City: Social Capital as a Key Theme. The research undertaken has focused on different themes over the years – such as economic prospects and development trends, health and well-being of older people and quality of life and outcomes for children and families. A common thread has been mapping the “social capital” of local communities. While social capital is a concept used in academia, in lay terms, it is about trust in people in general, looking out for each other, and forming social networks to support each other and do things together. Mostly, people agree that these are important to the quality of everyday life.

What is “Social Capital”? There are many definitions of social capital. Robert Putnam defines it as “features of social organization, such as networks, norms and trust that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action (Putnam, Leonardi et al, 1993). This is known as the civic perspective on social capital. An indicator of the health of the social capital in a community, such as a neighbourhood or a city, is the level of participation of people in voluntary associations. Trust is a key ingredient. If there isn’t a sense of trust in people in general, people are unlikely to engage in voluntary associations and to work together on common issues.

Going further into the concept, different types of social capital are identified in the academic literature,
namely: “bonding” social capital or networks of people from the same social background such as extended family, closest friends and neighbours who provide social support especially in times of need such as illness, bereavement, loss of employment; and “bridging” social capital, the more diversified networks of people from different social backgrounds. Networks of bridging social capital provide sources of new information and “bridges” to opportunities, extending beyond our own closest networks and immediate experience. It is important to note that there is also a “downside” to social capital – linked to networks which bring people into crime, drug use and risk behaviour.

A problem for communities with strong concentrations of people on low incomes is that residents tend to lack networks of bridging social capital. They tend to have socially restricted networks comprising people from the same social background with little resources. For instance, often they don’t have a network of people who are in employment or in higher education to provide role models, encouragement and support to help them access such opportunities themselves. If such communities are strongly physically bounded (e.g., cut off from the mainstream via a physical boundary such as a main road, a river, boundary walls restricting access to and from them etc.) and social segregation is reproduced in institutions where people meet such as schools, church, community centres, youth centres, the lack of bridging social capital is reinforced. In addition, there are risks that young people, for instance, with low education and lacking opportunities can be mobilised into negative networks (e.g., anti-social behaviour, crime).

Why the Interest in Social Capital in Communities? Analysis of types of social capital has been used to explain different outcomes for places. There is evidence that cities or regions with high social capital are more prosperous, have lower rates of crime, better population health and generally have better quality of life. It should be noted that some research contests this, arguing that other factors are at play here and not just the social capital. The density of voluntary associations, bringing people together from different backgrounds, is considered a measure of the health of the civil society.

Social Inequality and its Relationship to Social Capital. Another focus of the research in Limerick has been on social inequality in the city. Social inequalities, present in most advanced societies, are considered bad for society. Large differences in the concentrations of wealth and poverty in a country or city negatively affect social cohesion and social capital. Where societies are evidently unequal, people are less likely to trust each other in general and this reduces the likelihood of shared social associations being formed. There is, as such, a relationship between social capital and social inequality. In societies characterised by strong inequalities, the social capital will tend to be weaker and the society less cohesive.

Changing Conditions Post “the Celtic Tiger”. If we take some of these ideas and apply them to our own situation, over the last twenty years, Ireland has undergone remarkable economic and social change. While the state is now in a serious economic and financial crisis, overall living standards have improved from well below the European Community average in the 1980’s to well above the EU average now. Ireland is now an affluent society but the evidence suggests that, over the years, it has become more unequal. Nonetheless, as a nation we are associated with strong communities and community spirit, especially supportive of each other in times of difficulty. Post “celtic tiger”, there is a renewed sense of the importance of community.

Limerick City – Social Segregation and Social Inequality in the City. Limerick is an old industrial city which from the 1970’s successfully underwent a process of industrial restructuring out of declining industries into new sectors in manufacturing and services. In the process, many new sources of jobs were created offering employment and opportunities for social mobility. Not all benefited however. At the height of the “celtic tiger”, there were still very high levels of unemployment on the local authority estates.

A key feature of Limerick, however, is the high degree of social segregation into neighbourhoods of concentrated affluence and concentrated poverty. The most disadvantaged or poorest neighbourhoods, based on the Haas Index (1991-2006), are the large local authority estates on the northside (Moyross and St. Mary’s Park) and southside of the city (Southill and Ballinarra Weston) targeted by the Limerick Regeneration programme (2007). The severity and complexity of problems in Limerick’s local authority housing estates, identified by John Fitzgerald in his report to the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Inclusion after the incident of burning two children in their mother’s car on the Moyross estate, led to the setting up the regeneration programme and the Regeneration Agencies by government.

This outrageous act was seen as an indication that “anti-social behaviour” had “gotton out of hand” on the most deprived estates of Limerick City and the loss of any sense of civic community.
Knowing & Trusting Most People in the Neighbourhood

Fig. 1 Sources: Humphreys & deBurca (2009); Humphreys, McCafferty and Higgins (2012)
Social Capital in Neighbourhoods in Limerick City.

The various studies undertaken over the years show that people living in all types of neighbourhood in the city (affluent, poor, mixed, middle class) have strong bonding social capital – almost all people in the communities studied have good friends, neighbours and extended family to provide emotional and practical support in times of need. Generally, people living in relatively more affluent communities have larger social support networks compared with those living in relatively disadvantaged communities.

Focusing on community spirit, a study of older people in four parishes on the northside of the city showed a strong sense of belonging to community - over 93 percent in Christ the King (Caherdavin), 91 percent in the Holy Rosary Parish (Ennis Road / North Circular Road), 81 percent in St. Munchin’s (Thomondgate, Faranshone, Ballynanty, Killeely) and some 70 percent in Corpus Christi Parish (Moyross).

The same study showed a high level of involvement of older people in voluntary associations, highest in the Holy Rosary parish (67%), followed by Christ the King (6%), St. Munchin’s (40%) and lowest in Corpus Christi parish (38%). An earlier study (2003 and 2006) of the adult population of neighbourhoods (4) in the city and suburbs showed a lower level of involvement in voluntary associations generally – highest in Castletroy / Monaleen (42%), almost one-third in King’s Island (32%) and relatively low in Moyross (25%).

Knowing one’s neighbours and people living in the neighbourhood is often seen as an important characteristic of community and is important to the quality of neighbourhood life. Focusing on trust, drawing on the various studies, it is not the absolute level of trust that seems to matter most as an indicator of the health of civic community but rather the difference (positive/negative) and the extent of the gap between “knowing most people in the neighbourhood” and “trusting most”. In more disadvantaged communities, residents tend to know people to a greater extent than they trust them (i.e., there are deficits of trust). In more affluent neighbourhoods, the opposite is the case - they trust people to a greater extent than they know them. This is illustrated below with reference to two studies in Limerick City – the study of older people in the four parishes (2007/2008) and a study of children and families (2010 data) showed a large “education gap” between the population of the regeneration areas and average neighbourhoods in the city. Some 70 percent of parents in the regeneration areas had lower secondary education or below as the highest level of qualification, while less than 1 per cent had a third level degree or postgraduate qualification. This contrasts with the Corbally / Rhebogue neighbourhoods where 12 percent had lower secondary education as the highest level of qualification while 29 percent had a third level degree or postgraduate qualification. The same study found that households in the regeneration areas are largely dependent on Social Welfare payments as the largest source of household income (approximately 80%) indicating these are “workless” households.

The population trend in Limerick City since the mid-1990’s has been one of population loss. This reflects weakness in the social and economic base of the city. The long-term trend in the city’s regeneration areas has been one of population decline, especially sharp in the last census period 2006-2011 – for instance, where the O’Malley Park / Keyes Park area of Southill lost 50 percent of its population. These trends reflect a strong orientation to leave the large local authority estates in the city, assisted in the most recent period by the regeneration process. Population loss from the neighbourhoods could be seen as both unfavourable conditions for positive social capital and outcomes of deficits in community social capital. (see graph fig. 2)

Moving on to health outcomes, the research findings provide evidence of poorer health status and more health problems including poorer mental health for populations resident in the poorest neighbourhoods of the city compared with average and more affluent neighbourhoods. Older people living in more disadvantaged neighbourhoods including Corpus Christi Parish (Moyross) and adjacent areas reported worse health status compared with those resident in the more affluent neighbourhoods of Christ the King (Caherdavin) and Holy Rosary Parishes (Ennis Road / North Circular Road). Residents of the most affluent parish, while older on average than residents of other parishes, reported the best health status. (see graph fig. 3)

Findings of the most recent study (2010) indicate that both parents and children in the regeneration areas have poorer health compared with the same population in the average neighbourhoods. Examples with reference to parental health are shown below: rates of long-standing illness of parents, rates of psychological or emotional conditions; and the rate of parents assessed as at risk of depression (see graph fig. 4)
### Actual Population Change in Limerick Regeneration Areas, Limerick City & County 1981 - 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ballynanty ED (Moyross)</td>
<td>5,814</td>
<td>3,468</td>
<td>2,916</td>
<td>-552</td>
<td>-2,898</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limerick North Rural (Caherdavin/ Pineview/ Deimege/ Craeval)</td>
<td>4,857</td>
<td>7,251</td>
<td>6,454</td>
<td>-797</td>
<td>1,597</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rathbane (ED Carew &amp; Kincora)</td>
<td>3,704</td>
<td>1,702</td>
<td>1,566</td>
<td>-136</td>
<td>-2,138</td>
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<td>Galvone B (O’Malley, Keyes)</td>
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<td>1,574</td>
<td>883</td>
<td>-691</td>
<td>-2,012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prospect B (Ballincurra Weston)</td>
<td>1,429</td>
<td>1,026</td>
<td>748</td>
<td>-278</td>
<td>-681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. John’s A (St. Marys Park)</td>
<td>1,823</td>
<td>1,211</td>
<td>874</td>
<td>-337</td>
<td>-949</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limerick City</td>
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<td>59,790</td>
<td>56,779</td>
<td>-3,011</td>
<td>-8,814</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limerick County</td>
<td>98,068</td>
<td>124,265</td>
<td>134,527</td>
<td>10,262</td>
<td>38,459</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 2 Sources: CSO Census of Ireland, 1981-2011 (preliminary results for 2011)

### Self assessed health of older people in 2007 in Northside Limerick Neighbourhoods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>In Excellent/ Very Good Health (%)</th>
<th>In Fair/ Poor Health (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moyross (Most Disadvantaged)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballynanty / Kileely, Thomandgate (Disadvantaged)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caherdavin (Average)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ennis Rd./ North Circular Rd. &amp; Environ (Prosperous)</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 3 Data source: Humphreys, McCafferty and Higgins (2012)

### Parental health in Limerick City Neighbourhoods (Data collected in 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Self-reported In Poor/Fair Health (%)</th>
<th>With diagnosed long-standing illness (%)</th>
<th>Psychological/emotional conditions (%)</th>
<th>&quot;At risk of depression&quot; (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northside Regeneration Areas</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southside Regeneration Areas</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantaged Areas (Garryowen, Kennedy Park, Old Cork Road)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Areas (Corbally / Rhebogue)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 4 Data source: Humphreys, McCafferty and Higgins (2012)
Conclusions

Neighbourhoods in Limerick City have aspects of strong social capital. There is a strong sense of belonging to community and strong networks of social support from extended family, friends and neighbours. These aspects of social capital are highly valued and extremely important to the quality of everyday life. This is true of all types of neighbourhood including the most disadvantaged communities in the city. It is important to build on this.

The most disadvantaged communities in the city, in particular, show weaknesses in social capital particularly reflected in deficits of trust in people in general. This affects the cohesion of the community and indeed spills over into the city with negative outcomes for all. Population loss could be an indicator of poor community cohesion in the city.

A key problem in Limerick is the extremes of inequality at a spatial level in the neighbourhoods that make up Limerick city and suburbs or the highly segregated residential pattern. This is not conducive to building bridging social capital – i.e., the socially heterogeneous networks/associations – and this negatively affect those lowest down the social hierarchy, their aspirations and access to opportunities.

From the research undertaken in Limerick and the wider literature, it is clear that social inequality, poverty/deprivation and social capital are linked. Where poverty coincides with high levels of social inequality and a lack of positive social capital, the outcomes for society are poor and have worst effects on those lowest down the social hierarchy reflected, for instance, in poorer health status.

To change the prospects of the city, it is clearly necessary to work towards addressing the social inequalities between people and places in the city, which are deeply rooted historically and socially complex. Building social “bridges” or connections across people and neighbourhoods which are different from each other is extremely important – to break down the social and physical barriers across the city. This is a pre-requisite to identifying our common needs and to promote cooperation in the common interest.

Dr. Eileen Humphreys Research Fellow, Institute for the Study of Knowledge in Society (ISKS), University of Limerick

Sources
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Concern

I have chosen to work with the group of people from the Redemption Baptist Church, Athlone. A community of which I am a member and have personal relations with. The aim of my project was to create a dialogue with the group and encourage participants to share their daily life experiences that represent common beliefs.

This project is an attempt to make a space for dialogue between members and the public through creative processes - using photography and text as a way of sharing their personal experiences of Christian daily life and their concern for the salvation of one’s soul.
Sarah Daly

Sarah Daly is a graduate of Fine Art from Limerick School of Art and Design. She is a founding director and current manager of Louth Craftmark, a not-for-profit company which supports creative endeavour in County Louth and has recently completed construction of Creative Spark, Louth Creative Community Hub, a facility which provides workspace and training space for the creative sector and the communities it engages with.

Sarah’s current area of research concerns identity and the perceptions of identity in people(s) and place(s) - how they can be mapped, defined, accepted, challenged or altered.

Place Identity Maps and Meanings

“How hard it is to escape from places. However carefully one goes they hold you – you leave little bits of yourself fluttering on the fences – like rags and shreds of your very life.” Katherine Mansfield

This project aims to create dialogue, in the first instance with the Bush and Grange community on the Cooley Peninsula, and, by extension, with the wider County Louth community to create engagement, to create and sustain connection and to explore ideas of identity and place.

My interest is in people, places and identity – the identity associated with place and, in particular, the identity, or possibility of developing a shared sense of identity, of County Louth, the place where I now live and work.

In my professional practice I have engaged with creative practitioners and community groups and have developed a specific interest in the methodologies which can be used to engage individuals in dialogue, through the identification of common interests and spending time together.

Using a creative practice, involving the mapping of community assets through the use of walking, map-making, collecting images, stories, sound recording and storytelling, a community can gain a better understanding of itself, of its make up, its identity and of its commonalities.

Key concepts informing my practice are theories of place, placemaking and the production of shared space; as well as practical methodologies of community map-making. Placemaking is a deliberate and conscious decision to make a place for people or for a community.

Implicit in this is the desire to make a place better.
A graduate from Limerick School of Art and Design in the early 1970s, she returned to L.S.A.D. in September 2011 to participate in the MA in Social Practice and the Creative Environment.

Her work has been influenced and shaped by exposure to varying cultural and social realities in Ireland over the last 40 years and in Europe and Australia since 2000, when she lived on board a boat for 5 years. In recent years her interest in animation, documentary and sound has expanded her practice. She has availed of residency awards and extended studio experience in Ireland, Cyprus, Cadiz, Barcelona and Freemantle in Western Australia.

A lifelong interest in local and global social justice issues has motivated an interest in socially engaged practices. She is currently re-engaging with feminism, activism and less visible art forms, observing with interest the progress of the Occupy movement, worldwide. She has shown her work in cycles, from 1986-1992, 2001-2011 at home and abroad.

In the light of the recent Regeneration Project in Limerick, and from reflections on previous “regeneration” projects, within the island parish of St. Mary’s, I have initiated a series of social interventions, beginning with a screening of The Wizard of Oz in St. Mary’s school hall. The resulting meetings and activities have re-awakened memories, experience, past identity, occupation, displacements and re-locations, the effects of which are still being felt today, the erasure of an entire community of homes in the late 1980’s being a case in point. The gaps and empty spaces and the appropriation of areas where once were homes and thriving communities have stimulated my own political questioning. I see my current practice as an engagement in personal, collected and collective perspectives on the past, while enacting the presents and futures which unfold from them. I am inspired by the social practice of Gregory Sholette, a New York based artist, writer and educationalist, who, in a recent article (After OWS: Social practice Art, Abstraction, and the Limits of the Social, Eflux. 2012), considers new roles and new ways of thinking about a social practice for artists encouraging them to move more directly into cultural and societal “usership”, which would include political activism.

I believe that social practice and activist memory can open creative possibilities in a socially responsible, place-based practice. In excavations of embodied social memory and wounded places, I hope to progress a social practice of engagement in the witnessing of haunted sites, geographies of loss and an acknowledgement of the role of collected and collective memory as resistance to hegemonic town planning practice and an antidote to collective societal amnesia.

“It is not dreams of liberated grandchildren that stir men and women to revolt. It is the memories of enslaved ancestors” Walter Benjamin.
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Geraldine’s background is in Law, Print and Paint. She worked for many years within the legal profession qualifying as a Fellow of the Institute of Legal Executives, Bedford in 1996. She graduated from Sligo I.T. in 2011 with a B.A. (Hons) Degree in Fine Art. She has exhibited in The Law Library, Dublin, Cavan County Museum, The Dock, Carrick-on-Shannon and in many group exhibitions.

My work is concerned with opening spaces for dialogue to explore the notion of commodity fetishism, relative to self identity, how we relate to others, and the role we play in society, within the framework of the everyday. The aspiration for this intervention is to challenge continuing perceptions as to how consciously aware we are that our relationships with each other and our connecting with ourselves are being subverted by advertising in the media, on a daily basis. Conversely, this intervention will also explore, if mass media simply reflect our values as a society? and the cause and effect of our consumer behaviour.

This project will be explored within the theoretical framework of Object Relations and Attachment Theory and Primary Narcissism. The former puts forward the theory that we are biologically programmed to form human relationships and attachments, from very early in our lives as babies, which serve as a blueprint for establishing and maintaining future human relationships. This theory rejects the concept of Primary Narcissism and instant gratification, put forward by Sigmund Freud, which concept the mass media rely on to push the notion that the ultimate goal of human beings is the pursuit of happiness through the medium of consumerism to satisfy ‘our inner selfish desires’.

The purpose of my work is to interrupt and disrupt the subliminal images we are bombarded with in the everyday whereby the mass media seek to manage and control our inner psychological life by tapping into our unconscious for the purpose of manipulating our desires for their own corrupt purposes. The aim of this project is to seek to reactivate a necessary conversation, within a transitional space, to consider alternatives to capitalism or a different version of it, based on a conscious awareness that commodity fetishism is the driving force of our economic structure, changing it from needs to desire based economy resulting in alienation, inequity and inequality.
Considerations of individual being and collective becoming.

My work intends to challenge notions of "publicness", access to public space and the involvement of the public in the planning of public space. The wider criticality of my work considers in general, the ways in which people feel removed, detached, not part of greater society and more specifically the ways in which this creates a sense of powerlessness and alienation.

I propose that alienation and passivity in society is due, in part, to the inadequate provision of usable public spaces in which people can come together and form dialogues addressing the kind of society they would like to live in and ways in which this can be achieved.

Through the medium of performance I experiment with the "uninstrument" and the human body, placing these considerations within the public realm. This is intended to mobilise citizens to think more critically about their role in creating the public. Of particular interested to me is the uninstrument (any object with acoustic potential) as a tool of engagement and its potential for the development of egalitarian dialogics. It opens creative expression as a possibility to everyone everywhere thus potentially widening the scope of dialogue as well as addressing limitations of specialisation. Based on a personal meditative practice and research into methods of multidimensional listening, I have coupled the uninstrument with improvisation. I see improvisation, particularly when working with sound, as a delicate negotiation of motivations, inspirations and expressions which, when practiced collectively, may give rise to a form of communication which attempts to achieve inclusion, appropriateness and togetherness. Therefore it is my understanding that if improvisation is based on the notion that, success means a coherent whole, then it will lead to the kind of group experience that can inspire the formation of a community, thus society and world.
Steve Maher

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Steve Maher is an artist working, living, studying and speculating in Limerick City. Maher’s work deals with the uses of dialogue centred around the unknown and alternate possibilities about what we assume about the worlds we currently live in and could potentially live in.

The concept of futures and the uses of speculation in dialogue is the central proposition to Maher’s current proposal, this is derived from his research in the various genres of science fiction and the theoretical writings which are encompassed in futurology, this ranges from such varied sources as Arthur C. Clarke and Clifford D. Simak to Carl Sagan and Mark Rowlands. Although the speculations made currently about the future may be incorrect, the act of speculation portrays our invested aspirations in the current moment more accurately than any archival objective document. Maher’s work deals inherently because of his position with the history of the future.

The Speculative Society

What is the legacy of our role in this particular time and place and what shape will society take in 25, 50 or a 100 years due to the actions and decisions we make today? What impact do we have on a potential and speculated society? How as individuals do we foresee our role in the everyday lives of a future society in which we may no longer be present?

“If we have learned one thing from the history of invention and discovery it is that in the long run – and often in the short one – the most daring prophecies seem laughably conservative” Arthur C. Clarke

Speculation has uses beyond sheer fiction, we forecast the short term everyday in preparation for the following moment but our predictions can never truly be accurate. Our predictions can however be inaccurate in a very interesting way, how we speculate currently in the present moment characterises who we are and what we believe more than any other archival text could ever represent. Our aspirations and our interpretations of what is possible define who we are here and now more so than what we believe we know about our present moment, just look at classic science fiction texts and the fact that no matter how imaginative and intricate they were conceptually they just couldn’t shake certain social bias and perspective of their own time. No matter advanced the supercomputer or anti-gravity system described in these stories were, certain aspects of the time the tales where written in persist, like the archetypal lead male or the Nuclear Family.

What we are interested in is not an interpretation of past forms of speculation? Although these are still relevant for an anticipation of future societies reflection of our own actions now, we are interested in the uses speculation has for us today and the dialogue it can provoke.
In 2003 Justin graduated from the Dublin Institute of Technology with a BA degree in Fine Art specialising in interdisciplinary studies. He has exhibited in Talbot Gallery and studios, Dublin, Tengri Umai, Almaty, Kazakhstan as well as many other solo and group shows.

Aitys Choir

This work is centered around the creation of a number of workshops on the concept of the Aitis (meaning “speak” in Kazakhstan) which is created using the traditional instrument the dombra. Usually two people sing an improvised song poem which can last from morning to night and is usually between a man and a woman.

I have invited a number of Kazakhstan and English speakers to create their own Aitis Choir around the idea of distance.

In unwrapping and bringing different cultures together I can hopefully create a cultural change between these spaces/people.
Pauline O’Connell

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Heave – Ho

My work is interested in the identity of the local. In particular the specific trace of human presence and its erasure over time - rooted in the dialectic it considers the material world, its politics, ideologies both physical and ephemeral. The gathering of stories conflating fact, fiction and folklore has been a constant in my work for nearly 20 years. My practice to date has explored these concerns through public commissions and pedagogical initiatives, curating, writing, exhibitions and collaborations. Past commissioned projects adopted a physical presence manifest in site-specific / responsive works resulting with permanent, ephemeral and time based sculptures. In recent times the full potential of a socially engaged practice has focused my concerns on the local being global. Questioning what community is? Not as a noun, not as a constant but that reached through action. The link between repository and time, detour into the past acting as anachronistic time frames as evident in a newly commissioned film by Kerry County Council entitled “Drawing The Water”. These time frames act as a social document for comparative questioning of place, identity and meaning.

My MA project entitled “Heave – Ho” is centered in my local area of rural northeast Co. Kilkenny. This aims to create a repository through the re-enacting of a local activity from the past (in the form HeaveHo; an invitation to community) which is based on TUG O’ WAR. This activity was held locally up until the mid 1990s and was considered important to be an Olympic sport between 1900 and 1920. At that time, emphasis was paid to community activities and less to corporate sponsorship as is evident today within the Olympic games.

I aim to creatively orchestrate (through a league system of events) the adversarial relationship of the game whilst looking at the individual as an ingredient in community. The inter-dependence of those pulling together and those pulling in opposition as an embodying transformative engagement in this neo-liberal disconnected world.

Whilst detouring from the present via the past by re-introducing the game Tug O’ War, my aim is to direct situations whereby disparate individuals meet with a shared aim. One cannot play Tug O’ War alone, therefore the individuals in unison (through the creative encounter) would contribute to the creation of community – that with a common, shared aim.
Rebecca O’Hare

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Rebecca graduated from the Limerick School of Art & Design with a B.A Fine Art Sculpture & Combined Media (First Class Honours) in 2004 and H.Dip in Art & Design Education (Honours) in 2005. During her time as an undergraduate, Rebecca participated in the three year Be Bounded By Project and was one of four Irish students who travelled, worked and exhibited in North Lapland, the Burren, Co Clare and Estonia. Since graduating, Rebecca has worked in the third level education sector and currently works in the University of Limerick.

As an artist and often, cultural/artistic facilitators I find myself and often choose to, operate in the gap, the area of mistrust, the problematic space where conventional methods of resolving have failed or are lacking. Employing dialogical techniques, collaborative utopian thought and a grassroots approach, my methodology can be ethnographic in nature but usually finds me researching, artistically operating or dwelling in the circumstances presented. Empowering communities of practice or interest, collaborative and socially engaged undertakings such as that of my current project Neighbourhood Talks aims to create positive neighbourhood relationships and experiences through the sharing of common knowledge and understanding on the subject matter of anti-social behaviour as witnessed and documented by those involved and living in the suburbs surrounding the University of Limerick.

My intentions have been to create a dialogically focused and collaborative practice with interested local residents with the aim of stimulating dialogue and discussions centred on the ways in which anti-social behaviour impacts their everyday, their life and their home. Dialogue is encouraged in spaces which are familiar and comfortable to the resident and in most cases take place in their home or in other familiar or neutral territory. In the case of a group discussion, an event such as that of a neighbourhood dinner is devised so that the more formal ritual of a board room meeting is removed and in its place a more enjoyable experience to relax those participating and to allow dialogue to flow more freely and openly.

Neighbourhood Talks is a process of slow dialogue, recording, trust building, action and reflection. An artistic project rooted in an emotive and contested space with the aim and intention of placing a lens on the issues lying at the heart of the contested space and community while creatively investigating the reasons, emotions and personal narratives behind the issues with the wider and future goal of presenting this gathered and shared information on a more influential platform, in particular, to those in authority and with decision making power in the University of Limerick.

Given the opportunity, what new, exciting and real models of dynamic or creative change will emerge in an honest space which can then be tested within the problematic space of the local residential area when the information trustfully given and shared is presented, discussed, explored, poked at or teased out?
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Originally from Listowel, County Kerry, Emma graduated from Limerick School of Art and Design, where she received a BA (Hons) in Sculpture and Combined Media. Her practice has included workshop-based projects involving specific communities exploring photography and video. Emma has worked on a body of research this year, which has been influenced by the Irish Education System.

Looking at the theories of the banking’s system in Paulo Friere’s "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" and also theories from Sir Ken Robinson on the education system’s negative affect on creativity, I am critically analysing the Irish Primary Curriculum, comparing it to the Curriculum of excellence, the Reggio Emilia approach, Rudolf Steiner, and also the methodologies used by American Educator Geoffrey Canada and Howard Gardner.

The Red Door Art project’s is located in the Learning Hub Limerick, looks at a topic interdisciplinary planner, integrating literacy, numeracy and the visual arts into the learning process. Literacy is of personal, social and economic importance, and our ability to use language lies at the centre of the development and expression of our emotions, our thinking, our learning and our sense of personal identity. Being numerate helps us to function responsibly in everyday life and contribute effectively to society, and the Visual Arts gives the inspiration and power to enable young people to enhance their creative talent. By engaging in experiences young people will recognize and represent feelings and emotions, both their own and those of others.

The emphasis of this project is placed on learning as a group and developing a sense of ‘we’ that each young person can offer their best thinking, leading to a rich and fertile group exchange, and stimulating something new and unexpected. Creating a framework of seeing that the project belongs to the group; each young person is an essential part of the project, and the actual theme or content of the project is not important as the process of the young people’s thinking, feeling, working and progressing together.
“The Misadventures of a Good Citizen”

Eilish Tuite
Eilish Tuite

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Eilish Tuite graduated from Limerick School of Art and Design in 2011 and was the recipient of the inaugural Graduate Exhibition Award at Ormston House Gallery for the 2012 visual arts programme. Her work often includes collaborative and co-operative processes, and she founded ‘the Make and Do Society’ in 2008. She has worked with SpiritStore (2009-2011) and participated as part of CAT Dig run by SpiritStore during EV+A 2010.

Recently her work and interactions have questioned the ethics of temporary public art practice. In 2010, she co-ordinated the large-scale project Urban Knit Limerick, addressing the failing urban environment, with over 5000 contributing participants work wide. In 2011 Eilish Tuite was invited to participate in The Joinery Selected Stories project artwork that engages with ‘the real’, ‘Generation for Export’.

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**Misadventure of a good citizen**

I believe that my art practices should question political and social norms and make artwork that looks at issues that effect art and the everyday.

With this project I wanted to question the general public’s knowledge of the Irish Constitution. I placed an open call to the general public for a series of (500 word) short experimental plays/monologues, based on issues relevent to the Irish Constitution. These plays will be performed publically in venues here in Limerick and nationally over the course of this year.
Eating Knowledge

Eating Knowledge is a project set up by Lisa Watters within the Learning Hub Limerick. The Learning Hub Limerick was founded as a charitable company limited by guarantee in October 2007 and initially known as Northside Learning Hub. Eating Knowledge’s core conviction revolves around the distorted communication that advertising has on children through the branding and advertising techniques to sell unhealthy foods that cause serious implications on children’s health. The purpose of this project is to raise awareness of unhealthy eating habits through the exposure of junk food branding and advertising and its effects on children’s health.

Eating Knowledge is a designer led project. The role as the designer includes observation, collecting data, documenting results and creating awareness. The project is to facilitate and organize informative workshops that educate the young group involved in an unconventional classroom dynamic through the method of cooking. The project is a ten-week program where young children get the opportunity to learn new cooking skills by cooking healthy foods where they also learn about branding. The group gets a chance to brand the foods they produce, learning first hand how food branding works. Subsequently, each child can then bring home their branded products and pass on their acquired knowledge to their family and friends. Lisa has used her skills in both graphic design and as a commis chef, in carefully designing a workshop that delivers the elements of creating awareness about healthy eating with a huge emphasis on food branding and how food companies manipulate children into buying ‘junk food’. The aim is to give power and knowledge through these workshops to children, by raising awareness about the distortions that food branding creates, giving the children the opportunity to understand how the food-branding world works.

For further information and documentation of the project Eating Knowledge go to eatingknowledge.wordpress.com or email eatingknowledge@gmail.com.
Chao Yang

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Chao Yang graduated from Dance Department Music College Hunan Normal University in China 2009. In 2011 she started the course Master of Art in Art and Design in Social Practice and the Creative Environment in LIT Ireland. For a socially engaged choreographer “I have applied this year what I have learned as a dancer to my study. And to use this opportunity to collaborate with other dancers to express Chinese dance and culture.”

Dance Culture Conversation

This is an ongoing project in which I used the movement of dance to build a dialogue which will hopefully link China and Ireland for people who have never been to China to inform them about Chinese culture. This is an attempt to undertake a cross-cultural artistic experiment.

My aim is to use dance to inform the Irish Community about Chinese art’s history. I will do this by teaching traditional Chinese dance and by giving a presentation about Chinese dance history knowledge. I want to develop a practice where I can explore traditional Chinese dance in more creative ways. I would like to examine and reflect on how the body receives and responds to this different movement/language. This project is a collaborative work. And I needed to work with Irish dancers who had the contemporary dance/ballet/ Irish dance training and are also interested in the conversation about Chinese dance. Simultaneously I will try to combine these two different dances together to create a new dance form. In the practice, I want to create a reflective space evolving or changing my relationship with traditional movements and the conversation that will happen around the dance movements.
Acknowledgements

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