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A Laboratory of Common Interest:

contesting the economisation of space in Limerick city through the practice of aesthetic work.

A thesis submitted to Technological University Dublin in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

FIONA WOODS

Fiosraigh PhD Scholarship Award

Graduate School of Creative Arts and Media

Technological University Dublin

August 2021

Supervised by

Dr Glenn Loughran

Prof. Noel Fitzpatrick

Abstract

This arts practice-based research [APBR] addresses a political and ethical problem, namely how a creative practice can operate contrary to the destructive, predatory forces of extractive capitalism. The research took the systemic, socio-spatial violence of *enclosure* and *economisation* as a starting point, anchored in the concrete conditions of Limerick city, to test the critical, political possibilities of collaborative, cultural work. From an examination of the ways in which lived space is subsumed under the abstractive logic of 'the Economy', two processes of abstraction and enclosure are isolated and examined: i) a hollowing out of publicness, captured by the lexigraph *~~public~~*, and ii) a process described as *the economisation of space,* a hegemonic framing of urban space in purely economic terms, which draws local inhabitants into a performative idea of what the city means, and who it is for. Working through a socially engaged process, a critical and cognitive mapping methodology was conjoined with the emergent phenomena of aesthetic events, to generate ways of knowing, producing and acting in common, contrary to processes of enclosure and economisation. Through an extended analysis of selected aesthetic actions – *Free*Space*; *Critical Cartographies*; *Contested Sites*; and *The Laboratory of Common Interest* (2015 – 2019) – the thesis argues i) that the social order of extractive capitalism is underpinned by an aesthetic order, which acts upon the embodied dispositions of populations; and ii) that the aesthetic order is susceptible to modification through a practice identified as *aesthetic work*, which is unpacked and explicated in detail. The thesis includes a fully diagrammatic chapter that deliberately interrupts the research narrative, complicating the question of how knowledge is understood, produced and validated, and by whom.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of PhD, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work. This thesis was prepared according to the regulations for graduate study by research of the Technological University Dublin and has not been submitted in whole or in part for another award in any other third level institution. The work reported on in this thesis conforms to the principles and requirements of the TU Dublin's guidelines for ethics in research. TU Dublin has permission to keep, lend or copy this thesis in whole or in part, on condition that any such use of the material of the thesis be duly acknowledged.

Signature

Date

August 2021

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To embody critique means to ask how to subvert one's life nowadays in such a way that the world can no longer remain the same (Marina Garcés, 2006).

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Table 1.1 Research paradigm for annual review, 2017.

List of Acronyms

aaa	atelier d'architecture autogérée
æ	aesthetic events
APBR	Arts practice-based research
BID	Business Improvement Districts
BWRA	Ballinacurra Weston Residents' Alliance
CC	Critical Cartographies
CCL	Creative Communities Limerick
CM	Critical Mapping
CM/æ	Critical Mapping/aesthetic events
CR	Critical Realism
CS	Contested Sites
DAC	Designated Activity Company
DE	Decolonising Education
FE	Feminist Economics
IDEA	Irish Development Education Association
L2030	Limerick 2030; An Economic and Spatial Plan
LCC	Limerick County Council
LCCC	Limerick City and County Council
LCI	The Laboratory of Common Interest
LRFIP	Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan
LSSP	The Limerick Soviet Shilling Project
LTTS	The Limerick Twenty Thirty Strategic Development DAC
NAMA	National Assets Management Agency
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PPP	Private Public Partnerships
SU	Silent University

Introduction

This arts practice-based research [APBR] was prompted by a political-ethical question: how can a creative practice operate contrary to the destructive, predatory forces of extractive capitalism? The resulting critical inquiry generated three overlapping areas of interest: i) a theoretical and practice-based exploration of the systemic, socio-spatial violence of enclosure and economisation, anchored in the concrete conditions of Limerick city; ii) the articulation of *aesthetic work* as a critical, collaborative practice with political effects, and iii) an engagement with the poetics and politics of 'commoning', or collective acts of producing and sustaining a common resource.

Aesthetics is a complex, material-discursive system. Encompassing receptive and productive modes of sense-making, and practices of meaning-making, aesthetics also includes epistemological and discursive activity, through which its modes of praxis and politics are teased out and deliberated. Aesthetics and politics are inseparable; they are approached here as modalities in a state of productive tension, 'concepts in a struggle that vary according to the social setting and historical conjuncture' (Rockhill, 2011: 47- 48). They are entwined in the power to 'make sense', a matter that is of critical importance here. The research argues that what we sense, and how we make sense of it, are not given; dominant modes of sense-making, shaped by social and political norms, may become disjointed from ways of perceiving, creating a possibility of unworking the personal, social and cultural habits that arise from normative ways of smelling, looking, tasting, feeling and moving. The space between what we sense, and how we make sense of it, is therefore both theoretical and phenomenological; it can be perceived in everyday moments, when previously unrecognised

systems of sense-making jar against one another, generating friction, dissonance and new perceptual structures.

Practices that focus critical attention on that political space between what we sense and how we make sense of it are identified here as aesthetic work. Those practices may take the form of art or other forms like seed-saving projects, free-school projects, radical architecture, permaculture, hacktivist collectives, forms of public protest and more; these practices are pragmatic, poetic and strategic in their engagement with the politics of sense and sense-making. Aesthetic work does not rely on 'the prestige that accrues to art as an activity set aside from the mainstream of social existence' (Charnley, 2011: 50), but recognises the value of art as a space and as 'a condition of activation', discussed in Chapter Five. The performative frame of art, its prosthetic excess (Garoian, 2010), becomes a resource that can be used within the broader, non-ontological idea of aesthetic work, across an 'ecosystem of transformative fields' (Bruguera, 2012).

Aesthetic work is not proposed as a manifesto; rather, it identifies a way of operating that does not revolve around specific centres of institutional gravity. It combines the organisational structures of work – conceptualising, envisaging, planning, scheduling, situating, producing, resourcing – with the sentient and sensible aspects of labouring, and with the fluidity of emergent phenomena indicated by the term 'event' (Fiadeiro, 2010; Hannah, 2019). Aesthetic work brings different sensory regimes and forms of meaning-making into proximity to collectively generate new ways of knowing, producing and acting in common. The work is prefigurative, 'an ongoing process of meaning making through action where the emergent meanings [shape] the action simultaneously' (Curnow, 2016: 35). It operates in the common field of experience, as outlined by Rancière (2004; 2008; 2010), grounded in the

material world, whilst appealing to the imaginary through the sensory. Aesthetic work, as understood in this research, forms part of a strategy to challenge the systemic violence of the current social order by acting on its underpinning aesthetic order.

In Chapter Five, aesthetic work is discussed in greater detail, while Chapters Six and Seven show how aesthetic work was shaped by, and for, the inquiry, operating as a collective and embodied form of sense-making, in relation to a particular set of social conditions, the enclosure and economisation of space in Limerick city. I approached the context of Limerick as an outsider, someone with few connections to the city, which meant that I was less familiar with the dominant narratives shaping its socio-spatial configurations. The research was not designed to engage with established public or political organisations, each of which would have its own logics, cultures and socio-spatial narratives. It was directed towards minor or delegitimised perspectives on the socio-spatial dynamics of the city, working with fragments of discourse and lived experiences left out of official representations.

Aesthetic actions generated their own momentum, often running ahead of, or sometimes perpendicular to, theoretical framings. Discoveries arising from those actions were not always apparent as they were emerging; they often needed to run their course without being pre-empted, causing periodic disjunctions between processes of sensing and sense-making in the research. Furthermore, the research operated simultaneously in phenomenological *and* theoretical registers; modes of disclosure therefore shift between the empirical, the interpretive, the critical and the poetic. Measures have been taken to weave the unruly phenomenon of practice into the logical structures of the thesis through the inclusion of an entirely

diagrammatic chapter, along with the availability of an online archive of the practice that can be read in any order.[1]

The preliminary research question was expanded with a view to anchoring the inquiry in a set of concrete problems: *how can aesthetic actions, in the form of embodied and collectivised processes of sense-making, work in the socio-spatial conditions of Limerick city to contest the economisation of space?* That expanded question also sets out key concepts that were problematised, as follows (in italics):

i. *aesthetic actions can work* in conditions of lived experience, invoking a politics of praxis through cultural work; praxis is employed here in terms described by Joe Curnow as 'an ongoing process of meaning making through action where the emergent meanings shaped the action simultaneously' (Curnow, 2016: 35);
ii. aesthetic actions can take the form of *embodied and collectivised processes of sense-making*, foregrounding the performative, dialogical and socially engaged dimensions of the aesthetic work of this research;
iii. *socio-spatial conditions* create a contextual frame for aesthetic actions, particularly in relation to the concrete conditions of Limerick city, the most socially polarised city in the Republic of Ireland (Haase and Pratschke, 2016; McCafferty, 2011), where a highly contested, formal regeneration process has been underway since 2008;
iv. *the economisation of space* is an identifiable process that shapes socio-spatial conditions; and
v. the work of aesthetic actions can be directed towards that problematic with a view to *contesting* it.

[1] www.fionawoods.net/free-space

This research question also establishes a structural logic for the research narrative; each problematic builds on the previous one, in a dialogical fashion.

The thesis begins by acknowledging the meta-frame of academic research, which is not the natural habitat of artistic research. A considerable amount of time and effort was expended on meeting the norms and protocols of APBR without compromising the internal logics and movements of the practice. Foundational matters of practice and methodology are therefore drawn out in the first chapter, laying the ground for a discussion of the design of aesthetic actions as research actions, and their functioning as embodied and collectivised processes of sense-making. Subsequently, in Chapters Three and Four, an extended analysis of theoretical and phenomenological engagements with socio-spatial dynamics in Limerick city supports an in-depth look at the logics and processes shaping those dynamics.

Around the mid-point of the research, theoretical inquiry and aesthetic actions were beginning to generate feedback loops that led me to a critical re-examination and rearticulation of my practice, discussed in Chapter Five. The effects of that critical re-evaluation are apparent in the major project, *The Laboratory of Common Interest* (2018–2019) [*LCI*], which is the subject of Chapters Six and Seven. At that stage of the research, problems encapsulated in the research question(s) were approached from a different angle, drawing on the logics and practices of the Commons, an emerging, anti-extractivist, social movement that is discussed at length in Chapter Six.

The ways in which the different components of the critical inquiry were organised and synthesised have been influenced by Saskia Sassen's assertion that research and interpretation must respond and be organised contrary to destructive, predatory forces that are gaining control of representative democracy and enclosing the common resources of the planet (UCI Media,

2015). One of the key elements of the research has been a critical investigation of the destructive, predatory force of *enclosure*. Enclosure is a social, political and spatial phenomenon.[2] Its logics and mechanisms can be detected using theoretical and conceptual analysis, and its operations can be identified in concrete, material realities, whether as the overt land-grabbing of colonial and neo-colonial movements or through an infusion of logics of privatisation into the social production of space.

In the early research a diagnostic approach helped to identify and clarify the less visible processes of enclosure at work in Limerick city, along with their logics and effects. Two processes were distinguished. The first is an ongoing erasure of public space, along with a diminishment of the public sphere and decline of the public realm (Newman and Clarke, 2009; Sheikh, 2007). A hollowing out of publicness is a phenomenon that is observed in many cities (Low and Smith, 2006: Harvey 2012; Hou, 2012; Minton, 2013, 2017; Shenker, 2017). To give that process a distinct form I constructed the lexigraph ~~*public*~~, indicating a form that is 'under erasure' (Spivak, 1974: xiv) without being completely erased.[3] The crossing-out identifies a word that has become 'inaccurate' but remains 'necessary' (ibid.).

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[2] The term enclosure gained political significance in 16th C England where it referred to a practice by the landowning classes of enclosing open land that had hitherto been available for practices of commoning (hunting, collecting wood and water, grazing animals). Despite organised resistance, enclosure drove peasants off the land and into poorly waged labour. Forces of enclosure also operated in colonial occupation, which as Achille Mbembe has argued, 'was a matter of seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical geographical area – of writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations' (Mbembe, 2003: 25). Enclosure continues to be implicated in the contemporary condition that Anibal Quijano describes as 'coloniality' (2000). In former colonies, and in the global south generally, lifeworlds are decimated by processes of extraction and enclosure such as mining, land-grabbing and toxic industrial waste-dumping. Mbembe uses the term *death-worlds* to describe 'new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of Life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*' (ibid.: 40). Enclosure is implicated in 'contemporary forms of subjugation of Life to the power of death' (Mbembe, 2003: 39-40), and is therefore part of a 'necropolitics' (ibid.).

[3] The origin of this practice of placing terms under erasure lies in the work of Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (1929-30). Heidegger was concerned with the problematic nature of the meaning and definition of terms; by crossing out a word and letting the word and the deletion remain, he 'simultaneously recognised and questioned the term's meaning and accepted use' (Taylor and Winquist, 2001: 113). The practice, described in French as *sous rature*, was first employed a series of lectures by the German

During that research into the condition of ~~public~~, I engaged with the discourse of gentrification (Smith, 2002; Lees, 2012: Slater, 2006), state-led gentrification in particular (Slater, 2006). Eric Clarke lists the 'root causes' of gentrification as 'commodification of space, polarised power relations and a dominance of vision over sight' (Clarke, 2010: 24). The last of those causes, the 'dominance of vision over sight', was evident in the highly resourced vision documents associated with Limerick Regeneration (2008 – present). Tracing the logics of state-led gentrification through extensive policy and vision documents produced by Limerick City and County Council and their agents, I came to the conclusion that the sheer volume of those expensive vision documents is part of a programme to embed the totalising logic of 'the Economy' in the social imaginary of the city.

I identified that process as *the economisation of space,* a hegemonic process of meaning-making that frames urban space through that totalising logic in such a way that local inhabitants can be drawn into a normative and performative idea of what the city means and who it is for. The economisation of space is typical of what Henri Lefebvre, in his work on the social production of space, identified as the abstraction of space (1991). This is discussed in greater detail in Chapters Two, Three and Four, where it becomes apparent how foundational Lefebvre's work was to several of the research actions.

Moving beyond the diagnostic, I developed actions that took a constructive, prefigurative approach to the problematic of enclosure. The difficulty of moving from problem to action is often framed as a question of agency, a much-debated property of human action. While several, often contradictory, theories of agency were considered, including dialectical

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philosopher Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics, 1929/30.* It was subsequently taken up and employed by Jacques Derrida as a technique of Deconstruction. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's translator's preface to his early work, *On Grammatology* (Spivak:1974) clarified this practice as follows: 'since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible' (Spivak, 1974: xiv).

Critical Realism [CR] (Bhaskar, 1998; Archer, 2000), agential realism (Barad, 1998) and structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), it proved difficult to arrive at an account of agency that could be operationalised through the practice. A more productive route into the problem of effective action lay in anarchist and radical pedagogy (Curnow, 2016; Freire, 1972) and prefiguration theory (Maeckelbergh, 2011), which led me to view prefigurative praxis as the appropriate means by which to enact and evaluate the possibility of effective, social action through aesthetic work.

Prefiguration is as an active strategy of re-forming social relations through action. We build the future that we want first and foremost through the type of relations that we construct to build that future (Maeckelbergh, 2011). Curnow, an anarchist organiser and educator, has woven concepts of prefiguration and praxis together, drawing on Freire's definition of praxis (after Marx) as 'reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it' (Freire, 1972: 36). By modelling the social relations that we desire, processes of action and reflection become embedded in the ongoing production of the social order to which our actions aspire (Curnow, 2016: 43).

1. Theoretical Framework

The dialogical relationship between theory and practice demanded a theoretical framework that was flexible enough to adapt to the context-responsive momentum of practice, and robust enough to sustain a clear perspective and consistent focus. The dialectical CR of Roy Bhaskar and his followers informed the ontological, epistemological and axiological framework of the research. CR is a meta-theory, a 'ground for politics and theoretical work' (Bhaskar, interviewed by Volckmann, 2013) that functions as an 'under-labourer' (Clegg, 2006: 317) for

the development of theories and practices oriented towards emancipation and transformation, in the interest of social justice. CR sets out to articulate 'a thick and robust account of causation, structures and processes which is able to do justice to the complexity and heterogeneity of the social world' (Archer *et al.,* 2016). It does this through the application of a depth ontology that avoids naïve realism by encompassing three domains of 'reality': what is experienced and observed (empirical, phenomenological); trans-phenomenological events and actions (described as Actual); and underlying structures, social relations and generative mechanisms that operate in the domain of 'the Real' (Bhaskar, 1978). The 'ontological realism' of CR (Archer *et al.,* 2016) enables the articulation of societies as 'complex, real objects' (Bhaskar, 1998: 208), irreducible to persons, or to the sum of persons plus their actions (ibid.: 207).

Our ability to 'know' these realities is, however, historically, socially, and culturally situated. Bhaskar argues that knowledge is relative, value-laden and fallible; it must be viewed through the lens of power relations. Arguably, in these conditions of ontological realism/ epistemic relativism, it might not possible to make any claims about 'the real' at all. CR counters this problem with the axiological position of 'judgemental rationality', which asserts that there are 'criteria for judging which accounts about the world are better or worse' (ibid.). As an emancipatory theory, CR proposes that employing such criteria is justified. This normative position points to a tension between 'facts' and 'values' that is inherent in critical research, including my own. I have employed the CR framework to support the construction of an inquiry with critical, empirical, ethical, interpretive and poetic dimensions. CR also directly affected the design of a series of aesthetic actions, *Contested Sites* [*CS*], which are discussed in Chapters Three and Four.

A central pillar of the theoretical framework is Lefebvre's work on the social production of space (1991). Lefebvre's analytical scheme lends itself to empirical, interpretive and critical work, valuable for the different registers in which APBR operates. His work has been advanced and extended in the material-discursive field of critical spatial practice (Rendell, 2006: 2016), where ideas from disciplines as diverse as critical geography, radical architecture, urban activism, ethnographies of infrastructure, gentrification studies, radical pedagogy, and more, expand the ways in which space is understood and practiced. The field of critical spatial practice encompasses an engagement with socio-spatial forms, including publicness and the Commons, both of which are foundational to the socio-spatial focus of this inquiry. The Commons also generates its own discourse and theories; those are discussed and related to the key themes and practices of the research in Chapter Six.

Another pillar of the theoretical framework draws on the discourse of aesthetics, a complex term that operates across a spectrum of meanings and modalities. In this research it is approached as a political discourse with philosophical roots, a critical relationship 'between sense and sense' (Rancière, 2010: 139). Art historical, philosophical and critical theories support the interrogation of aesthetics as a social form. Practice-based perspectives are drawn together with concepts from anarchist pedagogy, cultural theory and the history of socially engaged art, resulting in a particular account of aesthetics, articulated relative to the praxis of the research, which serves as a basis for the elaboration of the practice of aesthetic work in Chapter Five.

2. Sensing and making sense

The nuances of the original Greek term *aisthesis* (*αἴσθ*-ησις) imply a mode of sense-making arising from perception, inflected with elements of sensation, pain, knowledge and the means of observing (Liddell, Scott and Jones, 1925). Aesthetics refers first to a human capacity to sense and to make sense of the world through a perceptual architecture, arising from a fundamental human desire for coherence and meaning, and the ability to make and experience meaning in response to that desire. Aesthetics is also a social phenomenon with a complex history and genealogy. It is a modality that may be operationalised by disciplinary forces to regulate the perceptual systems that underpin a society, and a means by which to interrogate and to dissent from the systems that shape perception to fit existing structures of power.

In Chapters One and Five I argue that the aesthetic order of a society is susceptible to modification; in this research that idea was approached through the practice described here as aesthetic work, sometimes employing the practice and methodology of counter-cartography. Cartography names a representational system concerned with 'locating, identifying and bounding phenomena, and thereby situating events, processes and things within a coherent . . . frame' (Harvey, 2001: 220). Cartography employs the organisational structures of work discussed previously – envisaging, planning, scheduling, situating, producing, resourcing, labouring - to generate propositional constructs that include maps. Cartography is also an aesthetic undertaking, in that its constructs offer different ways of shaping and reshaping the imaginary of time/space/relations (Kitchin and Dodge, 2007). According to Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge, maps have an 'ontogenetic' and performative character (ibid.: 334), meaning that they bring something into being rather than representing what already exists.

Counter-cartography describes a critical engagement with the ontogenetic property of maps. The highly problematic form of the map (Jameson, 1992; Wood, 1993) arises partly from the way that its aesthetic properties – its appeal to the imaginary through the sensory – may conceal the organisational structures of the work involved in its production.[4] Counter-cartographic practices therefore often emphasise the social activity of mapping, foregrounding a mode of sense-making that arises from embodied and sensory encounters with a 'terrain' (Iconoclasistas, 2016; Critical Geography Collective of Ecuador, 2018). The social activity of mapping features in some of the aesthetic actions discussed in the thesis.

Cartography is a vital technology in the arsenal of colonialism and empire (Stone, 1988; Schmidt, 1997). The order imposed by the cartographic logics and technologies of power is challenged through radical, social cartographies that employ processes of critical mapping in colonised and post-colonial territories. Social processes of mapping can be used as a tool to reassert local concepts of space and place, and to recover resources and territories enclosed through cartographic processes (Iconoclasistas, 2016, 2020; Sletto, Wagner and Hale, 2020; Zaragocin, 2018, 2019; Bryan and Wood, 2015). While maps may be generated in processes of critical mapping, those maps don't work to fix a terrain but to disrupt logics of coloniality and extractivism (Iconoclasistas, 2016; 2019).

3. Overview of the practice

The practice at the centre of the research was enacted through a series of aesthetic actions, connected by the conjoined methodologies of Critical Mapping/ aesthetic events (CM/æ).

[4] The organisational structures of work, such as those indicated here, manifest differently depending on the socio-economic conditions within which they are enacted – capitalist, communist, cooperative, feminist, non-monetary, commonist, etc.

Critical Mapping (CM) incorporates cognitive mapping, social mapping, cartographic actions, diagrammatic analysis and choreographic modes of organising, while aesthetic events (æ) take the form of collective real-time compositions, with emergent and contingent properties. The typographic formulation conveys the formality and systematic approach of Critical Mapping (CM) alongside the non-systematised intensity of aesthetic events (æ). The early aesthetic actions drew primarily on the CM methodology, informed by the discourse of 'critical spatial practice' (Rendell, 2006), a term devised by Jane Rendell to describe material-discursive practices concerned with transforming 'the social conditions of the sites into which they intervene' (Rendell, 2016). In critical spatial practice, ideas such as 'territory, agency, agonistic negotiation, blurred boundaries, grassroots democracy, heterogeneity, cross-benching, participation, relational aesthetics, post-public environment, micro-urban tactics, etc.' (Slager, 2016) invoke and flesh out the triadic dynamic of spatial practices/ representations of space/ spaces of representation described in Lefebvre's theories of the social production of space (1991: 33) (see Fig. 2.1).

Forms of critical mapping and aesthetic events were enacted through an episodic, dialogical process identified as *Free*Space,* supported by conceptual, digital, relational and theoretical infrastructures. *Free*Space* was a statement both of concern and of intent. Initially it operated as an online platform and a public field journal, logging informal conversations, formal dialogues, public consultations, collective-making sessions and meetings. *Free*Space* was also a unifying identity for several aesthetic actions:

i) *Contested Sites #1– #4* (2015–2019): these actions were designed to seek out fissures and fault-lines in the dominant production of space in the city. They involved a walk in the city with another person who had identified a site where conflicting logics were

manifesting, followed by contextual research into the site. They are discussed in Chapters Three and Four.

ii) *Critical Cartographies #1–#3* (2016–2018): a series of collaborative, counter-cartographic actions conducted with publics in Limerick, drawing on methods of radical, social cartography. These are discussed in Chapter Two.

iii) The *Limerick Soviet Shilling Project*: an alternative system of exchange based on a historical worker's currency, which functioned as a temporary economy in the city from 15th–27th April 2019. This work was coproduced with Ciaran Nash, the Limerick Soviet 100 Committee, commissioned artists and local businesses. This is discussed in Chapter Six.

iv) *A political herstory of our bodies:* A collaboration with the Circle of Friends Moyross Women's Group. A series of embroidered portraits of the women at different stages of their lives were made into a banner that served as the backdrop for a public reading of their play, *A Political History of Our Bodies*. This is discussed briefly in Chapter Four.

v) *The Laboratory of Common Interest* (2018–19): A complex collaborative work, coproduced with individuals and groups across the city, through which matters of common interest and modes of 'commoning' were explored. It culminated in a 13-day public event-space, hosting 20 different actions. Discussed in Chapters Six and Seven.

vi) *The Pamphlet Library*: a series of pamphlets commissioned from artists and activists, co-edited with artist Kate O' Shea.

4. Enclosure and the Commons

One of the ways in which the CM methodology manifests in this research is through a conceptual mapping of social processes, such as the destructive, predatory force of *enclosure.* Two specific processes of enclosure are conceptually mapped: i) the erosion of public space, hypothesised as ~~public~~; and ii) the economisation of space. Both represent a subsumption of lived space under the logics of 'the Economy'. The condition hypothesised as ~~public~~ was examined in the locality of Limerick city, looking at the way that market-based 'solutions' to social and economic problems have been implemented by the Local Authority, with the effect of advancing the dynamics, logics and mechanisms of enclosure, with socio-spatial consequences (LCCC, 2013; LCCC, 2019). The research employed analytical and aesthetical processes to explore spaces and situations in the city where: (i) an encroachment of those logics of enclosure can be discerned; (ii) claims of publicness are undermined by forms of policing (in the broad sense); or (iii) where lived experience and the material reality of seemingly 'public' spaces are in direct conflict with official representations and practices.

As the research process unfolded, previously unforeseen dimensions of the problems under consideration were exposed, bringing about a shift in the focus of the inquiry. An examination of publicness, discussed in Chapters Three and Four, revealed contradictions internal to its form that reduced its value as a site from which to contest the economisation of space. As Silvia Federici argues, public is just a different kind of private domain 'owned, managed, controlled, and regulated by and for the state' (Federici, 2019: 96). In response to this finding, I reoriented the research practice towards the contemporary, social movement of the Commons, an ecosystem of value production based on principles of anti-enclosure. Lauren Berlant makes a link between public and commons, where struggles to reclaim elements of

public space act as 'a placeholder form for the commons to come' (Berlant, 2016: 408). The concept of the commons amounts to a reinvention of 'the very concept of the public . . . against, with, and from within the nation and capital' (ibid.).

The Commons is an action concept (ibid.), ranging from macro-level actions, directed towards generating legal, economic, organisational and financial frameworks,[5] to micro-practices of social and infrastructural commoning, as well as theoretical and poetical explorations of 'the common' (Hardt, 2006). 'Commons are not things but social relations' (Federici, 2018: 93); they do not come into being spontaneously, nor are they easy to maintain. They depend upon practices called 'commoning' (Linebaugh, 2009), collective actions that are both poetic and political in their ways of generating value and knowledge. Commoning operates as a form of prefigurative praxis that begins by 'making common cause' (Laermans, 2018: 138). It establishes a way of being and a type of relationality that underpins the material, political composition of a common world, demanding rigorous attention to the ongoing production and negotiation of meaning and value (ibid.).

The Commons generates a material reality and a social imaginary. The social practice of commoning brings different sensory regimes into proximity, as the dominant social relations of property rub up against ideas of the common good. In its forms of knowledge-making and world-making the Commons generates conditions for contrary systems of sense-making to emerge. By engaging the embodied sensorium of persons to unwork the social and mental habits of 'capitalist realism' (Fisher, 2009), to formulate a different 'aesthetics of the real' (Dockx and Gielen, 2018: 54), the politics and poetics of the Commons coincide. This research approached the Commons primarily from the perspective of its poetic and aesthetic

[5] See the Peer-to-Peer Foundation, https://p2pfoundation.net/

aspects, to understand how its emergent forms of sense-making appear, and how they configure, or reconfigure, notions of what it means to be critical.

Berlant argues that the Commons is also 'an idea about infrastructure' (Berlant, 2016: 396). Critical infrastructures create conditions for the emergence of alternative ways of organising and being together. In 2015 I developed a conceptual, digital, relational and theoretical infrastructure, *Free*Space,*[6] to support a co-operative process of artistic research and dialogue in Limerick city. *Free*Space* created conditions for social actors, activists and advocates to bring different views, practices and actions into a dialogical relationship, working towards the production of spaces of common interest in the city. One of those spaces was *The Laboratory of Common Interest* (2018–19), described earlier as a complex collaborative work, coproduced with individuals and groups across the city, which culminated in a 13-day, public event-space. Marina Vishmidt's account of infrastructures as 'interface(s) between the material and the possible' (Vishmidt, 2017: 268), captures the way that infrastructures were put in place in the work of *LCI* to explore conditions for the emergence of contrary forms of sense-making, discussed in detail in Chapter Six

5. Researcher positionality

Social change, Grant Kester has argued, emerges through 'imperfect, messy . . . [and] compromised modalities' (2017). As a researcher, and as a practicing artist, I commit to integrity, criticality, reflexivity and ethical forms of representation rather than the disputed

[6] *Free*Space* began as a conceptual infrastructure and an online public platform to capture and present unfolding research actions in real-time. It was also employed as a project identity to set the work apart from the idea of a singularly authored practice. It has continued to function as a site of disclosure throughout the life of the research, and an archive of research actions. https://www.fionawoods.net/blog

perspective of disembodied objectivity. My commitment to creating shared resources and collective forms of meaning-making comes into conflict with the individual, academic, knowledge-making endeavour of APBR, which confers personal credit on the researcher. I am not outside of the structures of ownership and property on which the contested problematic of enclosure depends. These contradictions and conflicts have created some tension around researcher voice.

From the outset this research was identified as APBR. While significant work has been done in the last two decades on distinguishing the APBR research paradigm from the models of thinking and ways of knowing associated with scientific and social science research paradigms,[7] it was necessary to align the proposed research with an existing system and set of standards for the research to be admitted to the academy. That resulted initially in the articulation of a relatively orthodox research paradigm, supported by the established methodology of PAR, which is discussed in detail in Chapter One. However, as Henk Borgdorff argues, the norms and protocols that attend academic research are not merely procedural, but also i) ontological, insofar as the nature of the research object is defined prior to its emergence; ii) epistemological, in the way that modes of knowledge-making are systematised to match established standards of academic knowledge;[8] and iii) methodological,

[7] The 'uneasy relationship between artistic research and the academy' (Borgdorff, 2012: 85) was the subject of extensive debate and discussion in the European Artistic Research Network (EARN) founded in 2004 'to explore . . . different conceptions and modalities of artistic research and to enable exchange and critical dialogue across . . . different paradigms' (EARN, 2020). EARN subsequently participated in the SHARE (Step-change for Higher Arts Research and Education) international 'network of networks' (SHARE, ND.), a 'European-wide exchange framework for the widely different experiences, practices and ideas that make up 'the lively domain of artistic and cultural research' (ibid.), which culminated in the publication of the *SHARE Handbook of Artistic Research* (Wilson and van Ruiten, 2012). The intention was not to homogenise approaches to, or terminologies for, artistic research in the academy, or to do away with the contradictions inherent to that relationship (Wilson and van Ruiten, 2012).
[8] The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) published by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) includes a table of Awards Standards for Art & Design. Level 10 Indicators set out an evaluation of knowledge based on properties such as systemic, new, demonstrable, procedural, critical, applicable (QQI, 2014). While

as practice is shaped to fit established research paradigms and frameworks (Borgdorff, 2012: 31).

The unruly vitality of artistic practice and its ways of knowing have emergent properties that demand real-time innovations. Across the life of the research therefore, I crafted a set of conceptual and methodological tools to respond to ongoing discoveries:

- *CM/œ*; a methodological innovation that brought the processes of ordering and categorising associated with mapping into productive tension with looser, open-ended processes encapsulated in the idea of aesthetic events.
- *~~Public~~*; refers to an ideological hollowing out of the socio-spatial form of publicness, symptomatic of a wider problematic of extractivism and enclosure.
- *The economisation of space*; one of the ways in which the condition of ~~public~~ is generated. It is a hegemonic process of meaning-making that frames urban space through the totalising logic of 'the Economy', in such a way that local inhabitants can be drawn into a performative idea of what the city means and who it is for.
- *Aesthetic work*; a term that developed in the course of the research to describe the pragmatic, poetic and strategic aspects of my practice, and to situate it in relation to a wider field of practice. Aesthetic work operates in a field of common experience that it accentuates, or sometimes generates, bringing different forms of meaning-making into proximity to collectively modify the aesthetic order that underpins a given, or emergent, social order, one modest action at a time.

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many of these properties are present in artistic research, they are not generally formalised or extracted from a more complex understanding of knowledge as also embodied, relational, intuitive and care-based.

Each one of those four conceptual 'innovations' is positioned at the centre of a following chapter (Chapters Two–Five, in that order) and interrogated accordingly.

6. Overview of the thesis

Chapter One establishes the technical and conceptual framing of the APBR inquiry and its approach to knowledge-making, laying out hypotheses and arguments implicit in the research question(s). Chapter Two unpacks the CM/æ methodology, its ways of conceptualising sensing and sense-making and putting them to work in practice. It does so relative to the research actions *Critical Cartographies* [*CC*] *#1–#3*, which also introduces the socio-spatial context for the research, Limerick city. The *Contested Sites* actions [*CS*] are the subject of Chapters Three and Four; they set out to study public spaces where the social imaginary of a site conflicts with its material realities. Chapter Three considers the complex knot of processes, dynamics and contradictory politics concentrated in 'publicness' and its eroded, abstracted shadow, described here as '~~public~~'. In Chapter Four, another process of abstraction, described as *the economisation of space,* is tracked through official representations of space in vision documents, plans, visualisations and other discursive materials that dominate social and spatial policy development in Limerick city. Mapping and critical mapping featured prominently in the *CS* actions, which supported the formalising of CM as a systematic methodology and played a significant role in the evolution of the practice, shifting from art to aesthetic work.

Chapter Five marks a point in the research at which findings and insights from the first two years acted back upon core aspects of the practice, demanding a critical interrogation of its conceptual framing and modes of operating. An engagement with historical and contemporary theories of socially engaged practice over two decades had already led me to

question the ontology of art and its value in my practice, although I had not found a satisfactory alternative. The chapter discusses a thought /action process that led from the designation of art to that of aesthetic work. Aesthetic work, as discussed previously, describes a way of operating and a critical perspective. As outlined earlier, it combines the organisational structures of work[9] with the fluidity of the aesthetic. It is also a form of praxis, in the terms identified by Curnow, 'an ongoing process of meaning making through action where the emergent meanings [shape] the action simultaneously' (Curnow, 2016: 35). As that rearticulation of my practice came together with a study of the world-making project of the Commons, strategies emerged that are discussed in detail in Chapter Six.

Theoretical analyses discussed in Chapters Three and Four conclude that the socio-political framework of publicness cannot be separated from the social relations of private property, thereby limiting its effectiveness as a site from which to contest the effects of enclosure. The focus of the research shifts towards a site of material and conceptual struggle identified as the Commons, a movement concerned with producing social and economic infrastructures based on an anti-extractivist and anti-enclosure paradigm. The Commons, as Chapter Six shows, takes the form of a knowledge-making and world-making project. It is an ecosystem of value production, which, I argue, benefits significantly from acknowledging *the poetic* as one of its modes of (value) production. Processes of critical mapping and aesthetic events came together to form operational strategies – the infrastructural, the choreographic, the diagrammatic and the evental – which became tools for the real-time composition of *LCI.*

[9] The organisational structures of work indicated here manifest differently depending on the socio-economic conditions within which they are enacted – capitalist, communist, cooperative, feminist, non-monetary, commonist, etc.

Chapter Seven presents an iteration of the CM/æ methodology, addressing the work of *LCI* exclusively through diagrammatic language to emphasise a tension between sensing and sense-making, and to draw elements of uncertainty and ambiguity, not easily captured in language, into the thesis. Chapter Seven approaches *LCI* as an aesthetic work with knowledge-making and world-making dimensions, reflected in the use of diagram as 'knowledge producing form' rather than a 'formal representation of knowledge' (Drucker, 2013: 84).

The concluding section revisits the political-ethical question that ignited the research, *how can a creative practice operate contrary to the destructive, predatory forces of extractive capitalism?* Reflecting on themes that emerged from that question, the different registers within which the research operated are reasserted as a starting point for an analysis of contributions to practice, methodology and knowledge made by this research. It touches on the problematic of epistemological power, which, connects to the struggle for the knowledge commons. Despite the importance of this matter, and its constant presence in the background of the research, the problematic of epistemological power was beyond the scope of the inquiry. The thesis concludes with a consideration of the unfinished thinking of the research, the gaps, contradictions and inconsistencies that future researchers might consider as openings for further consideration.

7. Conclusions

From the interactions of theory and practice over a five-year period, overlapping areas of interest emerged, which have been set out in this introduction. The research question was constructed to clarify a set of concrete problems and to map key concepts through which the inquiry took shape: *how can aesthetic actions, in the form of embodied and collectivised*

processes of sense-making, work in the socio-spatial conditions of Limerick city to contest the economisation of space?

The research presented an opportunity to critically re-examine the pragmatic, poetic and strategic dimensions of my practice, and its ways of directing attention to the critical, political site that is opened when that which we sense splits from dominant modes of sense-making. As a result of that re-examination, I identified aesthetic work as the operational kernel of my practice, combining the organisational structures of work – envisaging, planning, scheduling, situating, producing, resourcing, labouring – with more fluid methods and techniques, without necessarily invoking the codified space of art.

Aesthetic work creates structures to support spaces of meaning-making, open to the resonances, strange intensities of meaning, coherence and/or beauty that can emerge through poetic and aesthetic action. In the context of this academic research, that approach is identified as a methodology, CM/æ. In the context of non-academic (and post-academic) practice in the field, it may be more appropriate to use a term like real-time composition. First elaborated in 1998 by the choreographer João Fiadeiro, real-time composition describes a way of working collectively, combining the ordering principles of composition with a more event-based approach:

> '. . . to have a cartography, to construct an idea of space and presence, between you and the situation . . . this method [creates] a common language that allows us to relate to the situation not in the same way . . . but to relate using the same tools . . .' (Fiadeiro, 2010).

The thesis will show that collaborative aesthetic actions, operating as real-time compositions within an ecosystem of political action, have a valuable contestatory function, particularly as

elements within the type of cross-disciplinary activism captured by Brian Holmes' account of 'eventwork' (2012). This is one of the key findings put forward by the research.

Balancing the concrete, empirical and sometimes incoherent detail of practice with the abstraction of interpretive work is a notable challenge. In the course of the research, ephemeral, real-time compositions and aesthetic actions were in a constant feedback loop with the conditions of their production. They can neither be present in, nor adequately represented by, this text, nor by any other mode of documentation. The task of disclosing the work of the research is therefore marked from the outset by a slippage between different forms of meaning-making, as moments and actions selected from five years of practice are translated from one medium into another. Translation is a fraught endeavour; when meaning crosses the boundaries of different signifying systems, what is coherent in one system may be rendered incoherent in another, resulting in a subtraction or supplement to the original. The thesis retains the uncertainty and ambiguity at the heart of artistic research through the use of the diagrammatic as a bridge between different systems and models of knowing and articulating, consistent with Tejaswini Niranjana's argument that translation brings a new 'original' into being (Niranjana, 1992: 3)..

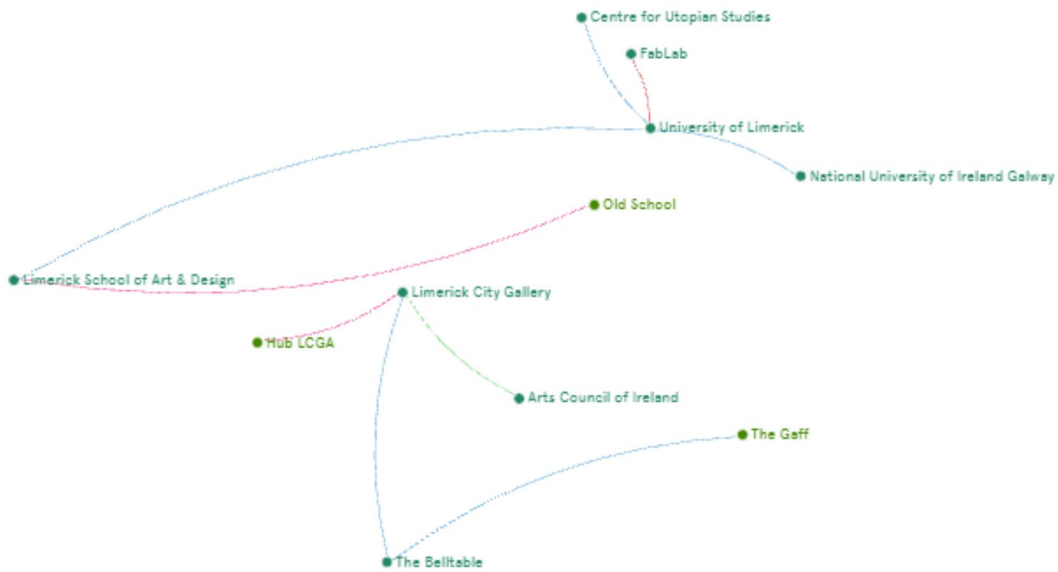
Artistic research is a specific form of knowledge-making; when it enters the landscape of APBR it must navigate the power structures of academic validation without necessarily accepting their norms concerning what counts as valid and valuable knowledge. In the Conclusion, a discussion of contributions made to practice, methodology and knowledge takes place in the context of this understanding of knowledge-making as a contested practice in the matrix of epistemological power.

Chapter One: Situating the Inquiry – practice, theory, context.

The practice at the heart of this research was designed to respond to emergent contexts and changing conditions. The complexity of the practice demanded robust conceptual, technical and material infrastructures to sustain, enable, support and connect the disparate elements. In time, those infrastructures took on a greater significance as framing devices in themselves relative to the sense-making forms of the work. Relational infrastructures, formed through a network of personal, professional and institutional relationships, and through a series of public events, were charted from the outset of the research (Fig. 2.5); economic infrastructures, made up of monetary resources, voluntary labour and modes of exchange, were discussed and foregrounded through a temporary local currency project (Fig. 6.14); while socio-spatial infrastructures were mapped through the production of public events across the city (Fig. 1.1). The role of infrastructure as an 'interface between the material and the possible' (Vishmidt, 2017: 268) was most evident in *The Laboratory of Common Interest,* which generated infrastructures to receive and gather the political and poetic resonances of its collective, aesthetic work.

As APBR, the research also depended upon technical and conceptual infrastructures to support the research design. While those were distinct from the practice, they were not separate from it. A considerable amount of time was expended teasing out the relationship between the two, in the context of questions about the knowledge-making properties of artistic research, vis-à-vis the academic domain. This chapter therefore begins with a reflection on the research framework and its conceptual infrastructures, before laying out a detailed outline of subsequent chapters.

Free*Space Infrastructural Elements. 73%



Graph Commons

Figure 1.1, Usable space and institutions; *Free*Space Infrastructural Elements,* screenshot (Woods, 2021).

1.1 Motivations and political context

The systemic violence of extractivism and enclosure, a key problematic for the research, is not uniformly distributed; it can range from brutality, murder and expulsion (Sassen, 2014b) to the commodification of affective life (Steyerl, 2007; 2010), from the capture of publicness by private interests to the low-level violence of prevailing norms, including those of the Western university (Harney and Moten, 2013). Economisation is a well-recognised process in that system, as social interests are subjected to the logics of 'the Economy' (Stigler, 1961; Harvey, 2005; Peck, 2010; Brown, 2019). The logics of economisation are embedded in regulatory mechanisms that shape key aspects of governance, demanding of bureaucrats and government operatives that they translate aspects of social life that may once have been expressed in terms of well-being, fairness or care, into the language of the market, with deeply distorting effects (Brown, 2019; De Angelis, 2012).

Arising from this research, a particular expression of that logic was identified, in the form of the economisation of space. A diagnostic, analytical method shows how that operates as a hegemonic process of meaning-making, in which urban space is framed through the totalising logic of 'the Economy' in such a way that local inhabitants may be drawn into a performative idea of what the city means and who it is for. Arriving at that finding began with a critical analysis of the socio-spatial form of publicness, or more particularly its erosion, in the context of encroaching logics of privatisation in Limerick city. The seminal work of Lefebvre (1991) plays a crucial role in grasping the forces at work on the social spaces of the city. Lefebvre generated conceptual tools for analysing the social production of space, connecting social structures and practices with forms of meaning-making across the registers of 'the perceived, the conceived and the lived' (ibid.: 39). Over an extended period of analysis, working with Lefebvre's ideas, certain logics were discerned in the policies and practices

shaping the social production of space in Limerick. The first of these is the condition described as ~~public~~, the second, as the economisation of space.

In addition to taking a diagnostic approach to the problematic of enclosure and extractivism, the research looked for ways to explore constructive alternatives. A generative, prefigurative approach was identified in the emerging social movement of the Commons, a material-discursive system and site of struggle that is actively building alternatives to the extractivist paradigm (Bauwens, 2017; Bauwens and Kranjc, 2020). A key question that emerged was how my practice could contribute to that struggle and emerging paradigm, as a way to contest the economisation of space. An entry point into the problem lay in the position that a social order is underpinned by an aesthetic order which may be operationalised by disciplinary forces and/or reconfigured through embodied forms of sense-making (Rancière, 2004; 2010; Eagleton, 1992; Hewitt, 2005; Klein; 2013; Choi *et al.,* 2015). As discussed in the introduction, Rancière articulates this potential as a space between what we sense and how we make sense of it (2010). Entering into that space opens onto the possibility of 'dissensus . . . a conflict between a sensory presentation and a way of making sense of it, or between several sensory regimes and/or 'bodies'' (Rancière, 2010: 139).

The sensory regime of privatisation and enclosure insinuates itself into the rhythms of our lives and bodies (Hewitt, 2005; Klein, 2013; McCormack, 2013; Lefebvre, 1992). According to Terry Eagleton, aesthetics is a way for power to situate ideology in human bodies; 'structures of power must become structures of feeling' (Eagleton, 1992: 21). Working structures of power into the grain of public feeling is achieved in different ways. Currently, one of the most obvious is the phenomenon described as the 'attention economy . . . a political economic rationale for reconstituting capitalism in the locus of the body' (Crogan and Kinsley, 2012: 3). The filmmaker and theorist, Hito Steyerl, often confronts these matters directly in her

practice and written work. A 2007 essay, *The Empire of Senses; police as art and the crisis of representation* (Steyerl, 2007), introduces the term 'power/affect' (after Foucault's conjunction power/knowledge (ibid.)) to capture the way that 'power operates . . . within the senses' (ibid.). The current era, she argues, is dominated by fear and sensation (ibid.):

> . . . built on shock and attraction, on desire and disgust, on hatred and hysteria, on feeling and fear. The power to trigger, channel, mediate and market those emotions is a characteristic of contemporary power as such (ibid.).

In this condition of *The Empire of the Senses,* politics is not only aestheticised but is 'exercised as aesthetics' through advertising, entertainment and newsfeeds. Violence, sex and a state of emergency, she argues, are fused to produce an atmosphere of heightened alert, conflating glamour, titillation and fear in what she describes as a kind of 'pornography' that acts on the nervous system of populations. This 'dictatorship of affect and noise' instils fear as the determining characteristic of the contemporary public (ibid.). The 'power/affect' matrix (Steyerl, 2007) is another way of speaking about the dominant aesthetic order; the capacity of aesthetics, as a social modality, to intervene in that order is presented throughout this thesis as basis for its praxis. This will be discussed greater detail relative to Rancière's concept of 'the distribution of the sensible' (2004), in Chapter Five.

The research question grounds these ideas in real conditions. *How can aesthetic actions, in the form of embodied and collectivised processes of sense-making, work in the socio-spatial conditions of Limerick city to contest the economisation of space?* identifies a material context, Limerick city, and pinpoints an identifiable manifestation of enclosure, the economisation of space. It proposes a way of conducting concrete actions, working with critical, embodied and collectivised processes of sense-making, and sets out a clear purpose, using aesthetic actions to contest the economisation of space. The earliest aesthetic actions, *Free*Space* (2015–2020),

were propositional and dialogical. They focused on the socio-spatial condition described as ~~public~~, testing ways of generating critical, embodied and collectivised processes of sense-making to contest that condition. To that end, processes of social and cognitive mapping were employed in the *CC* and *CS* actions (2017–2020).

As the practice gained momentum, so the praxis of aesthetic work took shape as an idea and an approach. While the terms 'work' and 'labour' are often used interchangeably, I have drawn on the work of economist Margaret Reid for clarification. In 1934, she devised ways of quantifying the economic value of women's domestic labour; she proposed that any activities that could be delegated to a third person could be described as 'work' rather than labour (Moos, 2015: 90). I have interpreted this to mean that work can be understood as a system with organisational structures and with productive and receptive aspects, which draws on, but is not identical to 'the sentient and sensible' labour of an embodied worker (Witz, Warhurst and Nickson, 2003: 38). While the receptive aspects of work – perceptual, intuitive, affective – are often devalued in comparison to 'productive' work (Federici, 2015; Moos, 2021), that is not the case in aesthetic work, as I am using the term.

That is not to say that aesthetic work is necessarily a critical undertaking. In 'The Labour of Aesthetics and the Aesthetics of Organization', Witz *et al.* use the term *aesthetic labour* to refer to a corporate mobilisation and modulation of employees 'embodied dispositions' (Bourdieu, 1994, in Witz *et al.*, 2011: 40). They are 'corporately molded to portray . . . [an] organisational aesthetic' (2011: 35), not only through how they look but in 'the look they have about them' (ibid.: 49). The 'stylization of workplace performances' (2011: 34) demands a modification of their emotional labour and an increased investment in their performative role as (relatively low-status) workers (ibid.: 48–49).[64] The receptive

component of the worker's embodied labour generates new sites of value-extraction, where the surplus value accrues to the corporation, alienated from the worker (ibid.).

These different meanings have been taken into consideration in the articulation of the critical practice identified as aesthetic work. Aesthetic work is systematic, to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the kind of social action through which it is enacted. Insofar as possible, the work is collective and collaborative. The receptive aspects of work are equally valued with productive work, and sometimes prioritised. However, the mobilisation of the embodied dispositions of those who work is recognised as a potential site of extraction, specifically for the cultural worker who is dependent to some extent on the reputational economy. Those contradictions are acknowledged, without being resolved.

When the practice began to take a more generative, prefigurative approach, the aesthetic actions looked towards *commoning*, micro-practices through which common resources are produced and sustained. The Commons was approached from the perspective of its modes of sensing and sense-making. The practice of commoning was considered in relation to its way of bringing meaning into being, which is a way of speaking about its poetics. Poetics is employed here to describe a way of generating value and knowledge at an affective level, by putting different sensory regimes into dialogue. To foreground and trace the poetics of commoning, the durational work, *LCI* (2018–19), devised strategies and infrastructures (material, relational and economic), which are considered in detail in Chapters Six and Seven.

1.2 A research question and its implications.

As discussed, the expanded research question sets out the primary motivations of the research and identifies a clear set of objectives, which were addressed through durational actions such

as *CS #3* and *#4,* and *LCI.* It rests on a number of assumptions concerning i) the nature of aesthetic actions; ii) the possibility and purpose of embodied and collectivised forms of meaning-making; and iii) a condition identified by the term 'socio-spatial' (Soja, 1980). This section teases out those ideas to lend a degree of nuance to the question and the practice that it implies.

The meaning ascribed to aesthetic actions was informed by an unlikely source, a study carried out by Professor Barbara Carper of Texas Women's University in 1978. Carper engaged in an extensive and thorough analysis of the 'conceptual and syntactical structure of nursing knowledge' (Carper, 1978: 23) to identify the different sources from which knowledge and beliefs in nursing practice were derived.[10] The stakes were very high; Carper was working against the establishment view that nursing knowledge did not count as 'Knowledge'. She was also working in the context of a scientific community that had little tolerance for diverse ways of knowing; '[it appears that] the only valid and reliable knowledge is that which is empirical, factual, objectively descriptive and generalisable' (ibid.: 25). The 'general conception' of nursing as a field of inquiry was shaping the kind of knowledge that it could produce and determining how that knowledge could be recognised, organised and communicated (ibid.: 23). As someone who was responsible for the development of nursing education, Carper undertook to formalise 'the body of knowledge that serves as the rationale for nursing practice'. For this she needed to understand:

> . . . the patterns, forms and structures [of knowledge] that serve as horizons of expectations and exemplify characteristic ways of thinking about phenomena . . . essential for the teaching and learning of nursing (ibid.: 23).

[10] This is consistent with feminist analyses of the general degradation of care work in patriarchal, capitalist systems (Federici, 2012).

In stepping outside the norms of scientific knowledge to theorise 'what it means to know and what kinds of knowledge are held to be of the most value' in nursing practice (ibid.: 23), Carper could not afford to make casual assumptions or theoretical errors. As a result of her study, she proposed a typology of nursing knowledge consisting of four 'patterns of knowing . . . empirical, personal, moral and esthetic [sic]' (ibid.: 23). Those patterns were not separable in practice but could be isolated for the purpose of study. The first three patterns are not relevant for this research; the pattern of interest here is that which Carper termed *esthetic*. The application of the concept of aesthetic meaning to nursing practice made possible 'a wider consideration of conditions, situations and experiences in nursing . . . including the creative process of discovery in the empirical pattern of knowing' (ibid.: 26). Drawing on the work of John Dewey, the aesthetic pattern of knowing in nursing, as described by Carper, involves 'the perception of abstracted particulars as distinguished from the recognition of abstracted universals' (ibid.: 27).

The capacity to abstract from particulars which 'resist projection into the discursive form of language' (Langer, 1957: 23 quoted in Carper, 1978: 16) is not about the individual elements in themselves but their relationship in space and time. To know in the aesthetic sense, according to Carper, involves actively gathering 'details and scattered particulars into an experienced whole for the purpose of seeing what is there' (Carper, 1978: 26). A nursing action could be considered aesthetic where it involved 'the active transformation of an immediate object – [in this case] the patient's behaviour – into a direct, non-mediated perception of what is significant in it' (ibid.: 26). Nursing care involves complex modes of knowing and decision-making. Every act of nursing care is directed towards a particular individual; it cannot be habitual or mechanical and relies in part on ways of knowing that 'are not the result of empirical investigation' (ibid.: 24). Carper's work identified aesthetics as a pattern of knowing (the

conscious, ‘direct, non-mediated perception of what is significant’ (ibid.: 26)), and a form of knowledge production (the ‘active gathering together of details and scattered particulars into an experienced whole for the purpose of seeing what is there’ (ibid.: 26)). Carper’s ideas contributed to my understanding of aesthetics as an embodied form of sense-making and meaning-making beyond the domain of art. This understanding of aesthetics was especially important in the articulation of aesthetic work, discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

Carrying out aesthetic actions through embodied and collectivised forms of sense-making was both a methodology and a point of critical consideration. It became more purposeful and coherent as the research inquiry engaged with the social movement of the Commons. The common is a nebulous concept having to do with what is shared, broadly speaking, a way of being and organising as a ‘we’ rather than an I. A ‘we’ may be inclusive and exclusive at the same time; the field of common experience is always in production; the common exists only in being enacted. In the work of Rancière the common *(le comun)* is a key term, ‘a technical term’, as Hardt describes it, ‘foundational for his conception of both the political and the aesthetic’ (Hardt, 2006: 1). Rancière’s notion of politics lies in a ‘relation between ‘the part’ and ‘the common,’ which is mediated by the operation of *partage*, simultaneously dividing and sharing’ (Hardt, 2006: 1). What is less clear in Rancière is how the common comes into being; for Hardt the common is not given, but is ‘dynamic and artificial, produced through a wide variety of social circuits and encounters’ (ibid.: 2).

The social circuits of the work and its modes of encounter emerged through an engagement with the socio-spatial conditions of Limerick city. Socio-spatial is a term coined by the political geographer Edward Soja (1980) to expand Lefebvre’s seminal theory concerning the social production of space (1991). Lefebvre outlined a three-dimensional dialectic existing within ‘the triad of the perceived, the conceived and the lived’ (Lefebvre,

1991: 39), (Fig. 2.1) that determines the social production of space. Soja described Lefebvre's approach as 'a mode of dialectical reasoning that is more inherently spatial than the conventionally temporally-defined dialectics of Marx or Hegel' (Soja, 1996: 10). The third dimension situated the dialectical movement more firmly in the material-discursive conditions of social reality, adding an element of metamorphosis to the process of synthesis, according to Christian Schmid (2008).

Schmid argues that Lefebvre drew from Nietschze to join 'the creative poetic act' with the rationality of Marxist-Hegelian analysis, resulting in the emergence of three dialectically interconnected moments. The first is 'material social practice', which contrasts with the second moment, 'knowledge, language, and the written word', viewed by Lefebvre as the nexus of abstraction and power (ibid.: 33). The third moment, according to Schmid, 'involves poesy and desire as forms of transcendence that help becoming prevail over death' (ibid.: 33). The trialectical movement is not finalised in the 'transcendence' of posey (ibid.). There is not the closure of synthesis, but a return to social, material practice and activity. Without resolution, disjunctions and gaps can appear along with slippages of meaning and understanding that make room for the unknown and the strange, significant components also of aesthetic work.

Several of the aesthetic actions that are discussed here employed spatial practices, including critical cartographic actions in public spaces, walk-and-talk actions at contested sites in the city, dialogues/screenings across a range of venues, and other actions that are discussed in later chapters. Through various forms of socio-spatial analysis, including a close study of representations of space in formal plans, policies and urban vision documents, a certain logic came to light which I found operating in discursive, material and phenomenological registers, and which I identified as the economisation of space. In Chapter Four, which deals directly with that logic, I argue that the economisation of space can be understood as a process of

meaning-making that frames urban space through the totalising logic of 'the Economy', in such a way that local inhabitants are drawn into a performative idea of what the city means and who it is for. In 2019 I received a commission from the EVA Biennale in Limerick to coproduce a work extending this research, but that commission had to be discontinued for political reasons.

Artistic research is its own form of knowledge-making, and the practice that it generates has its own logics and ways of operating. Designing an APBR research framework that could operate through the practice, without over-determining it, was challenging. The underpinning research paradigm and the general research methodologies went through a series of evolutionary stages to arrive at form appropriate for the different demands that needed to be met. The research question discussed here maps out the different demands of the research and the approach that was taken to address them. The following section discusses the evolution of more technical, academic aspects of the research, including the struggle to generate conceptual and theoretical infrastructures appropriate to support and respond to the unfolding practice. This struggle was heightened by the politics of knowledge exposed in recent times by decolonial discourse (Mignolo, 2009, 2010; De Sousa Santos, 2018; Zaragocin, 2019; Walsh, 2015), (see section 1.4). It was beyond the scope of the research to take on the politics of knowledge fully, but it is touched upon at different points in discussed in the Conclusions.

1.3 Research Design

The forms of inquiry and knowledge-making associated with APBR demand a robust but flexible research framework. The early research design took a semi-ethnographic approach which seemed appropriate for the socially engaged focus of the aesthetic work. Drawing on a combination of established research paradigms, the Transformative (Mertens, 2007) and the Postcolonial/ Indigenous (Chilisa, 2011), I devised a research framework that laid out a set of

qualitative research principles and methods, working with Participatory Action Research [PAR] as a fitting methodology. Informed by critical ethnography (Thomas, 1993; Banfield, 2004; Marcus, 2018), early aesthetic actions set out to encounter and to describe lived experiences of space and to untangle the dynamics producing those spaces, drawing on Lefebvre's triadic analytical model (1991). Working with the logics of CR, the social and material facts of encounters with concrete, socio-spatial phenomena were understood as surface appearances of a deeper social reality (Bhaskar, 1998). They were products of a complex web of values disseminated through the social imaginary.

The difficulties of navigating 'the thorny terrain between facts and values' are laid out in Grant Banfield's essay, 'What's Really Wrong with Ethnography?' (2004). Banfield unpacks a tension between realism and relativism that runs through the heart of ethnography, resulting in different schools of thought regarding social reality. His account of critical ethnography draws from a Marxist understanding of reality as stratified, specifically via the dialectical CR of Bhaskar (1998). CR lays out a depth ontology (Bhaskar, 1978, quoted in Banfield, 2004) consisting of three nested strata of reality: the Empirical; the Actual; and the Real (ibid.). This hierarchical arrangement encompasses what is experienced and observed (empirical, phenomenological); events and actions (actual, trans-phenomenological); as well as underlying structures, social relations and generative mechanisms (real, counter-phenomenological) (ibid.). CR's complex account of phenomena situates *that which appears* in relation to questions of history and power. Concrete, material objects exist independent of human ideas about them, but they are also expressions of forces beyond the observable (trans-phenomenological) and may even 'be a distorted expression of underlying structures' (Banfield, 2004: 60).

Banfield's account of critical ethnography, read through the lens of Bhaskar's CR (ibid.), helped to shed light on the ontological and epistemological stakes of this research, which in turn supported the construction of the research paradigm presented in Table 1.1. Embedded in the problematic of enclosure are structures and mechanisms of inequality which can be obscured, according to CR, by a 'naïve realism' (Banfield, 2004: 55) that conflates what appears with what is. Lefebvre's ideas concerning representations of space, and spaces of representation (1991: 33) draw attention to the social imaginary of space as a site of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic activity. The early aim of the research was to work through processes of collective meaning-making to introduce counter-hegemonic understandings of spatiality into the social imaginary of the city. Following from that aim and its associated objectives, a series of critical aesthetic actions were designed drawing on Lefebvre's triadic model and on Bhaskar's depth ontology, *CS* (2015–2020), discussed in detail in Chapters Three and Four.

The ethical framework within which the aesthetic actions were shaped was informed by the PAR research methodology, discussed in the following section. At the time that Table 1.1 was formulated in mid-2017, the unpredictability and specificity of practice was already generating fault-lines in the research paradigm, as evidenced by three questions inserted awkwardly into that research framework: *the ontology of aesthetic research? the nature of artistic knowledge?* and a problem loosely articulated as *embodied critique?* The ways in which the design of the research evolved to meet those changing priorities, resulting in the formative question discussed before, is the subject of subsequent sections.

1.3.1 Participatory Action Research [PAR]

PAR is an approach to research developed in social justice and development movements and projects across the world, and adopted in academia. As Reason and Bradbury describe it, PAR

Purpose of the research	To analyse a conflation of appearance and reality that obscures underlying structures and mechanisms of inequality, and to make that perceptible. Those who control the means of production of social imaginaries of the city produce the city in line with vested interests.
Philosophical underpinnings	Informed by critical theory, postcolonial discourses, feminist theories, neo-Marxist theories, theories of aesthetics and politics, Critical Realism.
Ontological assumptions	Reality implies a set of relationships. Social reality can be understood in relation to the connections that human beings have with other living beings, with the concrete world and with a social imaginary. Communality, collectivity, social justice, human unity and pluralism are implicit in this principle. *[Ontology of aesthetic research?]*
Place of values in the research	All research must be guided by a relational accountability that promotes respectful representation, reciprocity and rights of the researched.
Epistemology	Knowledge is neither the production nor the property of a single individual, it is a relational matter. Knowledge lies in collective meaning-making. *[Nature of artistic knowledge?]*
Methodology	Participatory Action Research Exploratory, Interpretive, Critical *[Embodied critique?]*
Techniques of gathering data	Observation Dialogue Semi-formal interviews Discourse analysis Arts research techniques Interventionist techniques

Table 1.1 Research paradigm for annual review, 2017.

is systematic in its approach to the development of knowledge, but it operates in a paradigm outside of 'conventional academic research' (Reason and Bradbury, 2008: 4). PAR is based in a fundamentally different understanding of the purpose and conception of research and knowledge (ibid.), which changes the way that research inquiries are understood. It takes an ethical and political approach to knowledge-making and social change, working democratically alongside others who constitute a community of inquiry that is directed to addressing collectively identified issues and questions. PAR is context-specific and can be constructed around quite diverse theoretical commitments and methodological approaches. It has a transformative/ emancipatory purpose, 'to liberate the human body, mind and spirit in the search for a better, freer world' (ibid.: 5).

Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) is recognised as one of the influences on the development of PAR. In Freire's work, literacy was the stated goal of the pedagogical process, but the structure and agency dynamics of its educational practices were equally important in making it possible for learners to acquire tools of self-emancipation. PAR is committed to bringing about change; Alice McIntyre describes it as a 'living, dialectical process' because it changes the researcher, the 'participants' and the situation (McIntyre, 2008:1). While there is considerable theoretical and methodological variation in the use and application of PAR across social, community and academic research, there are shared principles. Firstly, the goals of the research are arrived at collaboratively. The relationships that underpin collaborative research must be founded on trust, and therefore researchers must address questions of privilege and power. To ensure transparency in the research process, the goals and the limitations need to be acknowledged, and decisions should be made collaboratively. The question of representation is also significant; everyone who participates

in the project should have the right to decide how they are identified during or after the project (Reason and Bradbury, 2008).

PAR was beneficial in terms of communicating the values and the ethics of the research to publics and communities, and it was an important tool for communicating the ethics of the work to the academic institution. It suggested a way to align the pragmatic, political and relational nature of the socially engaged aesthetic work at the centre of this inquiry to the protocols and ethical norms of academic research. The principles listed above were adopted, broadly speaking. The socially engaged commitments of the practice were oriented towards principles of co-production and horizontal relations, and the goals of individual aesthetic actions were arrived at dialogically and collaboratively.

However, because those actions were framed within an academic research process, from which I was extracting 'credit' as the primary researcher, not all decision-making was collaborative and the privilege accruing from the work was not evenly distributed. I tried to make that situation as explicit as possible in publicity materials and consent forms, and I generated a degree of transparency through the public platform, *Free*Space* that presented the research 'live' from the outset. I attempted to address questions of privilege and power throughout the life of the research, and in 2018 assembled a community of solidarity (Curnow, 2016) composed of people who expressed a desire to coproduce aesthetic actions. That community of solidarity was instrumental in developing the work *LCI*. While PAR was relevant as a general methodology in the early stages of the research, it could not account for some of the distinct operational and methodological logics and complex contextual considerations associated with APBR. Engaging with the performative dimension of aesthetic work, and of the research more broadly, opened up ways of adding nuance to the research paradigm.

1.3.2 The performative paradigm

As the research progressed, a degree of insight developed through Charles Garoian's account of art's 'prosthetic ontology' (Garoian, 2013) and its effects in situations of collaboration. Garoian's analogy of prosthesis describes a condition of extension, supplementation, complication and augmentation, where the element identifiable as 'art' in a collaborative undertaking is both of and apart from its social dynamics. The analogy of prosthesis offers a way of thinking how 'art' interlocks with, expands and extends socio-political phenomena to activate latent potentialities and imaginaries without concealing the artificiality of the conjunction or glossing over the awkwardness of the fit. A prosthesis has its own logics and forms; it is functional and yet marks a strangeness, a polyvalent hybridity that opens one reality onto another. It may even be beautiful without being ornamental. It also names a kind of supplement that is contentious in collaborative work, because the value of that supplement is not necessarily distributed evenly.

In *10 things you need to consider if you are an artist, not of the refugee and asylum seeker community, looking to work with our community* (2015), Tania Canas, director and member of the Australian organisation RISE [Refugees, Survivors and Ex-Detainees] sets out the kind of terms deemed necessary to distribute the value of the artmaking in a collaborative situation (Fig. 1.2). RISE demands a highly reflexive, participant-driven, politically aware stance by the artist who proposes to collaborate with people from their community. Many of those demands are understood in current in debates on participation, collaboration and co-production. By constantly highlighting and negotiating its terms of engagement, critical, collaborative work is always performative, performing its own self-critique, performing processes of collective meaning-making and so on.

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REFUGEES, SURVIVORS AND EX-DETAINEES

10 things you need to consider if you are an artist ? not of the refugee and asylum seeker community- looking to work with our community.

by RISE | Oct 5, 2015 | CURRENT AFFAIRS | 0 COMMENTS

There has been a huge influx of artists approaching us in order to find participants for their next project. The artist often claims to want to show ?the human side of the story? through a false sense of neutrality and limited understanding of their own bias, privilege and frameworks.

1. Process not product
We are not a resource to feed into your next artistic project.? You may be talented at your particular craft but do not assume that this automatically translates to an ethical, responsible and self-determining process. Understand community cultural development methodology but also understand that it is not a full-proof methodology. Who and what institutions are benefiting from the exchange?

2. Critically interrogate your intention
Our struggle is not an opportunity, or our bodies? a currency, by which to build your career. Rather than merely focusing on the ?other? (?where do I find refugees?.. etc) Subject your own intention to critical, reflexive analysis. What is your motivation to work with this particular subject matter?? Why at this particular time?

3. Realise your own privilege
What biases and intentions, even if you consider these ?good? intentions, do you carry with you? What social positionality (and power) do you bring to the space? Know how much space you take up. Know when to step back.

4. Participation is not always progressive or empowering
Your project may have elements of participation but know how this can just as easily be limiting, tokenistic and condescending.? Your demands on our community sharing our stories may be just as easily disempowering. What frameworks have you already imposed on participation?? What power dynamics are you reinforcing with such a framework? What relationships are you creating (eg. informant vs expert, enunciated vs enunciator)

5. Presentation vs representation
Know the difference!

6. It is not a safe-space just because you say it is
This requires long term grass-roots work, solidarity and commitment.

7. Do not expect us to be grateful
We are not your next interesting arts project. Our community are not sitting waiting for our struggle to be acknowledged by your individual consciousness nor highlighted through your art practice.

8. Do not reduce us to an issue
We are whole humans with various experiences, knowledge and skills. We can speak on many things; do not reduce us to one narrative.

9. Do your research
Know the solidarity work already being done. Know the nuanced differences between organisations and projects. Just because we may work with the same community doesn?t mean we work in the same way.

10. Art is not neutral
Our community has been politicised and any art work done with/by us is inherently political. If you wish to build with our community know that your artistic practice cannot be neutral.

By Tania Canas, RISE Arts Director / Member

Figure 1.2, Screenshot from riserefugee.org, 2021.

That observation can also be extended to artistic research more generally which tends to operate in a critical relationship to 'conventions that mark the work as 'artistic' or as 'research' in the first place' (Bolt, 2016). In her essay, 'Artistic Research, a performative paradigm?' (2016), Barbara Bolt argues that 'artistic research . . . reveals new modes and methodologies that could be considered to constitute a new paradigm of research' (Bolt, 2016). In that 'performative paradigm' (ibid.), practice is both productive and itself an object of inquiry. As Estelle Barrett argues, its instruments and objects are understood as active, emergent 'co-producers in collaborative and, in the case of audiences, participatory approaches that may not be pre-determined at the outset of the research' (Barrett, 2014: 3). Acknowledging the performative aspect of the socially engaged aesthetic work at the heart of the research opened up new ways of thinking about different elements in the research and their relationship to one another.

Shannon Jackson has argued that a great deal of 'expanded' art, including its socially engaged forms, employs 'the fundamental registers of theatre – duration, embodiment, spectacle, ensemble, text, sound, gesture, situated space' (Jackson, 2011: 19), although it rejects 'the artifice of . . . theatricality' (ibid.: 20). That dimension of the practice was made explicit in the latter half of this research through the articulation of a strategy identified as *the choreographic,* employed in the sense proposed by contemporary choreographer William Forsythe, as a form of 'potential organisation and instigation of action-based knowledge' (Forsythe interviewed by Neri, 2017). Contemporary choreography is a multi-actor production, polyphonic, agential, open to reinterpretation and reconfiguration by any or all the social actors involved. Part of the motivation behind identifying *the choreographic* as a process in the work was to pay critical attention to the resonance of an assembled 'we'. It was also informed by an engagement with the work of Andrew Hewitt on social choreography (2005), a perspective on

the hegemonic spacing, moving and/or situating of bodies and displacement of bodies at macro- and micro-scales (discussed in more detail in Chapter Two).

Social choreography is also a way to think about the relations of bodies to one another in the social production of space. The Commons, as I will discuss, is a counter-hegemonic production of space, resulting in a modification of the field of common experience and a transformation of sensibilities. It is as much an aesthetic undertaking as a social one. Choi *et al.* have articulated the idea of a 'commonist aesthetics' (2015) as a proposition, highlighting the need to institute a new kind of aesthetics, to reject the mastery of representation and to think by means of relation, grounded in 'the world of the senses – to a *residually common world*, as Terry Eagleton once put it' (Choi *et al.*, 2015, italics in original). In the aesthetic work discussed here the strategy of *the choreographic* was employed as a way to discern the values and poetics of the spaces developed between persons, objects and structures in the 'real-time composition' of the practice, for the purpose of understanding how a commonist aesthetics might add to the social, spatial and political unfolding of the Commons.

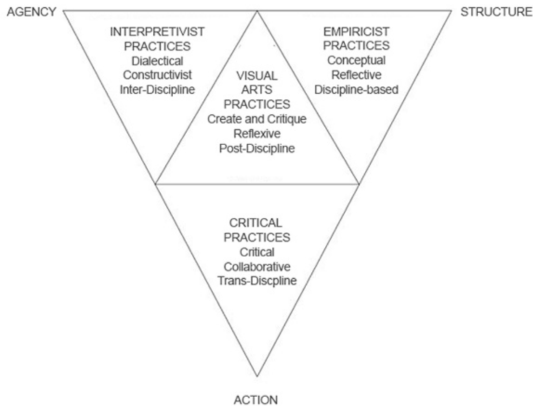
1.3.3 Art Practice as Research [APR]

As discussed, APBR has distinct operational and methodological demands and complex, contextual considerations that cannot be fully accounted for in standard research paradigms. That posed a continuous challenge to this research, particularly as the aesthetic work developed its own momentum. A late encounter with Graeme Sullivan's *Art Practice as Research, Inquiry in the Visual Arts* (2010)[11] laid out several ways of connecting APBR to the wider system of academic research, whilst making space for the fluidity of artistic research and aesthetic work.

[11] I had engaged with Sullivan's work at a very early point in the research, but at that time it did not seem relevant. It was 're-discovered' at a later stage.

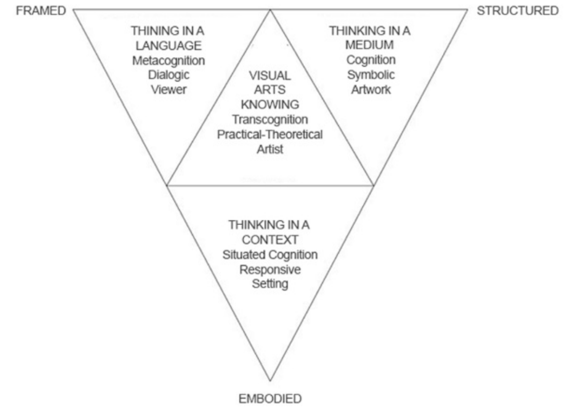
Sullivan unpacks artistic research as a formal system with identifiable dynamics and logics, providing a scheme through which to place those dynamics and logics in a productive, conceptual relationship with academic research. He constructs an elaborate methodological and theoretical scaffold, consisting of four 'layers', organised around the concepts of research, knowing, context and practice. The layers, which are to be understood as 'flexible and evolving systems of interlocking and infolding inquiry' (Sullivan, 2010: 100), are represented by four diagrams (Fig. 1. 3 (a – d)). Reading across those four frames generates a high level of complexity that resists any singular interpretation. The first of the frameworks in Sullivan's scheme, *Visual Arts Research* (Fig. 1. 3 (a)), is designed to give a critical perspective on the theoretical and methodological robustness of APBR as a domain of inquiry. At the centre of the triangular structure Sullivan situates 'visual'[12] arts practice-as-research, the site from which research problems and questions emerge and where methodologies are formulated. unconventional ways. This research drew elements from those different traditions in its early construction of research strategies: empiricist, in the close study of socio-spatial phenomena as a lived experience and material reality; interpretive, in multiple ways, across the entire practice; and critical, not only in terms of a reflexive engagement with the conditions of production of the research but also in the sense described by Sullivan as 'an incursion [into] existing systems, structures and practices' (ibid.: 111). At the outer edges of Fig. 1. 3 (a) Sullivan added what he described as the 'boundary focus areas' (ibid.: 101) of structure, agency and action. Sullivan's positioning of the tension between agency and structure along an axis between interpretive and empirical practices mirrors a complex question that arose repeatedly in the aesthetic actions

[12] Sullivan's emphasis is very much on visual arts, drawing on theories of visuality and practices of visualisation in the elaboration of the methodology. The visual is not emphasised in the same way in my practice.



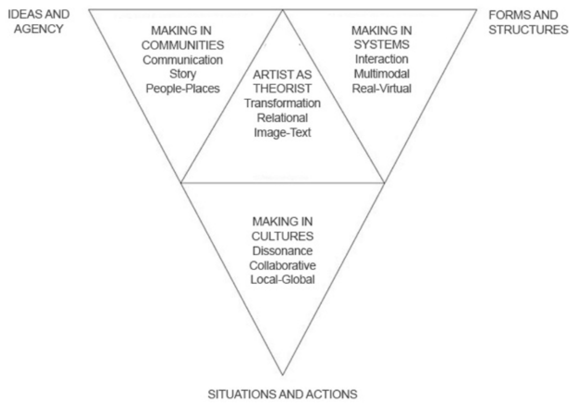
Framework of Visual Arts Research

Figure A



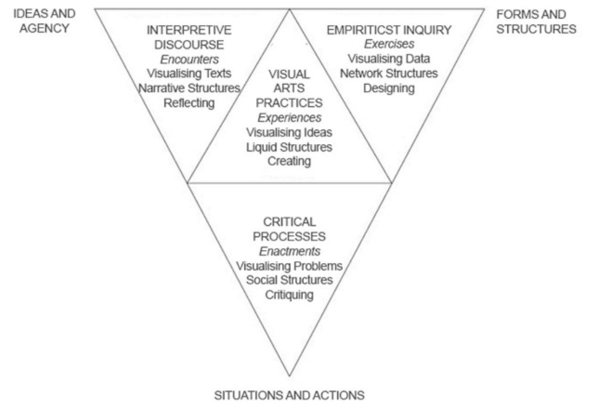
Framework of Visual Arts Knowing

Figure B



Framework of Visual Arts Contexts

Figure C



Framework of Visual Arts Practices

Figure D

Figure 1.3, (a), (b), (c), and (d), adapted from
Sullivan G., 2010, *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts,* p 103.

discussed here, as to how agency moves from being a matter of interpretation into a phenomenological register where its transformative capacity can be recognised and applied. This problem was eventually addressed by adopting the principle of prefigurative praxis, an active strategy of forming social relations through and around the production of a shared resource, as a commons.

The second 'level' in Sullivan's overall framework of art practice as research, *Visual Arts Knowing* (Fig. 1.3 (b)), offers an interesting set of positions concerning art's epistemology. Sullivan begins his discussion on this point by drawing attention to the relationship between knowing and unknowing that is at the heart of any research inquiry (ibid.: 102). Artistic knowledge straddles and reconfigures conventions and norms, whilst modelling a spectrum of *ways of knowing*. Sullivan breaks the diagram down into practices and perspectives that can capture the diverse modes of 'visual arts knowing' (ibid.: 133) inherent in arts practice. The diagram identifies different forms of cognition; the term *transcognition,* a 'practical-theoretical process' that Sullivan sees as characteristic of *Visual Arts Knowing* (ibid.: 134) is placed at the centre. The domains of visual arts knowing (Fig. 1.3 (b)) conform to previous triangulations in Sullivan's model and generate 'thinking structures' (ibid.: 133): thinking in a language; thinking in a medium; and thinking in a context (ibid.: 133). Those structures encircle and constitute the transcognitive dimension of visual arts knowing through dialogic, symbolic and responsive thought processes. The diagram situates what Sullivan describes as the 'mindful activity' of artistic practice at the outer points of thinking structures, showing how it moves between framed, structured and embodied orderings. The value of that model is that it asserts a distinct form of knowing at the centre of APBR; it also composes a coherent, cognitive framework within which unconventional forms of knowing can be justified and defended, without surrendering entirely the space of 'what we do not yet know how to know' (Rogoff,

2015). Sullivan's framework regarding *Visual Arts Knowing* is referenced again in Chapter Two, where one of the central methodologies of this inquiry, broadly described as Critical Mapping/ aesthetic events (CM/æ), is discussed.

While Fig. 1. 3 productively illustrates triadic relations that can be discerned as patterns at work in this inquiry – framing/ structuring/ embodying; ideas/ forms/ situations; thinking/ making/ process, Sullivan also cracks open those triadic frames (Fig. 1. 4) to examine 'Domains of Practice *Around* Inquiry' (ibid.: 107), offering useful tools to excavate the logics and processes of the practice-based element of this research. Artistic research is still situated at the heart of the diagram, but at points where it folds into other research frameworks Sullivan locates three clearly identifiable methods – discursive, dialectical, and deconstructive – which outline modes of exploration of the structure/ agency/ action dynamic. The outer layer of the diagram identifies key research motivations – explaining phenomena, engaging in meaning-making or laying the ground for transformative action – all of which have a place in this inquiry. The relationships that Sullivan articulates between structure, agency and action, and the way that he relates those to different approaches and methodologies (Fig. 1. 3), suggest strategies such as those employed in this research. The discursive method draws on empiricist and interpretivist approaches, using 'conceptual techniques to identify patterns and consistencies in data' (ibid.: 107), a diagnostic strategy that was employed in the aesthetic actions, *Contested Sites* (2015–19), two of which are discussed in Chapters Three and Four. The relationship between structure and action (Fig. 1. 3 (c)) can be examined through deconstructive methods, according to Sullivan, to identify 'areas of emphasis and omission in systems and structures' (ibid.: 107), with an explanatory purpose. That kind of diagnostic, deconstructive analysis was also conducted as part of the *CS* actions; areas of emphasis and omission were studied in relation to the logics and dynamics of the socio-spatial phenomenon of publicness, and through

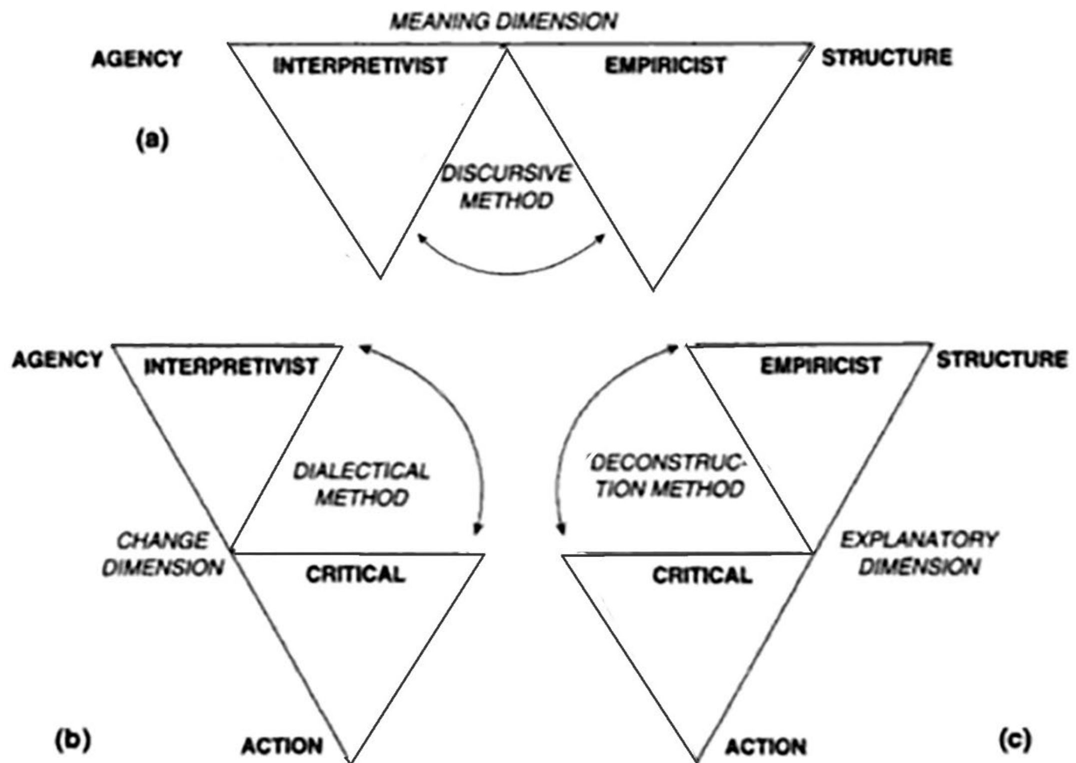


Figure 1.4, Domains of Practice Around Inquiry, adapted from
Sullivan G., 2010, *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts*, p 107.

a multi-modal discourse analysis of official documents, to analyse the material-discursive production of a process of abstraction described as the economisation of space.

The value of Sullivan's model lies in the way that its structured system enables dynamics and logics particular to artistic research to be placed in a productive, conceptual relationship to those of other research traditions, whilst also holding a place for a state of suspension and non-resolution that makes artworks compelling and relevant. However, based on Garoian's account of art's 'prosthetic ontology' (2013), and arising from models that were constructed to support this APBR, I found that Sullivan's interpretivist/ critical/ empiricist diagram benefitted from the addition of a fourth node, the poetic (Fig. 1. 5). The logic of prosthesis, in the sense argued by Garoian, offers a fourth position in the dialectical movement of thesis, antithesis and the closure of synthesis. Together these represent 'a fourfold, open and mutable epistemology that enables oppositional discourse' (ibid.: 226). The thesis/antithesis tension, which resolves in synthesis, is a closed movement. Prosthesis adds 'indeterminate flights of understanding that extend beyond our bodies and symbiotically interconnect with others' (ibid.). The expanded version of Sullivan's scheme presented in Figure 1.5 stresses the vitality of APBR in the broader research landscape and emphasises the significant role that poetics plays in the production of meaning and of knowledge. These matters are discussed further relative to claims regarding contributions to knowledge made by the research in the final section, Conclusions.

1.4 Academic rationale and relevance

A discussion of academic rationale and relevance must begin with an acknowledgement that the problematic of enclosure runs right through the heart of academia, shaped by the values of a heteropatriarchal, Eurocentric, capitalist-realist, rationalist-instrumental, colonialist

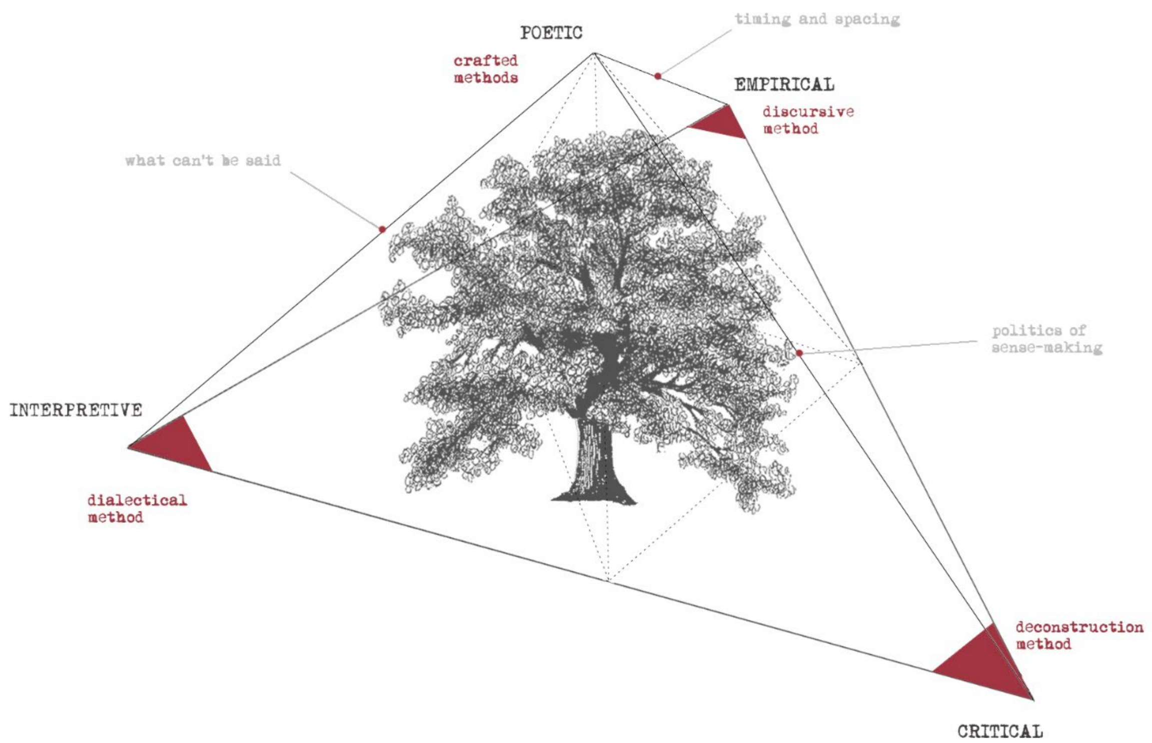


Figure 1.5, Domains of practice, including the poetic. Author rendering, based on Sullivan G., 2010, *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts.*

paradigm. The matter of art's forms of knowledge-making, its critical relationship to the politics of knowledge in the neoliberal system, and the critical position of APBR in the broader academic landscape, generated questions that simmered in the background of this research but were only fully unpacked in the writing of the thesis.

It has been vital to retain a degree of scepticism with regard to the academic validation of ways of knowing and forms of knowledge-making. Feminist critiques of the project of Western knowledge (Lather, 2016) have long argued that the norms regarding what constitutes valid and valuable knowledge – abstract, individual, 'objective', disembodied – have been set by 'epistemic communities' (Haas, 1992) that reflect and reinforce dominant power-knowledge structures. Those structures perpetuate the fallacy of a geopolitically, racially, gender-neutral account of knowing that is challenged by feminist and decolonial scholars (Mignolo, 2009, 2010; De Sousa Santos, 2018; Zaragocin, 2019; Walsh, 2015).

In the field of artmaking, knowledge is constantly being produced through assembling, making, teaching, discussing, researching, exhibiting, staging, curating etc. Critical artistic work can pin-point, contest and counteract semiotic systems that sustain relations of power; it can frame phenomena in ways that multiply difference and perpetuate, rather than resolve, strangeness; and it can unframe matters given as common sense, with conceptual and aesthetic resonance. When artistic and aesthetic modes of knowledge-making enter into the landscape of academia, they must navigate the power structures of academic validation without necessarily accepting their norms concerning what counts as valid and valuable knowledge. These matters are relevant to ongoing discussions about the politics of knowledge, particularly in light of current decolonial critiques (Mignolo, 2009, 2010; Walsh, 2015; Mignolo and Walsh, 2018; De Sousa Santos, 2018; Zaragocin, 2019;), and are discussed in more detail in the final section, Conclusions.

Conditions of structural inequality arising from the problematic of enclosure were scrutinised and challenged in the course of the research, drawing on, and contributing to, the field of critical spatial practice. That term was coined by Rendell to describe 'modes of self-reflective artistic and architectural practice which seek to question and to transform the social conditions of the sites into which they intervene' (Rendell, 2016). The term quickly came to encompass an interdisciplinary, material-discursive area of inquiry, incorporating critical geography, urban studies, feminist theories of spatial justice, investigations of spatial agency, activist positions, decolonial perspectives and socially engaged artistic and aesthetic work, amongst others. The term has been taken up and developed further by practitioners and theorists in the fields of art and architecture, including a series of publications organised around the question *What is Critical Spatial Practice?* (Hirsch and Meissen, 2012).

Informed by theories and practices from that field, two socio-spatial phenomena have been studied in close detail, theoretically and in practice; an ideologically driven hollowing of the complex phenomenon of publicness (Newman and Clarke, 2009; Sheikh, 2007), identified as ~~public~~, and a specific dynamic of enclosure identified by this researcher as *the economisation of space.* As a result of field work and analysis it became apparent that publicness is riven by internal, structural conflicts arising from the need to integrate the factual inequalities generated by systems of private property with an appearance of social solidarity necessary for the functioning of democracy. As such, its value as a site from which to contest the dynamics of enclosure was called into question.

Berlant has argued that a reinvention of 'the very concept of the public . . . against, with, and from within the nation and capital' (Berlant, 2016: 408) is already underway in the social movement of the Commons, which amounts to a modification of the field of common experience, already proceeding through formal and ad hoc activist and cultural practices, alongside significant theoretical work regarding the aesthetics of 'a *residually common world'*

(Choi *et al.*, 2015, italics in original). Choi *et al.* have employed the term *commonist aesthetics* to capture those concerns, something that was taken up and addressed through aesthetic work, in ways that are discussed in Chapter Six. The fundamental role played by aesthetics in modifying the field of common experience is asserted, along with the role of poetics as a way of producing knowledge and value.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

Chapter Two examines a key methodology that connected different aspects of the research, identified as Critical Mapping/aesthetic events [CM/æ]. Critical mapping and aesthetic events were already understood as methods in my practice, including activities such as cognitive mapping, social mapping, cartographic action, the production of diagrams, modes of assembling, dialogical processes, collective actions and so on. As the aesthetic actions began to unfold, I recognised that those activities formed a structured, purposeful system. The CM activities had organising and rationalising effects balanced by looser, embodied, affective actions that I classified as aesthetic events (æ). Those aesthetic events hold a place for the richness, strangeness and ambivalence of the aesthetic, for poetics, politics and unpredictable forms of agency and action. CM/æ is unpacked over the course of Chapter Two, and its rigour and relevance as a methodology is discussed in relation to the research framework outlined in this chapter. Chapter Two also introduces the *CC* actions in the context of Limerick city.

Chapter Three introduces the *CS* aesthetic actions and situates them relative to the socio-spatial context for the work. Limerick is a small city to which neoliberal politics and economics came relatively late, making it an ideal situation in which to examine forces and mechanisms driving processes of enclosure. *CS #3* and *CS #4* performed a critical examination of ways in which logics of enclosure are worked into the social order. They did so by employing

a three-stage method based on the depth ontology of CR (after Banfield, 2004): i) *phenomenological*; a specific set of socio-spatial circumstances was observed first-hand, in the company of a person who had identified it as a contested site; ii) *trans-phenomenological*; the contested nature of the site was further explored by drawing on discursive materials and official representations, to identify logics and processes working on the site; and iii) *counter-phenomenological*; further deductive work and theoretical analysis was carried out to detect some of the distorting effects of economisation and enclosure, and to make those visible. Adding the poetic node of knowledge-making to this triad results also in a response in the register of sense and sense-making.

Chapter Four also takes the *CS* actions as its focus. Lefebvre's categorisation of spatial practices, representations of space, and spaces of representation (1991: 33) helped to untangle the logics working on the different sites. A wide range of communicative materials including city plans, vision documents, semi-public property websites, public consultation events, promotional videos and official presentations were studied to draw out the nexus of state-corporate interests infusing neoliberal values of enclosure and economisation into the social imaginary of the city. A close reading of those documents revealed efforts to strategically harness the embodied dispositions of Limerick's citizens and direct them towards a performance of what the city means and who it is for, an attempt to aesthetically reconfigure the field of common experience of the city.

Critical reflection on my practice did not begin with this research but intensified within its temporal frame (2015–2021). A longstanding and extensive engagement with historical and contemporary theories of socially engaged practice, both inside and outside of the sphere of art, had already led me to question the ontology of art and its value in my practice. In his analysis of Rancière's politics of aesthetics, Yepes argues that 'aesthetics in its broad sense is

. . . the frame that gives art its political potential' (Yepes, 2014: 45). The frame of aesthetics extends beyond the sphere of 'art', and it can be put to work in many ways. That relatively simple observation offered a way to make sense of different critical impulses in my practice. As the theoretical inquiry and the aesthetic actions began to generate feedback loops, a thought /action process led me to the idea of aesthetic work as an appropriate way of framing and formulating my practice. Aesthetic work indicates a way of operating and a critical perspective which found its clearest expression in the aesthetic event, *LCI* (2018–19). Aesthetic work is not without contradictions, just as socially engaged art is not without contradictions; those matters are addressed directly in Chapter Five.

Against the systemic violence of the paradigm of extractivism, the transformative project of the Commons amounts to a modification of the field of experience at all scales, from political-legal systems down to micro-practices of commoning, and further into the realm of perception, amounting to a transformation of sensibilities. It is as much an aesthetic undertaking as a social one, and it calls for a new kind of aesthetics, to reject the mastery of representation and to think by means of relation, grounded in 'the world of the senses – to a *residually common world*, as Terry Eagleton once put it' (Choi *et al.*, 2015, italics in original).

Chapter Six addresses these matters directly through an extended analysis of the aesthetic work, *LCI,* which responded in part to the call for a 'commonist aesthetics' set out by Choi *et al.* (2015). *LCI* set out to find haptic, embodied, relational, choreographic and diagrammatic strategies for bringing different ways of knowing and being into proximity, to construct common objects. It took place over the course of a year, culminating in a public event-space (Hannah, 2019) in April 2019, in Limerick city centre. It created a set of infrastructures to support collective forms of sensing and sense-making, resulting in a

coproduction of thought and action to 'make explicit the relationship between the practices of a community and the theories that underpin those practices' (Curnow, 2016: 35).

Chapter Seven also takes *LCI* as its subject but does so through the language of the diagram. It approaches *LCI* as an aesthetic work with knowledge-making and world-making dimensions, reflected in the use of diagram as 'knowledge producing form' rather than a 'formal representation of knowledge' (Drucker, 2013: 84). Chapter Seven is comprised of 9 diagrams in which problems and potencies inherent in the work of *LCI* are teased out and processed. In a further iteration of the CM/æ methodology, diagrammatic language was employed to make sense of matters that were sensed in the work, without seeking the closure of coherence. The diagram makes room for uncertainty and ambiguity, a significant dimension of research and of aesthetic work. Working with the strategy of the diagrammatic emphasises the performativity of observing, interpreting and translating a set of conditions in ways that are produce 'a new original' (Niranjana, 1992).

The final section, Conclusions, offers a critical reflection on the contributions to knowledge made by the research, in the areas of practice, methodology and the field of critical spatial practice. The question of knowledge itself, the kinds of knowledges that are valid or validated in APBR, the politics of that knowledge and how that sits in relation to wider questions about decolonising the production of knowledge, are considered as a final reflection on the effects of this research.

1.6 Conclusions

This chapter has laid out theoretical, methodological and critical infrastructures which supported the design and realisation of this APBR, and created a system for enacting several

aesthetic actions, as well as a framework through which to analyse their implications and effects. Three interlocking strands of inquiry are present in the research: i) a theoretical and practice-based exploration of the systemic, socio-spatial violence of economisation and enclosure; ii) the articulation of aesthetic work as a critical, collaborative practice with political effects, and iii) an engagement with the poetics and politics of commoning. These connected strands reflect the motivation of the research; to be part of an urgent struggle to interrupt the 'distribution of the sensible' (Rancière, 2004) that normalises social and ecological destruction, and to contribute to a new political imaginary in ways that are not merely symbolic. Aesthetic work may operate at a modest scale, but its ambitions are nothing less than to modify the sensory regime of the dominant aesthetic order. It may make use of the codified space of art, (Yepes, 2014), but it operates at and across the borders of different domains as a kind of connective tissue, what Bruguera describes as 'an ecosystem of transformative fields' (2012). These matters are addressed in full in Chapter Five.

The inquiry was situated in a complex and contested landscape of knowledge-making, aligned with growing demands for a reconfiguration of the conventions by which knowledge is recognised, validated and put to use. Artistic knowing and artistic knowledge occupy an awkward position in that landscape; the performative nature of artistic research lies in its capacity to work with the constitutive character of conventions in such a way as to cause a modification of those conventions, but risks being absorbed into the neoliberal logic of knowledge-as-capital. These matters create an additional layer of criticality that the arts practice-based researcher must address. I do not speak from a position outside of those conditions and therefore must attempt to strike a balance between a conceptual, theoretical, interpretive voice and one that stems from the embodied, phenomenological register of the practice.

The purpose of the research has arisen from those conditions. It is important to acknowledge that I operate from a position of relative social privilege which sets up a political contradiction. However, as Kester argues, social change emerges through 'imperfect, messy . . . [and] compromised modalities' (2017). My practice is situated in the 'dynamic world of the social' (Beshty, 2015: 16) with the aim of developing, or refining, cultural tools and perspectives that could contribute to more just and equitable social structures. The Transformative/ Emancipatory paradigm was a comfortable fit for the aspirations of the research at the outset, and PAR was useful as an orienting principle and overall methodology to bring the socially engaged aspects of the work into alignment with the protocols and ethical norms of academic research. However, as the practice-based aspects of the research gathered momentum, it became apparent that the paradigm could not fully account for the performative aspect of the research, in the sense of a structured system of communication that functions as a form of social action, 'enact[ing] real effects in the world' (Bolt, 2016). Modifications were made that generated a more fitting framework, drawing out implicit methodologies that were at work in the practice.

The question – *how can aesthetic actions, in the form of embodied and collectivised processes of sense-making, work in the socio-spatial conditions of Limerick city to contest the economisation of space?* – lays out some of the claims and hypotheses that the research addressed. The reference to embodied and collectivised forms of sense-making points to the social orientation of the work, involving actions that lead to the production of knowledges which are not the province of specialists or intellectuals, nor are they particular to art. The question above also names the socio-spatial as a site of inquiry, examined through the lens of a phenomenon described as the economisation of space.

Those matters are approached through theoretical and aesthetic analyses based on phenomenological actions and studies in social space. The term *contestation* implies or poses a question about agency, an uncertain property of human action, which is difficult to measure or realise. Agency was more productively interpreted in this research through the lens of prefigurative praxis as an active strategy of forming social relations around a matter of common interest, with transformative potential (Maeckelbergh, 2011), which can be fostered and traced in local conditions, as I will discuss.

Chapter Two: CM/æ, a methodology.

A critical re-examination of my practice was a key part of the work of this research, as discussed in previous chapters. That re-examination included a close scrutiny of its ways of operating and its modes of praxis. This chapter focuses on a methodology that was latent in the practice but given a more coherent articulation in this research as Critical Mapping/aesthetic events [CM/æ]. Critical mapping is a longstanding technique and organisational principle in my practice,[13] incorporating methods such as cognitive mapping, social mapping, cartographic action and the production of diagrams. It is a systematic form of meaning-making that is productive in relation to socio-spatial work, but, for reasons that will be discussed in this chapter, is potentially overdetermining from a critical, aesthetic perspective.

To maintain spaces for emergent forms of sense-making, more evental processes are also part of my practice - dialogical processes, forms of collective play, actions in public space and the production of choreographic objects. Fiadeiro's concept of Real Time Composition (Fiadeiro, 2010) opened a new perspective on those methods, outlining a coherent system with non-systematic elements, a way of creating spaces for unprecedented modes of sense-making, for the richness, strangeness and ambivalence of the aesthetic, and for ways of paying attention to what we do not yet know how to perceive. That paradoxical system is presented in the thesis as CM/æ, and this chapter will unpack its different components and their relevance for the research.

[13] I have used critical mapping in previous durational works, most particularly in *Walking Silvermines*, a work of collaborative mapping that was carried out with the community of Silvermines in Co. Tipperary. It is included in the Arte Útil archive; www.walkingsilvermines.net

2.1 Sensing and sense-making

Mapping, even critical mapping, has ways of invoking 'the real' that must be rigorously interrogated to retain a clear perspective on its possibilities and limitations as an emancipatory tool. In the terms laid out in Lefebvre's triadic analytical scheme (Fig. 2.1) mapping is a spatial practice (1991) – embodied, haptic, aesthetic and cognitive – before it is representational. The maps that result from practices of mapping can perform in different ways. They may take the form of representations of space (ibid.), constructs that set out to order space in a particular way and to naturalise that ordering of space, setting up an imaginary of time/space/relations accordingly. On the other hand, maps can offer counter-hegemonic accounts of spatio-temporal formations, reasserting the messy business of lived experience. Christian Schmid describes this as the material order on the ground, which he equates with Lefebvre's category of spaces of representation (Schmid, 2008). These matters will be drawn out and discussed in this chapter and related to a series of cartographic actions in the research, *CC #1–#3* (2017–2018).

At the heart of the methodology of CM, therefore, lies a contradiction, the same contradiction that is interrogated in Frederic Jameson's work *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (1992). The impossible complexity of the world-system, Jameson argues, generates a crisis of perception and orientation that thwarts emancipatory projects of resistance. Existing modes of representation and sense-making are found to be inadequate; the crisis of representability calls for 'an aesthetics of cognitive mapping' (Jameson, 1992: 11), which does not employ the ideological form of the map but generates unprecedented modes of sense-making. The apparent coherence offered by the map may obscure the crisis of representability, establishing coordinates of sense-making such as Rancière associates with the police order (2004).

The discourse of critical cartography is closely associated with the field of critical spatial practice. That field was first articulated by Rendell to describe 'modes of self-reflective artistic and architectural practice which seek to question and to transform the social conditions of the sites into

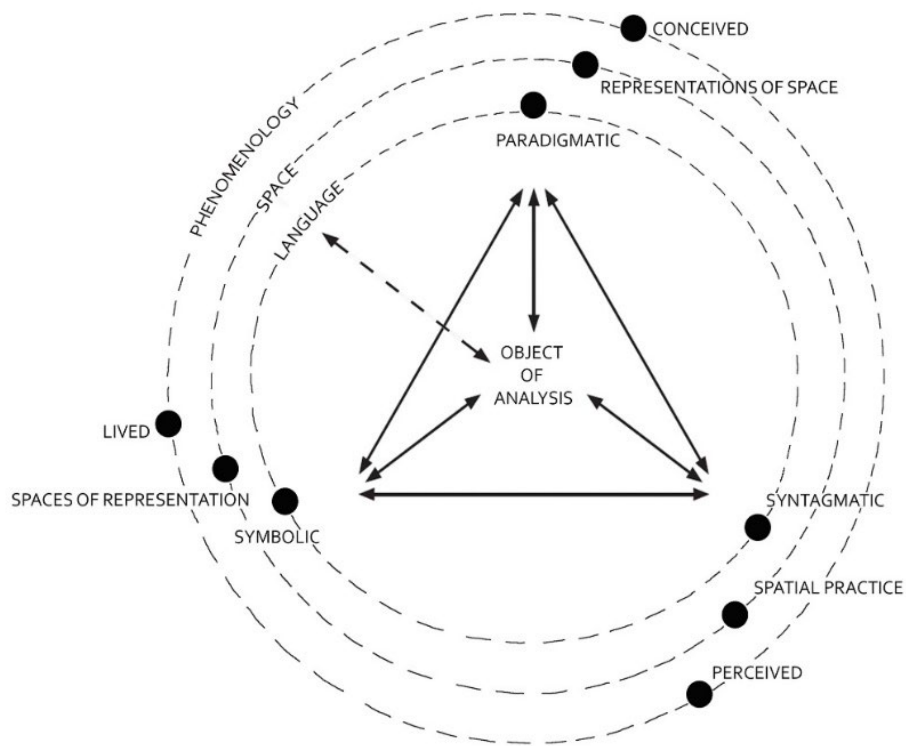


Figure 2.1, Diagrammatic representation of Lefebvre's triadic scheme of analysis,
as applied to three key areas of exploration in Lefebvre's work.

which they intervene' (Rendell, 2016). The term quickly came to encompass an interdisciplinary, material-discursive area of inquiry incorporating critical geography, urban studies, feminist theories of spatial justice, activism, investigations of spatial agency, decolonial perspectives and socially engaged aesthetic work amongst others. The metholodogy of CM owes a good deal of its rigour to that field, theoretically and in terms of practice.

Returning to Jameson's call for unprecedented modes of sense-making, to find ways of paying attention to what we do not yet know how to perceive, that problem was approached in this research through the æ methodology. The term aesthetic event draws some of its meanings from the work of Colombian cultural critic, Ruben Yepes, who described the 'aesthetic event' (2016: 124) as:

> . . . an emergent phenomenon, an assemblage of disparate elements that produces a complex relationality that creates its own time and space, assembling diverse elements: the materiality of the objects and actions presented, the discursive content of those objects, the affects and sensations they elicit, the discourses that frame the latter, as well as the discourses and frames that the spectator/participant brings to the above elements (Yepes, 2016: 125).

As a methodology, æ is also dialogical. Dialogue is understood here not so much as a technique or a method of communication but as a movement towards a 'radical relatedness' (Gablik, 1991a: 2). Suzi Gablik described a 'profound and necessary paradigm shift' (ibid.: 2) from which new aesthetic values were emerging in the 1980's and 1990's, which she called a 'connective aesthetics' (ibid.: 2). These modes of art 'rooted in a listening self' (ibid.: 4) manifested fully in the idea of dialogue, a two-way transmission. Gablik's concept of a connective aesthetics found wider purchase in the idea of dialogical aesthetics, which entered into cultural discourse in the 1990's (Bourriaud, 1994; Haynes, 1995; Kac, 1999: Kester, 1999). Within this framework, art and life answer to each other; '[art] is always related, answerable to life and lived experience' (Haynes, 1995: 295).

2.2 The social production of space

Chapter One touched briefly on Lefebvre's seminal work, *The Production of Space* (1991). His triadic scheme for the analysis of the social production of space (Fig. 2.1) was vital in establishing the initial object of the inquiry, a condition that was hypothesised as ~~public~~ (see Chapter Three). That triadic form, comprised of the dynamic interaction of spatial practices, representations of space and representational space (also translated as spaces of representation), accommodated a theory-and-practice-relay approach, whilst also functioning as an operational strategy to navigate the complexity of the object of inquiry, guiding the unfolding of the research itself.

'Socio-spatial' is a term that was coined by Soja to describe a dialectical movement between the social and the spatial (1980) as a supplement to Lefebvre's concept of social space (1991), which had become 'murky with multiple and often incompatible meanings' (Soja, 1980: 209). Lefebvre's ground-breaking work articulated a clear distinction between contextual space, a generalised idea of space as such, and a spatiality that Soja defined as 'the created space of social organisation *and* production' (Soja, 1980: 209, italics in original). Marxist scholars had accused Lefebvre of fetishising space by representing it as an 'autonomous determinant to history and human action' (ibid.: 208), but Soja argued that this was a misrepresentation of Lefebvre's thought. Drawing directly on his writings, Soja restated the dialectical aspect of Lefebvre's position, describing social and spatial relations as 'dialectically inter-reactive, interdependent' (ibid.: 211). When space is understood as socially constructed, we recognise that 'social relations of production are both space-forming and space-contingent (insofar as we maintain a view of organised space as socially constructed)' (ibid.: 211).

Lefebvre himself rejected, or at least modified the 'dualisms' (1991: 39) of the dialectical movement. In its place he devised a triadic form of analysis that he applied to several areas of inquiry: language, space, the everyday and rhythm. The dynamic figure operating in Lefebvre's work can be understood as 'the contradiction between social thought and social action, supplemented by the third factor of the creative, poetic act' (Schmid, 2008: 33). His theory of the social production of space (1991) posits space as a fluctuating condition generated through the interactions of three 'moments' of spatial production, which never settle into a stable configuration.

The first of these moments, *spatial practice*, consists of situated activities and interactions grounded in a material reality; the second, *representations of space*, uses language, mapping, charts, algorithms, valuations and other abstract forms of demarcation as a 'technology of abstraction' (Wilson, 2013: 368) that renders space calculable and thereby commodifiable. The third mode, *spaces of representation* (also called representational space) refers to 'space as directly lived, the space of inhabitants' (Lefebvre, 1991: 39). Christian Schmid calls this 'the material "order" that emerges on the ground (which) can itself become the vehicle conveying meaning' (Schmid, 2008: 37). This is the realm where hegemonic and counter-hegemonic productions of space are in a state of constant tension, generating normative and/or unconventional socio-spatial forms.

Lefebvre's triadic scheme recognises a degree of uncertainty in the production of the socio-spatial order and offers a methodology for prying open a gap between the contradictory immediacy of lived space and capital's strategic shaping of that space, analysing the incomplete, creative process by which social and spatial reality comes into being (Schmid, 2008). Lefebvre's analytical method supports the discovery or recognition of a horizon of

becoming, of possibilities, uncertainties and chances. It also enables the formulation of a strategy without the certainty of achieving the aim (ibid.: 34).

Subjected to the logics of capital, space is 'not just commodified, but commodification becomes the operational logic of spatial practices' (Lefebvre, 1991: 106). A brutal struggle between use value and exchange value gives space its inherently political character (ibid.). By and large, the ideology that favours exchange value is more thoroughly insinuated into the institutions that regulate urban space, skewing the struggle in favour of a production of abstract and commodified space. Abstract space is not, however, without fissures and fault-lines, and Lefebvre offered a tantalising idea of what he termed 'differential space' (ibid.: 302) emerging from those contradictions. The concept was not fully developed in *The Production of Space* (1991) rendering the term somewhat flabby, as evidenced by its inconsistent deployment across disparate discourses ranging from urban planning to organisational studies to anarchist theory. Japhy Wilson has argued that differential space, like abstract space, must be read across all of Lefebvre's works to grasp its significance; it describes a space of *disalienation* through the process of worker self-management described as autogestion (Wilson, 2013: 372).

In this research, the process of autogestion is interpreted as a process of self-organisation and, in the later parts of the research, as a mode of production identified as commoning. Many theorists and practitioners have picked up the threads of Lefebvre's analysis with a view to developing ideas that he left relatively incomplete, continuing to think and to practice the spatial as a contingent and relational process, and a condition for the formulation of new political questions. Space, as Doreen Massey argues, is 'always under construction' (2005: 9). It is constituted through interrelated trajectories that coexist as a relational matrix (2005). The imagination of the spatial and the imagination of the political coincide; political thought is incomplete where it fails to engage with the challenges and possibilities of the spatial

(ibid.). To conceive of the future as radically open it is necessary to think space as an open system, as 'the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity' (ibid.: 9). To think space, to work with the imaginary of space, is both diagnostic and productive. Actions that engage with and intervene in spatial conditions, taking into account the dominant and residual imaginaries constituting a space, may find and engage with the gaps and fissures that Lefebvre's system proposes. These matters receive more attention in Chapters Three and Four.

2.3 Critical Mapping (CM): a methodology

The map is a commonplace tool and technology of orientation, so ubiquitous that its role as an instrument of rationalisation and abstraction is often overlooked. The visibility created by the map comes at a price. As Laura Kurgan argues, maps let us see so much that they 'blind us to what we cannot see, imposing a quiet tyranny of orientation that erases the possibility of disoriented discovery' (Kurgan, 2013: 16 – 17). They also omit the dynamic trajectories and relations that create 'the most common spaces we live in today' (ibid.: 16 – 17). Long before they communicate locational or organisational information, maps assert a system of notation laden with conventions, norms and codes, setting the very terms by which direction and position are understood.

This section presents a critical engagement with mapping, drawing out its problematics and its possibilities. These ideas are discussed in relation to *CC #1–#3,* a series of cartographic actions in public space in Limerick (2016 – 2018), where the emphasis was on mapping, rather than maps as such. Mapping is a social process combining such diverse activities as ordering, orienting, cataloguing, displaying, charting, spacing, disorienting, transgressing, evading, occupying, framing, unframing, and declassifying; it does not necessarily result in a map. The

section also discusses a contradiction at the heart of critical mapping that leads directly to the methodology of aesthetic work.

2.3.1 The (counter) cartographic gaze

Cartography denotes the construction of a representational system concerned with 'locating, identifying and bounding phenomena and thereby situating events, processes and things within a coherent . . . frame' (Harvey, 2001: 220). It has been, and continues to be, a key tool in the arsenal of power; cartographic procedures were developed to support military and imperialist expansions, as well as practices of enclosure in the interests of capital accumulation (Stone, 1988; Schmidt, 1997). The grid system helped to secure temporal and socio-spatial orderings as cartographic 'fact' (Bryan and Wood, 2015). Doug Specht and Anna Feigenbaum have argued that the god's eye view of the 'cartographic gaze', is not so much a way of looking at the world as 'a medium for spreading domination through power models emboldened through colonialism' (Specht and Feigenbaum, 2019: 40). The cartographic gaze was, and continues to be, a technology of othering; '[it] solidifies relations and immobilises those who are mapped' (ibid.: 40).

Where once the ability to collect and organise information cartographically was concentrated in the hands of sovereign powers, the proliferation of digital technologies of mapping, along with widespread access to 'raw' data, has generated a phenomenon that Jeremy Crampton describes as 'Cartography 2.0' (2009). However, dominant, accessible technologies of mapping are generally founded on the grid-map, the ubiquity of which reinforces the logics of the traditional cartographic gaze as well as the power to position.[14]

[14] The primary cartographic gaze of state-corporate power in the 21st C. is acquisitive in another way; its technologies are algorithmic, biometric, data-tracking. As well as data harvesting and monitoring, emotional

Maps are also rhetorical devices that 'shape arguments . . . set discursive boundaries and identify objects to be considered' (Institute for Applied Autonomy, 2008: 35). Recognising the map as a propositional construct offers other ways of shaping (or reshaping) the imaginary of time/space/relations. The fact that maps bring something into being rather than representing what already exists, which Kitchin and Dodge describe as their 'ontogenetic' and performative character (2007: 334), is also the basis of mapping's counterhegemonic force. Radical social cartographies (Sletto *et al.*, 2020) have evolved to expose the violence and oppression of patriarchal coloniality and to fight against the dispossession of indigenous lands by the state-corporate nexus, especially in Latin America.[15] Radical social cartographies are both epistemic, in relation to the knowledge-making aspects of mapping, and ontological, in terms of the 'realities' that those maps are seen to generate.

The fight to protect indigenous territories against illegal encroachment generally requires making use of 'The Master's Tools' (Lorde, 1984), i.e., the grid-map used to configure those territories as *terra nullius* in the first place (Stone, 1988). The use of mapping as a way of making visible carries a risk; visibility can facilitate further incursions into disputed territories. For those reasons, and because maps are rhetorical devices, the field of radical social cartography is often collective and intertextual, bringing together communities of place and interest, activists, scholars, technicians, artists and educators (i.e. The Critical Geography Collective of Ecuador; Critical Feminist Viewpoints on Territory, Uruguay; Cartography of the South, Colombia; Iconoclasistas, Argentina; Mapping Action Collective, US; Amazon

recognition and attention tracking are relatively mainstream forms of surveillance that are now in use by governments and corporate employers (Nash, 2021).

[15] For example, InfoAmazonia.org presents important research for the peoples and environments of the Amazon which cross territorial boundaries; Geografia Critica Ecuador likewise have worked with the Waorani people to secure the integrity of their territory in the face of extractive industry encroachment. https://geografiacriticaecuador.org/2017/03/20/cartografia-de-la-afectacion-de-texaco/

Frontlines, international; Counter-cartographies collective, international, Bureau D'Études, France).

In the course of this research a series of collaborative, counter-cartographic actions were conducted with publics in Limerick city, drawing on methods of social cartography developed by the Argentinian collective, Iconoclasistas, including open-source tools made available through their *Manual of Collective Mapping: critical cartographic resources for territorial processes of collaborative creation* (Iconoclasistas, 2016). Each event in the *CC* series [*CC #1–#3*] was organised in response to an invitation; the focus of the collaborative mapping was designed with the host organisation as follows:

- *CC# 1;* **Host –** Cecil Street Festival / **Venue** – The GAFF community theatre courtyard / **Theme** – Where is public space in the city?
- *CC# 2:* **Host** – Creative Communities Limerick (CCL) / **Venue** – 'The Art of Community' two-day symposium, Belltable Arts Centre / **Theme** – Where do communities find culture?
- *CC# 3;* **Host** – Ormston House / **Venue** – Ormston House, Lunchtime Social public event-space / **Theme** – What are threshold spaces?

Each event used an A0 map of Limerick city, somewhat stylised and with all text removed to confound the supposedly transparent nature of maps and to present their contingent status as authoritative representations of a territory. The Iconoclasistas open-source manual provides pictograms that can be used in collective mappings (Fig. 2.2). They describe these as 'technologies for looking, put together with instruments that calibrate vision' (Iconoclasistas, 2020). Pictograms offer ways to synthesise micro-perspectives and scattered knowledges, but because they are open and interchangeable, they 'interrupt normalised gazes and common sense' (ibid.). In the *CC* actions, a selection of pictograms was produced as three-dimensional

elements that could be stuck onto the map at any point, interrupting the two-dimensional nature of the map and asserting relations over topography (Fig. 2.3).

This approach also had the effect of inserting the messy business of lived experience back into the abstracting technology of the map, subverting the cartographic gaze. Each event generated what Iconoclasistas describe as 'tactical spaces . . . [for] the construction of collaborative knowledge' (ibid.). The questions that were posed with each map were designed elicit accounts of the city that were not part of the dominant narrative of the city. Those who participated in the mappings ranged from passing publics (*CC#1)* to community workers, activists, development workers etc. who passed through a semi-public space outside of a symposium *(CC#2)* and attendees at an open lunchtime event in a contemporary art venue, a mixture of artists, students, activists and workers from surrounding offices (*CC #3*). Collectively, the mappings elicited lived experiences around the tightly controlled nature of 'public' space in Limerick city and the creeping privatisation of the city centre. They also gave a starkly visual form to the disconnect between communities who live at the edges of the city and the publicly funded cultural facilities and institutions concentrated in the city centre. The mappings also elicited a conversation about transitional and threshold spaces and conditions in the city, as sites of restriction and of potential.

The outcome 'maps' (Fig. 2.4) were not coherent as maps, nor were they intended to be. They were, 'a series of enunciations about (a) territory' (Iconoclasistas, 2016), a constellation of ideas, positions, perspectives. The *CC* actions were part of the process of developing relational infrastructures. By bringing different modes of sensing and sense-making into proximity around a common endeavour ('mapping' the city), ways of knowing, producing and acting emerged that formed the basis of further collective aesthetic actions (Chapters Six and Seven). A community of practice took shape, made up of social actors, community groups,

Figure 2.2, Iconoclasistas, *Pictogramming and Iconographies* (2008–2017)

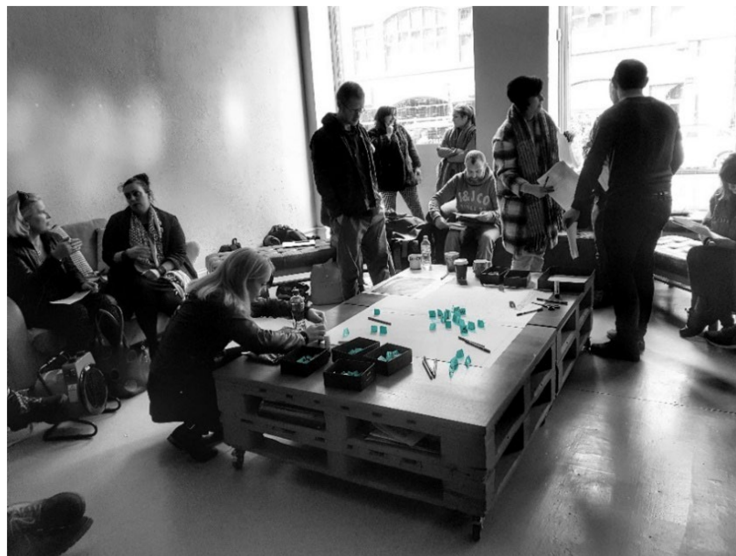


Figure 2.3, *Critical Cartographies #1* (top); *#2* (middle), *#3* (bottom) 2016–2018

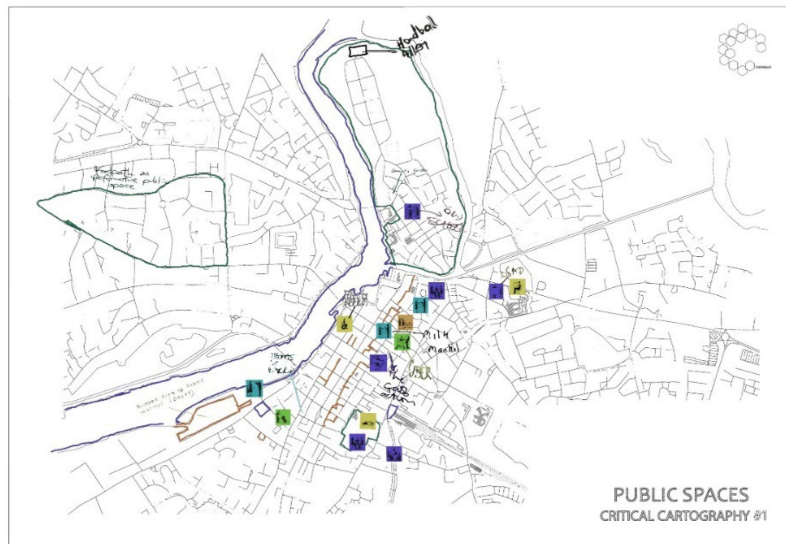


Figure 2.4, *Critical Cartographies #1* (top); *#2* (middle), *#3* (bottom) 2016–2018.

institutions, cultural spaces and persons not aligned with any particular position, who engaged in a collective production of knowledge and action. That community of practice formed a kind of relational infrastructure for the practice-based research, which I 'mapped' publicly and in real time, using an online tool, Graph Commons.[16] The purpose of that mapping was to show the wide range of actors involved in generating such a complex work, and the extent to which such work is dependent upon institutional relations and the goodwill of small, semi-public or private venues (Fig. 2.5). The motility of the Graph Commons 'map' visualises the flux of relational infrastructure and the matrix of personal, professional, institutional and transactional interactions that support a practice.

A more focused 'community of praxis' (Curnow, 2016: 35) emerged from that initial group (Woods, 2019). A community of praxis, according to Curnow, recognises the need to transform the social relations within which their collective production of knowledge and action takes place. This is what Allman described as 'critical praxis' (Allman, 2001: 6), the understanding that material conditions and social relations are bound together, and that they must be changed together. Critical praxis in this sense is prefigurative, the active strategy of forming new social relations through action (Maeckelbergh, 2011). The community of praxis that emerged from the early research actions became foundational to the collective and embodied meaning-making processes of the aesthetic event, *LCI*, working with social relations of production based on the principle of commoning, as well as generating the material actions through a dialogical process. That group are identified in Chapter Six as the core group.

[16] https://graphcommons.com/

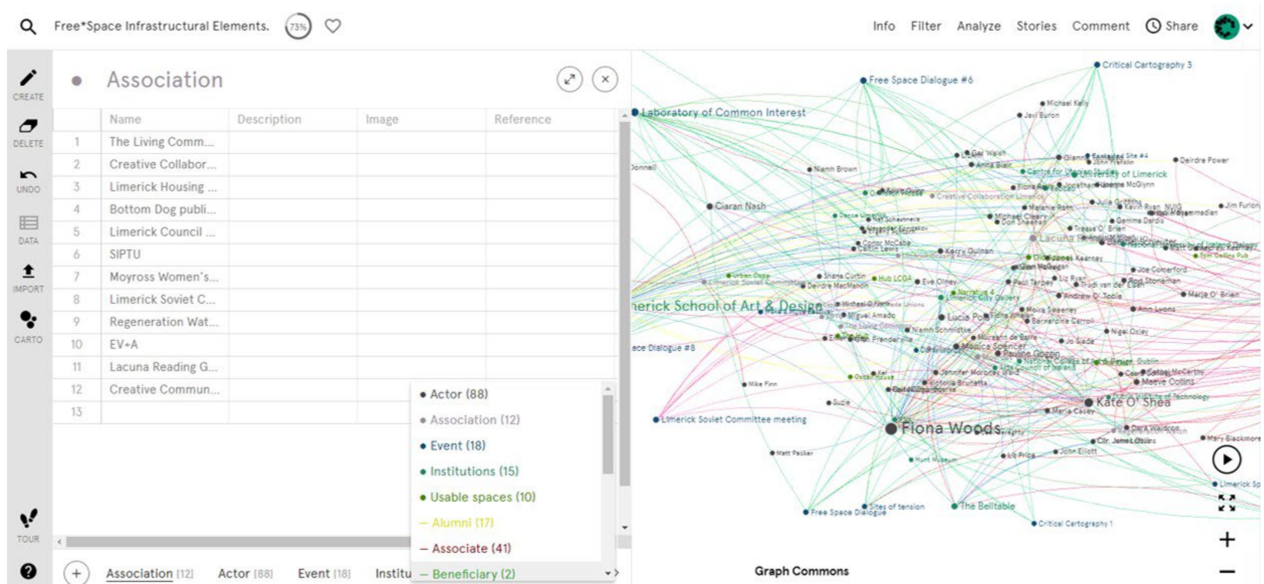


Figure 2.5, Fiona Woods, 2020, *Free*Space Infrastructural Elements graph,* screenshot, available at https://graphcommons.com/graphs/3b11d5a0-8748-48aa-a4c5-9bafdaf524b3?

2.4 Aesthetic events (æ)

The contrasting methodologies of CM and æ find a common denominator in the concept and practice of cognitive mapping. The term, borrowed from urban theory, was employed by Jameson to describe ways of visualising and making sense of what is impossible to think or represent (Jameson, 1992: 3). Humans have a strong desire to understand the matrix of forces that shape our world, but systems of power are so complex that they cannot be grasped through the categories of perception that are naturally available to us (ibid.: 2), leading to what Jameson describes as a paralysis of the social and political imaginary (ibid.: 7). Conspiracy theories, he argues, are a mode of representation that offer relief from that paralysis because they create 'answers', however illogical.

Cognitive mapping in Jameson's terms refers to the construction of an interpretative grid that points beyond the imaginary limits of the immediate political horizon (ibid.). One of the stakes in Jameson's account of cognitive mapping concerns 'representability' (ibid.: 4). Existing modes of representation and sense-making are inadequate; 'the terms that lie to hand, indeed, are already figural, already soaked and saturated in ideology' (ibid.: 2), not least the terms map/mapping/cartography. Jameson is clear that cognitive mapping 'cannot involve anything so easy as a map' (ibid.: 409). In fact, he says, 'all figures of maps and mapping' have to be set aside to make room for something else to be imagined (ibid.). For Jameson, cartography is the problem, 'at least in its ideal epistemological form as social cognitive mapping on a global scale' (Jameson, 2007: 158, in Toscano and Kinkle, 2015: 249).

The impossibility of grasping the totality of the world system disrupts 'common-sense perception' (1992: 9), it inaugurates a crisis of perception. Jameson's call for 'an aesthetics of cognitive mapping' (Jameson, 1992: 11) alludes to a form of representability that does not yet exist. He is not anticipating anything akin to a map, which belongs to what he describes as an

‘older aesthetic’ (ibid.: 11). The call is rather for a reconfiguration of the modes of aisthesis by which the totality may be communicated. Cognitive mapping is not theoretical in Jameson’s account, but a mode of praxis oriented towards identifying and taking advantage of the points at which power’s reproduction of its own field is weak. Parallels can be drawn with Rancière’s theories regarding power’s field of exercise as a regime of sensibility, a system of norms, practices, figurations and customs determining what can be thought, what can be seen and what can be said. The contestatory process that Rancière identifies as ‘dissensus’ (Rancière, 2010: 139) emerges from a gap between what is sensed and how sense is made of that, not unlike like Jameson’s aesthetic of cognitive mapping. While Jameson is calling for a system of interpretation on the one hand, the need for new, unsystematised modes of aisthesis are also inherent in that call. Just like trying to imagine a colour that does not yet exist, the search for new, unsystematised modes of aisthesis is an elusive concept, an attempt to engage with what we do not yet know how to perceive.

The aesthetic work of this research has attempted to grapple with this problem, working in a feedback loop between sensing and sense-making. The æ methodology can be understood as a response to that problematic. While CM places a structured and systematic approach at the centre of the methodology, it also harbours the contradiction that Jameson’s critique laid bare. In the face of the crisis of perception that enables the ongoing reproduction of a violent, heteropatriarchal, anthropocentric, extractivist, hyper-capitalist system, modes of sense-making associated with mapping, even the most critical, cartographic practices are potentially misleading, epistemologically speaking. Jameson’s call for ‘an aesthetics of cognitive mapping’, which rejects ‘the map’ and demands unprecedented forms of representation, aligns closely with another radical, critical position, decolonial aesthetics (Mignolo and Vazquez, 2013), which calls for a reconfiguration of the modes of aisthesis entangled with what Anibal

Quijano describes as 'coloniality' (2000).[17] Coloniality is a logic of modernity that embeds itself into our bodies, institutions and social systems (ibid.), through aesthetic processes that convert 'structures of power into structures of feeling' (Eagleton, 1992: 21). It is also central to the paradigm of extractivism and enclosure.

The question of how to pay attention aesthetically without reaffirming the aesthetico-political regime of coloniality, and how to make space for the emergence of what we don't yet know how to perceive, has been influential in the articulation and practice of æ. Perpendicular to the systematisation of CM, æ holds a place for the richness, strangeness and ambivalence of the aesthetic, the poetics of its productions, its particular politics and modes of agency and action. Posthuman and Decolonial aesthetics contest the dominance of visuality in the repertoire of aesthetic work, viewing the optical as a significant tool in the reproduction of the logics of conquest and alienation (Wolfe, 2009; Gómez-Báris, 2017). Experiments with haptic and embodied modes of aisthesis, at the 'intersecting spatial, corporeal, affective and informational dimensions of being entangled with the world' (Adash, Cnaani and Schmitz, 2020), are present in *LCI.* The work embraced a strategy described as *the choreographic,* a mode of haptic and embodied sense-making that is polyphonic, agential, open to reinterpretation and reconfiguration by any, or all, of the social actors involved. The choreographic operates at micro- and macro-levels, the latter in the form of social choreography, as described by Hewitt (2005), which is the subject of the following section.

2.4.1 Social choreography

In his work, *Social Choreography, Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement* (2005), Andrew Hewitt argues that a social order has a choreography, a way in which it

[17] Decolonial aesthetics is discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven.

structures the movement or non-movement of bodies, both individual and collective. Hewitt sets out 'to think the aesthetic as it operates at the very base of experience' (ibid.: 2). By embedding the choreographic in social practices and configurations, according to Klein, Hewitt's work has emphasised the extent to which social perception is regulated by 'the norms, rules and customs [that] already control perception by spacing people socially, allocating them social and political manoeuvring space' (Klein, 2013: 32). As the title suggests, Hewitt's understanding of choreography is not confined to the medium of dance. He draws explicitly on Althusser's theory of ideology as a spatial determination of social formations but focuses on the ways in which bodies move and are moved in the 'spatial dynamics of ideological formation' (Salazar Sutil and Whatley, 2018a).

In his study, Hewitt examines moments from the history of dance where aestheticised movements seem to correspond to unfolding modes of social relation, but he considers dance as part of a continuum of conventionalised gestures that have historical, social and geographical specificity. In Hewitt's words, choreography identifies what he describes as 'a sliding or gray zone where discourse meets practice' (Hewitt, interviewed by Pristaš, 2013: 2). This 'zone', for Hewitt, was instrumental in a bourgeois redefinition of 'the boundaries of aesthetics and politics' (ibid.), an idea that has affinities with Rancière's formulation of the politics of aesthetics as it emerged from the bourgeois revolution.

Like Eagleton, Hewitt begins with the work of the philosopher poet Friedrich von Schiller, in this case his reflections on English dance (1794). Like Eagleton, Hewitt sees this operation of aesthetics at 'the very base of human experience' (2005: 2) as a key component in the shaping and calibration of the discriminative capacities of the newly emerging bourgeois class, one of its identifying and self-regulating features (Eagleton, 1992: 29). Hewitt makes the case that ideology can be understood as the corporeal enactment of a political unconscious to

which aesthetics is immanent (2005). For Hewitt, the political agent is not 'a purely somatic body that acts from some form of urge or untrammeled pre-social drive' (Hewitt, interviewed by Pristaš, 2013: 8), nor is it a transcendental subject or 'the bourgeois subject of ego psychology' (ibid.). It is, he argues, 'the one operating through the other – the subject aware of its historical objectivity through the medium of its body' (ibid.). Choreography, for Hewitt, offers a way of thinking about individual in relationship to the social order and 'a way of thinking about the relationship of aesthetics to politics' (ibid.: 2).

Hewitt's ideas have been interrogated from many perspectives. Mark Franko is critical of Hewitt's merging of the terms social[18] and choreography, arguing that he does not make clear what is meant by either term (Franko, 2006: 191). He finds that while Hewitt wants to situate the choreographic in the parapraxic corporeality of everyday movement (ibid.), he engages with choreography through a dominantly textual lens that erases the complexity of the 'social base' that Hewitt seeks to excavate (ibid.). Practitioners and scholars (Cveić and Vujanović, 2013; Klein, 2013; Milohnić, 2013; Salazar Sutil and Whatley, 2018) have taken up and developed Hewitt's concept through the lens of practice, to describe 'an open cluster of knowledge production concerned with the organisation of bodily movement in social, political and even economic contexts' (Salazar Sutil and Whatley, 2018).

Social choreography offers ways of articulating what Lepecki describes as 'kinaesthetic politics' (Lepecki, 2006), a hegemonic and counter-hegemonic spacing, moving and/or situating of bodies, whether at a macro-scale such as the displacement of bodies and the movements of the displaced across boundaries and borders, or at a micro-scale, for example,

[18] A broad working definition of 'the social' is employed in this research as the field of relations through which power is exercised; powers concentrates into nodes such as institutions, modes of 'policing' (in Rancière's terms), flows and borders, modes of production and reproduction, distributions of resources. Rancière's relatively loose account of 'the distribution of the sensible' (2004) looks at that field of relations through the lens of sensibility and sense-making, which is the form most relevant to this research.

the ways that bodies are directed through urban space and even corralled based on class and race, whether in single-class estates, gated communities, traveller encampments or refugee holding facilities.

Amongst the choreographers who have extended and developed Hewitt's idea of social choreography is Gabrielle Klein. Echoing Hewitt, Klein understands the aesthetic as being 'embedded in political and social practices and social figurations' (Klein, 2013: 32). This idea reflects a Rancièrean understanding of the imbrication of politics and aesthetics in the social field, which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five. It was through the work of Klein that I was introduced to Real Time Composition (Fiadeiro, 2010), which its originator, João Fiadeiro, describes as a contradictory practice, because it draws on existing knowledges, and anticipates a future composition but unfolds in response to the immediate conditions of an situation. For Fiadeiro, the purpose of Real Time Composition is to form 'a sensitivity towards the manifestations . . .of difference that are constantly emerging inside (and around) life' (Fiadeiro, n.d.). Nothing happens as a result of actions by a single agent; the work emerges through 'a collision of a series of crossed events within a matrix of premises and principles' (ibid.). This idea took on an important role in defining the work of *LCI,* as the following section will show.

2.4.2 Real-time composition

Shannon Jackson has argued that a great deal of 'expanded' art, including its socially engaged forms, employs 'the fundamental registers of theatre – duration, embodiment, spectacle, ensemble, text, sound, gesture, situated space' (Jackson, 2011: 19) although it rejects 'the artifice . . . of the theatrical (ibid.: 20). It can be argued that the technique of real-time composition is also evident in socially engaged aesthetic works. *LCI* was undertaken as a real-

time composition, working consciously with a strategy of *the choreographic* as a multi-actor production, polyphonic, agential, open to reinterpretation and reconfiguration by any, or all, of the social actors involved. As a mode of aisthesis, *the choreographic* is haptic, embodied and emergent; it involves clusters, points of connection and voids. It invokes the position of bodies[19] in space and the relations of those bodies to one another in the social production of space. The value of that strategy in *LCI* lay in a way of thinking about the poetics of the work, its modes of bringing meaning into being in the spaces between bodies, between perceptions, between the known and the unknown, between different types of socio-spatial production.

By making the idea of the choreographic explicit in the preparations and dialogues for *LCI,* the community of coproducers were invited to pay critical attention to the haptical, sensory dimensions of our coming together to form a temporary 'we'. When people come together for a common purpose, a fragile resonance develops. The privatisation of experience makes collective action difficult. To enact the common, practices of commoning must pay attention to, and make space for, that vulnerability and its extension into collective action. The strategy of the choreographic also focused attention on the aesthetical and ethical dynamics immanent to the spaces that developed between bodies, objects and structures in the real-time composition of the work.

By acknowledging the choreographic as a component of the work it opened that element of the practice to critical analysis. Drawing people together for a particular purpose, namely the material-discursive construction of a potentially common space, amounted to a kind of social ordering of bodies. A tangible *infrastructure* – conceptual, material and aesthetic – was

[19] Body here is understood through the idea of body-as-situation, introduced by philosopher Simone de Beauvoir in the seminal text *The Second Sex* (1949). Thinking the body as situation opens onto a range of critical perspectives, in which the body can be understood as a material-discursive event, a relational process, a porous thing in itself and a fragmented construction, emerging at the intersection of biological, ideological, relational and structural forces, a site at which meanings are made and onto which meanings are projected.

put in place to support the possible emergence of unfamiliar, haptic, embodied modes of sense-making, which is discussed in detail in Chapter Six. In *LCI,* the choreographic crossed over with other strategies including *the infrastructural* and *the diagrammatic,* also discussed fully in Chapter Six. Chapter Seven brings the CM and æ approaches together as a series of diagrammatic enunciations of the real-time composition of *LCI.* The diagrams are further iterations of the event; they operate as forms of knowledge-making and ways of emphasising unresolved, open conditions of *in-between*, shifting and mutable relations in a collaborative, evental space.

2.5 CM/æ in the overall research framework

The general methodology of PAR was discussed in Chapter One, particularly its principles and methods as those relate to the socially engaged dimensions of my practice. A research paradigm developed in 2016/17 (Table 1.1) identified a gap in the framework where the collaborative and aesthetic work could not map onto the social science research paradigm, no matter how nuanced that became. Arts practice as academic research is a peculiar condition, even more so when the work is collaborative. When collaborative work is framed as 'art', even when it rejects that framing (almost) entirely, as in the case of Wright's non-ontological condition of User Art (2014), it generates a supplement that is both of and apart from the conditions of its production. Garoian's account of art's 'prosthetic ontology' (2013) refers to this phenomenon. The analogy of prosthesis highlights properties of expansion, extension, conjunction and hybridity that art brings to a social situation, its ways of opening one reality onto another. The CM/æ methodology was capable of hosting this ontological specificity, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter Five.

The second problem that emerged in the research paradigm was epistemological, concerning the nature of artistic knowledge. As Bolt describes it, artistic research tends to operate in a critical relationship to 'conventions that mark the work as 'artistic' or as 'research' in the first place' (Bolt, 2016). To the extent that it models and/or contests ideas of knowledge and knowing in relation to the academic project of Western knowledge (Lather, 2016), the epistemology of APBR is open and mutable. Its knowledge-making endeavours are recursive and performative, its instruments and objects active and emergent (Barrett, 2014). The third problem was that the traditional research paradigm could not account for the richness, strangeness and ambivalence of the aesthetic, the vital role played by uncertainty and contrary imaginings. Those things necessitated a different kind of research framework, such as that afforded by Sullivan's complex model of APR (2010). The three problems described were not clearly articulated prior to engaging with APR; Sullivan's model made it possible to articulate the specifics of the aesthetic practices as-research, and helped to situate the structure, agency and action dynamic as it unfolded in phenomenological and theoretical registers.

The CM/æ methodology was attuned to the production of action-based knowledge and to modes of poiesis arising from embodied and collectivised forms of sense-making. Where CM attempted to explain, systematise and critically encapsulate, æ operated to keep a space open for 'what we do not yet know how to know' (Rogoff, 2015), or even know how to perceive. The practice of real-time composition, drawing on dialogical, choreographic and diagrammatic strategies, brought different sensory regimes into proximity. Modes of collective sensing and sense-making arose from the spaces between bodies, actions, temporalities, ways of knowing and ways of making; they did not necessarily resolve as conclusive positions. This logic of CM/æ led me to expand Sullivan's triad by adding a fourth node to the triad of interpretive, empirical and critical research traditions; the poetic (Fig. 1.5). That addition, the

research contends, asserts the productive and generative role of the space 'between what is known and what is not' (Sullivan, 2010: 244), without trying to resolve it, part of what APBR brings to the landscape of academic research.

2.6 Conclusions

CM/æ provides a set of principles and tools to bring the messy reality of collective processes of meaning-making into dialogue with formal processes of knowledge-making, and vice versa. In this critical investigation, it operated at the core of the aesthetic work, something that becomes more apparent as the thesis moves from a consideration of the more infrastructural aspects of the research to an engagement with its ways of manifesting through aesthetic actions.

When Jameson called for 'an aesthetics of cognitive mapping' (Jameson, 1992: 11) he was acknowledging a crisis of perception arising from the failure of existing modes of representation to provide critical tools to make sense of the workings of power. Mapping, he argued, can be put to work to obscure the crisis of representability, and to establish coordinates of sense-making, such as Rancière associates with the police order (2004). However, mapping is also a social and spatial practice that is embodied, haptic, aesthetic and cognitive before it is representational. Critical mapping is a process of sense-making that is often collective and intertextual. Maps that result from that process can offer counter-hegemonic accounts of spatio-temporal formations, reinserting the messy business of lived experience into the abstract spaces generated through the cartographic gaze.

In the following chapters, the focus of the thesis turns to the socio-spatial conditions of Limerick city, and the aesthetic actions that addressed those conditions directly. CM was central to that work. Its ways of analysing, organising and categorising – of making sense – were vital in the face of the messy reality of the material order and social conditions that were

sensed on the ground. As the work moved towards prefigurative praxis as a way of responding to those conditions, the process needed to be reversed, opening ideas and propositions to a haptic, embodied and collective process of meaning-making through which to enact the common. æ created conditions for processes of collective sense- and meaning-making, drawing on techniques and strategies of CM, but making space for more nuanced, uncertain and emergent forms. These matters become apparent in the chapters that follow.

Chapter Three: ~~Public~~

This chapter focuses on two aesthetic actions that addressed the problematic of enclosure directly. The effects of neoliberalism on urban space are generally recognised as anti-democratic, resulting in entanglements of financial and market-based technologies with practices of enclosure and systemic discrimination (Harvey, 2004; 2012; Rendell, 2006, 2016; Wacquant, 2008; Low and Smith, 2006). The problematic of enclosure generates acute concentrations of wealth and power that spawn what Sassen has described as 'predatory formations' (Sassen, 2014b: 7), forces that operate at various scales and intensities in different parts of the world. The critical, investigative aspect of this research set out to examine how those forces manifest at a local level in Limerick city, and how they might be contested. Two processes were identified to which the research actions responded; the socio-spatial phenomenon identified as ~~public~~ and one of the processes through which that condition of ~~public~~ is constituted, identified as the economisation of space.

Publicness is a complex knot of processes, dynamics and a contradictory politics that was central to the articulation of the research problem at the outset of this APBR. There is a long-term engagement in my practice with the phenomenon of publicness as a social and political imaginary, and as a field of experience where 'the many can attend to common affairs' (Virno, 2004). Contemporary public life has taken on a different aspect under the all-pervasive, monolithic lens of 'the Economy' that dominates neoliberal society. Simon Sheikh has described this new configuration as a 'post-public condition' (Sheikh, 2007). 'Post-public', according to Sheikh, is not after or beyond public, but 'a critical re-examination of its leitmotifs and basic modalities, where the bourgeois notion of the public, and its adjacent counterpublics, appear to us in the form of a phantom' (ibid.: 6). Public has become a floating signifier

exploited by the state-corporate nexus to mask and to normalise the emergence of pseudo-public space (Shenker, 2017), a hollowed-out form of publicness stripped of the principle of common interest. The term post-public, coined by Sheikh in 2007, retains a critical publicness as a kind of 'phantom'. Pseudo-public describes a deceptive appearance of publicness that masks a distortion of the critical values of 'public', as I will discuss. I devised the lexigraph ~~public~~ to convey that distortion as a sustained condition. To strike out a term, as Spivak writes, is to place it 'under erasure' (Spivak, 1974: xiv), by printing the original word and its 'deletion', in the form of the striking out. 'Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible' (ibid.: xiv).

These insights emerged through an analysis of the substance and structuration of publicness, its purported values and relations to privatisation and inequality, the basis of its unruly and contestatory powers and the internal contradictions between its ideal form and material realisation. Theoretical and practice-based explorations gradually revealed that the acute operations of enclosure and extractivism could not be grasped through the lens of ~~public~~ alone. Drawing from gentrification studies, critical geography and urban theory, and working through a live, critical spatial practice, *the economisation of space* was pinpointed as an operation in the production of alienated and alienating spaces in Limerick city. Economisation is well-recognised as one of the primary objects and effects of the neoliberal project (Stigler, 1961; Harvey, 2005; Peck, 2010; Brown, 2019). Its logics are embedded in the regulatory mechanisms that shape key aspects of governance, demanding of bureaucrats and government operatives that they translate aspects of social life that may once have been expressed in terms of well-being, fairness or care into the language of the market, with deeply distorting effects. *The economisation of space* was employed in this research to refer to a process of meaning-making that frames urban space through the totalising logic of 'the Economy' in such a way

that local inhabitants are drawn into a performative idea of what the city means and who it is for. It is a process of alienation closely linked to the condition identified as ~~public~~.

While public is usually contrasted with the idea of private, attempts to distinguish between public and private soon reveal an interdependence and set of overlaps that make it difficult to demarcate a definite boundary (Low and Smith, 2006: 5–6). Analysis exposed a fundamental, structural conflict arising from the need to integrate factual inequalities generated by systems of private property with the appearance of social solidarity that is necessary for the functioning of democracy. It became apparent that publicness is enmeshed in the structures of property relations, meaning that the value of publicness, as a site from which to contest the economisation of space and wider forces of enclosure, was called into question.

In this and the following chapter, matters laid out thus far in the thesis are grounded in the messy reality of practice through a discussion of a series of aesthetic actions, *Contested Sites,* which were designed to seek out fissures and fault-lines in the dominant production of space in Limerick city. The actions combined different modalities of CM with spatial practices, representations of space and spaces of representation (following Lefebvre). A multi-modal discourse analysis of the representations of space at each ‘contested site’, including official documents, revealed areas of emphasis and omission that pointed to overarching logics and dynamics shaping the production of space in the city. An engagement with the material conditions of each of the contested sites threw up the fragments, residues and messy contingencies of lived space that are usually flattened by the abstraction of space. *CS* actions studied ‘public’ spaces where the social imaginary of the site was in conflict with its material reality, or contradictory logics were seen to be operating at the site, or where forces of abstraction could be identified. The *CS* actions were made public in real-time through *Free*Space,* an online platform that made the research public from the outset, as following

sections will make clear. To set the foundations of these actions, the following section lays out a genealogy of publicness, a necessary basis for a critique of its internal dynamics.

3.1 The unstable dynamics of public

Public can be understood as a social institution,[20] given that it has endured as a politico-legal form, discursively and in practice, for over two thousand years. Public is an amalgamation of social, spatial and cultural ideals and realities which are neither fixed nor stable. It is approached here as a complex socio-spatial dynamic that involves power relations, spatial and discursive productions of social order, economic flows, administrative and financial instruments, multiple forms of policing, practices of contestation, potential violence and political challenge. Authorities and commercial interests expend considerable amounts of energy persuading, managing, regulating, policing, structuring, misleading, educating and manipulating the interests of this public, indicating that publicness operates as a kind of force with which dominant interests must reckon.

Public refers to different domains of publicness – public space, public realm and public sphere. It is not possible to maintain a complete separation between these categories, as they overlap considerably. For the purpose of clarity, the term public space is used here to refer to the socio-spatial dimension of civic and/or collective life, which may involve different degrees of management, from the most informal to the formal. Public realm refers largely to infrastructure and what might be called the space of policymaking (in general usage the term is sometimes used to include public space). The public sphere is a complex, discursive formation of particular importance in this research.

[20] Huntington's definition of institutions as 'stable, valued, recurring patterns of behaviour' is what is intended here (Huntington 1965: 394).

Contemporary usage of the term public often conflates these different domains, generating a degree of complexity that is reflected in the many things that 'public' is understood to designate: a political value closely associated with democracy and citizenship (Pocock, 1992); a set of spatial and political practices, (Low and Smith, 2006; Massey, 2005; Lefebvre, 1991; Harvey, 2012; Rendell, 2006; 2016); a physical and communicative arena of exchange (Habermas, 1989); an ideational norm (Eagelton, 1992; Fraser, 1990; Negt and Kluge, 1993); and a social form and imaginary (Rancière, 2004; Warner, 2002a, 2002b). In spite of being heavily colonised by a 'private consciousness industry' (Negt and Kluge 1993: 10), or what Henry Giroux terms 'public pedagogy' (2014: 8),[21] public continues to operate as a contested site for the production of a social imaginary.

The unpredictable power of publicness is also evident in the extent to which counterpublics manifest in spite of strategies of control (Warner, 2002a), and they ways in which those counterpublics are often framed as something other than publics – troublemakers, deviants, rioters, mobs, trespassers, subversives, delinquents – to undermine the legitimacy of their position. Public denotes a conflicted relationship between power, agency and idealism, in a social form that gives an appearance of continuity whilst being constantly reshaped by the convergence of social, technical, institutional and ideological factors.

The political concept of public is foundational to the system of democracy in Europe, drawing its legitimacy from two classical systems in which matters of space, deliberation and the politics of inclusion and exclusion were entangled. Publicness was marked as a space and as a discursive process in the *agora* of Athenian democracy (5th–4th centuries BC), the forum within the marketplace where members of the polis could engage in open debate about matters

[21] Public pedagogy can be understood as 'a powerful ensemble of ideological and institutional forces whose aim is to produce competitive, self-interested individuals vying for their own material and ideological gain' (Giroux, 2014: 8).

of common interest as a prelude to voting in the *ekklesia* or legislative assembly of citizens. In the Roman political system (3rd C. BC–1st C. AD) the term *civis Romanus* referred to those who participated in the self-governing assemblies of the Roman republic. In both cases, spaces were designated where citizens (equal members of a self-governing polity) were at liberty to speak openly on matters of common interest. Citizenship was, however, a restricted and conditional category in both regimes, available only to a minority (Fraser, 1990). 'Public' spaces were never accessible to all people equally, a contradiction between the ideal and the practice that continues to shape the phenomenon of publicness to the present day (Low and Smith, 2006).

In 'The Ideal of Citizenship since Classical Times' (1992), J.G.A. Pocock traces the interrelated history of the concepts of public and citizenship. The freedom to take part in public decisions, identified by Aristotle as a public good in itself, constituted '(a) non-operational or non-instrumental definition of politics (that) has remained part of our definition of freedom ever since and explains the role of citizenship in it' (Pocock, 1992: 34). The Athenian citizen took part in the making and determining of the laws by which he was governed, but he did so in the context of a strict separation between the realms of private and public. Instrumental action was understood as relating almost entirely to the *oikos*, the material infrastructure that was necessary to confer access to the polis, but from which one must be emancipated in order to enter into the ideational world of politics. Citizenship was based on this rigorous distinction and was the means by which one came to be fully human according to Aristotle's definition of the human as 'a creature formed to live a political life' (ibid.: 35). Citizenship and the political life depended upon the existence of a class of people to whom citizenship was denied, 'on the grounds that they are too much involved in the world of things – in material, productive, domestic or reproductive relationships' (ibid.: 36).

These matters took a different shape under Roman law. The citizen was no longer understood primarily as a political entity but as a legal one, existing 'in a world of persons, actions and things regulated by law' (ibid.: 36). The citizen became one who possessed things, including the rights of citizenship, 'someone free to act by law, free to ask and expect the law's protection, a citizen of a legal community' (ibid.: 37). A connection between the idea of 'rights' and the primacy of private property was forged in this milieu; 'it is in jurisprudence,' writes Pocock 'long before the rise and supremacy of the market, that we should locate the origins of possessive individualism' (ibid.: 36). While the notion of commonwealth was formalised as the basis of political organisation in the *Res Publica*,[22] individual property rights were also enshrined, generating contradictions that continue to manifest up to the present day.

An attempt to reconcile the incompatibility of private ownership with the equitable social relations of publicness was incorporated into the system of democratic governance that re-emerged (following the Medieval period) in the republican city-state of Florence (1115–1532). Recognised as one of the origin points of modern capitalism, with a substantial banking industry that gave rise to considerable financial power (Goldthwaite, 2009), this 'merchant republic' (Trexler, 1991: 19) demonstrated many of the contradictions between public as an ideal and as a reality that continue to characterise modes of governance in capitalist democratic systems. 'In merchant republics like Florence, claims that the government stood above mere business and pursued a high purpose were palpably hollow' (ibid.: 19). The possibility of upward social mobility via the accumulation of wealth by trade was socially sanctioned but a scrupulous system of short-term office holding by a rotation of citizens, designed to 'guard

[22] *Res publica* is translated variously to mean public matter, public thing, common thing but Zetzel's translation of Cicero's writings on *Res Publica* uses commonwealth as the most accurate translation in terms of the Roman political system at the time (2017: xxxi). Cicero, 2017, (trans.) Zetzel, J., *On the Commonwealth, and On the Laws,* [second edition] Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

against inequality' (ibid.: 27) was counterbalanced by a 'complex, sub-governmental system of clientage built upon concepts of famiglia' (ibid.: 27).

According to Trexler, the contrary demands placed on a citizen in his role as temporary public servant, versus his ongoing role as the obligated member of an extended family, are indicative of the horizontal and vertical axes of a political regime that espouses equality on the one hand and a liberal view of private property on the other. 'The essential characteristic of the patronal network was behaviourally to combine equality and inequality, inducing fraternal solidarity while vertically integrating factual inequality' (ibid.: 28). These dynamics continue to operate in systems of governance based on the pre-eminence of the rights of private property. The public face of representative democracy appeals to an ideal community of 'free' individuals, whilst generating a 'competitive order' in practice (Habermas, 1989: 132) through the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities along a vertical axis of privilege. These matters are well known; in the context of this inquiry, the economisation of space was found to be one of those mechanisms promoting inequality in the name of equality, which is discussed in later sections.

3.1.1 Going Public: *Free*Space*

The fault-lines of publicness, the nuances of publicness and the scope of its contestatory power are clarified by reading the form through critical theories. Nancy Fraser points out that many counterpublics arose in parallel to the dominant bourgeois public 'including nationalist publics, popular peasant publics, elite women's publics and working-class publics' (1990: 116). The masculinism of the early modern republics denied to women, who were active in the revolution, the rights of suffrage, violently suppressing women's demands for a political voice, which resulted in the sublimation of a relational and material shadow at the core of the

liberal model of citizenship. These ‘subaltern counterpublic(s)’ (ibid.: 137), self-organising, contingent, unstable and unpredictable, demonstrate the true functioning of publicness, according to Michael Warner (Warner 2002a), as a social space that forms around a matter of common interest among those whose interests are excluded from the space of public speech.

In their Queer reading of public space, ‘Sex in Public’ (1998), Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner take up a version of Nancy Fraser’s question ‘what counts as a public matter?’ (Fraser, 1990) to critique the ‘hierarchies of property and propriety’ (Berlant and Warner, 1998: 548) associated with heteronormative privilege. The conventions of intimacy associated with heteronormativity depend on structural differentiations that place personal life apart from other matters ‘such as work, politics and the public sphere, . . . [to] block the building of non-normative or explicit public sexual cultures’ (ibid.: 553). Privatisation, they argue, is a constellation of practices that separates the moral from the economic (ibid.: 554) and personhood from citizenship (ibid.: 559). The world-making project of Queer culture depends on an appeal to a social imaginary formed by ‘going public’ (Warner, 2002a: 63), appealing to matters one has in common with strangers by creating a social space of reflexive discourse.

It was a priority of this practice-based research from the outset to create a space for the circulation of a counterpublic discourse, to generate a social imaginary around an idea of acting collectively out of common interest. An online, public, field journal, *Free*Space,* was live from early on as a means of ‘going public’. What began as a way of logging the process soon became a system of cognitive mapping to try to understand and to make visible structures and mechanisms of inequality underpinning the condition of ~~public~~. Limerick is a small city to which neoliberal politics and economics came late. That made it an ideal situation to examine generative mechanisms producing abstracted space and to look at the possibilities of generating differential spaces of *‘disalienation’* (Lefebvre quoted in Wilson, 2013, author’s italics)

discussed in Chapter Two. As the research progressed, *Free*Space* became a more substantial public platform and a basis for the development of a cooperative infrastructure, building towards the project *LCI*, which is discussed in Chapter Six.

*Free*Space* manifested in the material space of the city as a series of public dialogues, screenings and aesthetic actions, including *Money, Space and Cinema* (2017), 4 screening and dialogue events, *CC,* discussed in Chapters Two and Three, and *CS*, actions to be discussed in a following section. Those actions were particularly important in generating the conditions for a social space of reflexive discourse towards which the strategy of going public is directed. In this regard, the role of the public sphere as 'a site of discursive contestation' (Hansen, 1993: xxix) was crucial to the work. The function of *Free*Space* as a platform for a counterpublic discourse is apparent in my response to an event organised by Limerick City and County Council in May 2017. Described as a 'World Café Consultation Event', organised by the 'cross party Culture and Arts Working Group', the event took place in the Savoy Hotel in Limerick, a relatively upmarket venue. The purpose of the event was to 'gather views that will form the recommendations that will go to Council on a new model of delivery for Culture and Arts in Limerick' (Woods, 2017b). The event was led by the director of a consultancy group 'which focuses on helping clients to deliver positive social and economic changes' (ibid.).

The consultation was an excellent example of pseudo-publicness. A corporate presentation established a narrow set of ideas concerning 'culture' in Limerick, its 'priorities' and 'successes'. In a tightly choreographed, 15-minute round-table event, people were asked to brainstorm those priorities, with no indication at all how those would be fed back into any larger process of decisions-making. There was no tolerance for any questioning of the format or the method of capturing views. Critical questions posed by this researcher were not included in the feedback given by the table moderator. Fig. 3.1 shows some of my notes from that event.

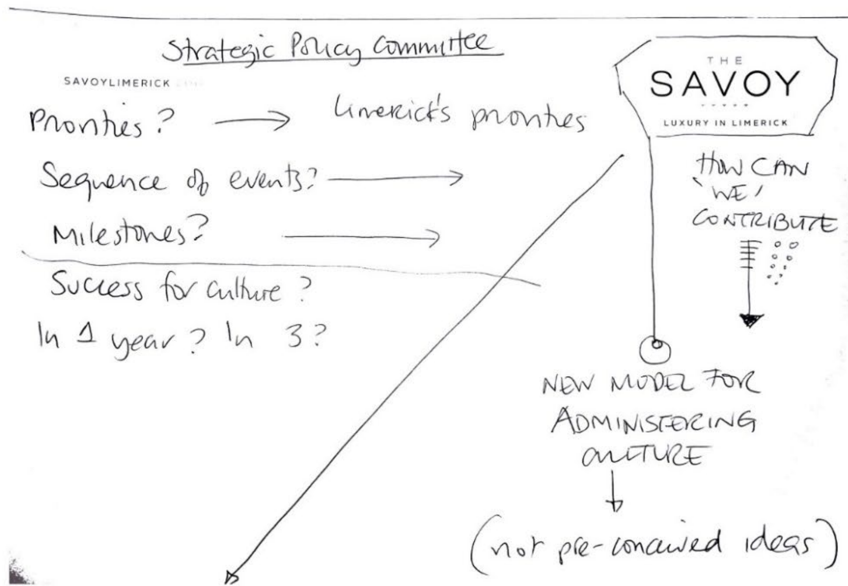


Figure 3.1, Notes by the author during the a 'World Café Consultation Event', organised by the 'cross party Culture and Arts Working Group' of Limerick City and County Council, May 2017 (for more details see Woods, 2017b).

A full account of the event is given on *Free*Space,* which was the only public critique of the event that I could find online (Woods, 2017b).

3.1.2 The public sphere and its discontents

Arising from the communicative and deliberative aspects of publicness, Jürgen Habermas theorised the existence and the functioning of a public sphere that formed a vital component of 18th/19th C bourgeois society, engendered by the Enlightenment belief in the power of reasoned argument to constitute a world in which all citizens could be equal before the law. That law, by extension, would be universal and rational, emerging from a general public will to guarantee conditions of freedom for all (Habermas, 1989 [1962]: 108 – 109). The bourgeois public sphere mapped out by Habermas contained 'an element of truth and emancipatory potential' (ibid.), despite contradictions and 'ideological misrepresentations' (Calhoun, 1992: 2) that resulted from the inherent class limitations of the bourgeois social order. His analysis not only constituted the public sphere as a category of bourgeois society, but also charted its gradual 'depoliticisation . . . and its impoverishment by removal of critical discourse' (ibid.: 24).

Critics have argued that the Habermasian ideal of rational-critical debate as the proper medium of the public sphere contained normative aspects that occluded many of the complex processes of publicness and misrecognised some of its paradoxical energies. In spite of those critiques, Nancy Fraser has argued that the public sphere is an 'indispensable' conceptual resource that makes certain kinds of critical social-theoretical analysis possible (Fraser, 1990: 111). According to Calhoun, the importance of the public sphere 'lies in its potential as a mode of societal integration' (Calhoun, 1992: 6), in contrast to

> . . . money and power. . . non-discursive modes of coordination . . . (that) offer no intrinsic openings to the identification of reason and will and . . . suffer from tendencies towards reification and domination (Calhoun, 1992: 6).

The public sphere continues to have a legitimising function (Negt and Kluge, 1993: 3); however that has always produced a corresponding residue of illegitimacy. It is not simply that some things are left out of the representation of the social totality; the very terms by which things are made visible negate the conception of other forms of life, as Feminist and Queer critiques discussed earlier have articulated. The following section presents a class-based critique of the Habermasian public sphere by Oscar Negt and Alexander Kluge (1993 [1972]) which played a significant role in this research, in the *CS* actions in particular.

3.1.3 The shadow of the public sphere

Negt and Kluge's work, *Public Sphere and Experience; Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere,* (1993) critiques Habermas' analysis primarily on the basis that that the idealised general will of the public is not a transparent instrument of social equality, but a mechanism for the suppression of difference, what Miriam Hansen describes as a 'violent pseudo-synthesis of power, profit and meaning' (Hansen, 1993: xxxviii). Rather than seeing the lack of harmonious rationality as evidence of the failure of the ideal public sphere, Negt and Kluge embark on their analysis from the starting point of what they see as actually existing conditions, 'grounded in material structures, rather than abstract ideals of universality' (ibid.: xxix).

From that different starting point, a different conception of the public sphere emerges, as an unstable and potentially unpredictable process 'due to overlaps and conjunctures between different types of publicity and diverse publics' (ibid.: xxix). The supposed equality of those

who enter the ideal public sphere is rejected by Negt and Kluge, seeing instead a site of 'discursive contestation for and among multiple, diverse, and unequal constituencies' (ibid.: xxix). The public sphere functions both as a façade of legitimation and as 'a genuine articulation of a fundamental social need' (Negt and Kluge, 1993: 3); Negt and Kluge address this contradiction by positing a 'dominant public sphere' that operates as a representational apparatus which delegitimises elements of social experience by excluding and thereby negating them.

Underpinning their critique is a question about the relationship between critical theory and social practice in the light of 'real social experience' (ibid.: xliii). In her introduction to Negt and Kluge's work, Miriam Hansen spends some time teasing out the subtleties of the original German word *Erfahrung*, translated as the less complex English word experience. The German term, she explains, suggests a 'matrix that mediates individual perception and social horizons of meaning, including the collective experience of alienation, isolation, and privatisation' (ibid.: xvii). Negt and Kluge's project is to 'reconceptualise the public from the perspective of experience' (ibid.: xxix), laying stress on aspects such as 'openness, inclusiveness, multiplicity, heterogeneity, unpredictability, conflict, contradiction, difference' (ibid.: viii), from which new modes of expression and intersubjectivity might emerge. As such, Negt and Kluge's work was part of the call for new cultural practices that surfaced in the 1960's/70's,[23] in this case a call to rematerialise the public sphere, moving away from its purported abstract universality and engaging with its concrete instantiations. Ultimately, they

[23] 'The long march through the institutions' was a phrase coined in 1970 by a German student activist Rudi Dutschke to describe a strategy for establishing the conditions for revolution: subverting society by infiltrating established institutions. This slogan was picked up and used widely in the 1970's. Herbert Marcuse specifically referenced Dutshcke's strategy in his 1972 book *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (p 55).

argued for different concepts of public life and different principles of organisation (ibid.: xxi) than those set out by the model of the normative, bourgeois public sphere.

Negt and Kluge identify other spheres, less visible or dominant, that they argue are equally important as modes of meaning-making to produce social integration (or disintegration). The second public sphere which they address directly is actually an aggregate, what they call ‘the industrialised public spheres of production’ (Negt and Kluge, 1993: 13),[24] which arises from the non-public spheres of production, and overlays the dominant sphere. ‘The bourgeois public sphere's network of norms is under occupation by massive production interests to such a degree that it becomes an arsenal that can be deployed by private elements’ (ibid.: 16). This second sphere is constructed deliberately, not only for publicity, as in advertising and ‘the consciousness industry’ (ibid.: 13),[25] but for the purpose of legitimising power relations arising from the processes of production by seeming to inject them with interests that have been generalised through the medium of the dominant public sphere (ibid.: 14).

The public sphere of production aims to infiltrate and/or appropriate aspects of the life context that are excluded from the dominant public sphere. This is the realm of spectacular commodity fetishism (Debord, 1994), the process by which social relations are converted into abstract value-relations. Both public spheres produce ‘an image’ of a public sphere ‘manifested in the apparatus of distribution’ (Negt and Kluge, 1993: 16), which should not be confused with the structures of production of the public sphere but should neither be dismissed as mere publicity. As Hansen argues, the possibility of change for Negt and Kluge rests on a potential

[24] This form is variously referred to throughout the text as ‘public spheres of production’, ‘industrial-commercial public spheres’,’ industrialised spheres of production’,’ a deliberately manufactured non-public sphere’ etc. (pp. 11–16).
[25] The term is drawn from the Frankfurt School’s theory of the Culture Industry, in which popular culture was seen as a means of instilling ‘false consciousness’ in the masses (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002 [1947]).

for instability that can arise from 'accidental collisions and opportunities, for unpredictable conjunctures' (Hansen, 1993: xl) that come from 'uneven organisational structures of publicity' overlapping in fragmented public spheres (ibid.: xl). Those are the conditions from which new, collective arrangements may emerge.

The third sphere in their scheme, the proletarian public sphere, is something of a contradiction-in-terms in that it 'has no existence as a ruling public sphere, it has to be reconstructed from . . . rifts, marginal cases, isolated initiatives' (Negt and Kluge, 1993: xliii). This seems to correspond to a 'plebian public sphere' referred to in passing by Habermas, something that had been 'suppressed within the historical process' (Habermas, 1989: 8). Proletarian is used by Negt and Kluge to refer, not to the working class as such, but to a 'context of living' (Negt and Kluge, 1993: 6) that is fragmented, incoherent, disorganised and excluded from the visible horizon of experience produced by the dominant public sphere. In these conditions of fragmentation, the possibility of making connections 'between traditionally segregated domains of public and private, politics and everyday life, reality and fantasy, production and desire, between diverse and competing partial publics' (Hansen, 1993: xxv) is precarious.

The proletarian public sphere identifies a potential, 'a social, collective process of production that has as its object the human senses in their interrelatedness' (Negt and Kluge, 1993: 7). That negated social experience operates in the shadow of the public sphere, but also constitutes its shadow in the sense of unacknowledged and repressed libidinal energies that may subvert established norms in unpredictable ways. The aesthetic action *CS #4* (2016–2019) and a work that emerged directly from that action, with the partially redacted title, : *Informational Aesthetic*, were direct engagements with the

public sphere and its residues. The following section begins by presenting the rationale behind the *CS* actions and will then look more closely at each one.

3.2 Spatial practice

As stated at the start of this chapter, *CS* was a series of aesthetic actions designed to seek out fissures and fault-lines in the dominant production of space in Limerick city. Limerick is the most socially polarised city in the Republic of Ireland, with high levels of social deprivation concentrated in particular areas of the city (Haase and Pratschke, 2016; McCafferty, 2011). Over the years, that has resulted in high levels of crime and gang-related violence. Existing conditions of structural inequality and their spatial manifestations were recognised in a major study known as *The Fitzgerald Report* (Fitzgerald, 2007), which recommended a sweeping process of regeneration across the city. Tracking the evolution of Limerick Regeneration from Fitzgerald's recommendations up to the present, through a series of official urban regeneration/ development and vision documents (*Limerick Regeneration Masterplan* (LCCC, 2008), *Limerick 2030: An Economic and Spatial Plan* [*L2030*] (LCCC, 2013), *Limerick Regeneration* various documents (LCCC, 2007–present) and modifications to or expansions of *L2030* (LCCC 2016; 2019) demonstrates a rapid shift away from the social goals of regeneration and the advancement of market-driven solutions to social problems. The mass demolition of social housing, which displaced local populations,[26] was not followed by the construction of new social housing as promised, while corporate city-centre offices were prioritised for development.

[26] A 2019 report by sociologist Dr Eileen Humphreys found that deprivation in Limerick estates was worse than 10 years earlier. In the estate of Moyross, nearly 60% of the population has been displaced. See Rabbites, 2019, 'Deprivation in Limerick's regeneration estates is 'worse than 10 years ago', claims study', in *Limerick Leader,* September 26th, 2019.

The location for each *CS* action was determined by another person, someone that I met and approached because they had identified spatial conditions that were in some way contested. I deliberately approached people who occupied the kind of position that Margaret Archer describes as 'social actor', people with clear social roles and social identities (Archer, 2000: 261). Meeting people through their social roles (my own included) was an important leveller in terms of the ethics of the engagement, something that was discussed prior to each collaborative action. In the kinds of spaces that the coproducers of the actions identified, the social imaginary of the space was in conflict with its material reality, or contradictory logics were seen to be operating at the site, or forces of abstraction were evidently at work.

CS, as discussed, was designed to seek out fissures and fault-lines in the dominant production of space in Limerick city. The actions combined different modalities of CM with spatial practices, representations of space and spaces of representation (following Lefebvre). Each action began with the spatial practice of walking and talking at the site. During the course of that dialogue, other spatial practices became visible. Representations from-above and from-below were considered and discussed. Follow-up research analysed official representations relating to that space, which were gathered together with fragments and residues arising from the misalignment of abstract and concrete spaces of the city. Three stages were applied, drawing from the depth ontology laid out in dialectical CR:

Stage 1: A specific socio-spatial set of circumstances, described as a contested site, was observed first-hand, in dialogue with a person who knew the site well.

Stage 2: An analysis was conducted in relation to the contested nature of the site, drawing on discursive materials to ascertain the logics and practices at work in its production.

Stage 3: Theoretical work was carried out the deduce the dynamics underpinning the logics and practices maintaining the site in its current condition.

Stage 1 brought Lefebvre's category of spaces of representation and Rancière's idea of the field of common experience, or distribution of the sensible (2004), to bear on actions as they unfolded on site. Stage 2 drew on all three of Lefebvre's categories – spatial practices, representations of space and representational space (1991: 33), as well as Rancière's 'regime of visibility' (2004: 20), to conduct a discourse analysis based on documents, plans and reports relating to the site in question, along with informal representations from below. Stage 3 employed tools derived from Rancière's conceptual triad – the distribution of the sensible, the part-of-no-part, and the police order (2004) – to unravel and to articulate dynamics and logics involved in maintaining the socio-spatial ordering of the site. In the following section I discuss *CS #3 and CS #4,* focusing on the first phase of both actions (Stage 1), which take place primarily in a phenomenological register. The remaining stages, which move into a material-discursive register, are discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

3.2.1 *Contested Site #3*, Stage 1

CS #3 was an engagement with the material conditions of a space in the city centre that is referenced in many of the official plans and vision documents as an ideal public space (LCCC, 2013). The site was suggested by John Elliot, an archivist at Limerick City Museum. The walk-and-talk aspect of the action began at Arthur's Quay Park and followed a riverside walk (Fig. 3.2). Over the course of 25 minutes John and I passed through 9 gates, each one locked or unlocked at different times of the day by various agents or security groups (Fig. 3.3). No central schedule of these times exists. There is very little public engagement with either the space or

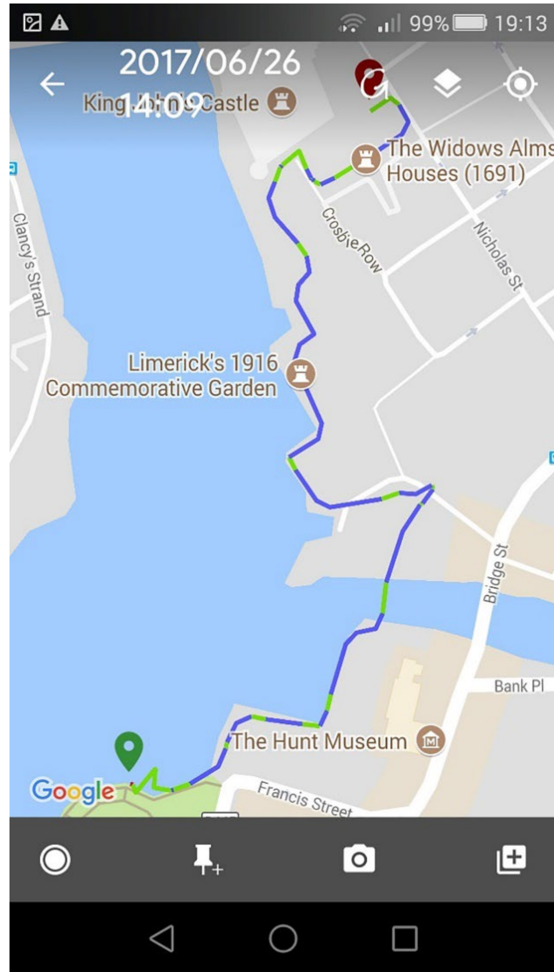


Figure 3.2, *Contested Site #3 trajectory,* screenshot, Google maps.

Figure 3.3, Fiona Woods, 2019, Contested Site #3; Riverside Walk, 9 gates.

its enclosure. This public realm space is held up as ideal in the vision plans for the city; it is in the city centre, full of pleasant, open spaces to sit, away from all roads, and yet there are rarely more than a few people using it at any one time. Antisocial behaviour, a nebulous term that can be used to cover a wide range of activities, is frequently cited as justification for policing and regulation decisions in Limerick city. The terms 'undesirables' and 'antisocial behaviour' are often linked, in general discourse and in press reporting.[27] There is a spoken and unspoken acceptance that the actions and presence of undesirables (which can mean anything from homeless people to youth groups, travellers, asylum seekers, drug users, street drinkers etc.) must be discouraged. Informal congregations are likely to draw the attention of the police, who can cite various by-laws that prohibit a range of activities as determined by the Local Authority.

Steven Flusty confers the term 'crusty space' on public space that 'cannot be accessed due to obstructions such as walls, gates and checkpoints' (Flusty,1994: 17). This is a typical feature of what he describes as an 'erosion of spatial justice' (ibid.: 15), where various tactics are employed 'to intercept, repel or filter would-be users' (ibid.: 16). This results in what he calls 'paranoid space' (ibid.: 7). Paranoid space describes a particular distribution of the sensible, the regulation and partition of spaces to determine modes of access and occupation. This paranoid space can be detected in the way that people occupy, or fail to occupy, public spaces in Limerick city.

As discussed, *CS#3* was an aesthetic action conducted in three stages. Through the walk-and-talk stage, a specific socio-spatial set of circumstances, described as a contested site,

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27 The usage is very commonplace, as an internet search quickly shows. One example of the apparently casual attribution of 'undesirability' took place at an Employment Appeals Tribunal hearing in relation to the dismissal of a security guard at the Arthur's Quay Shopping centre, next to the site where the Contested Space #3 action took place. A report in The Limerick Leader states that the tribunal heard that 'it was part the job [of the security guard] to deal with shoplifters and other "undesirables"' (Limerick Leader, 2013) https://www.limerickleader.ie/news/local-news/107899/Sacked-after-row-with-centre-tenant.html (Accessed: 28th July 2020].

was observed first-hand. The site was examined through the lens of Flusty's account of 'interdictory space' (ibid.). In the final stage, as part of the process of deducing the dynamics underpinning the logics and practices maintaining the site in its current condition, I identified the urban plan *Limerick 2030: An Economic and Spatial Plan for Limerick* [*L2030*] (LCCC, 2013) as an apparatus reproducing and furthering the economisation of space in the city centre. A close analysis of that plan is presented in Chapter Four.

3.2.2 *Contested Site #4*, Stage 1

Contested Site #4 [*CS #4*] was made in a response to a site in one of the designated regeneration areas of Limerick.[28] Clarina Park in Ballinacurra Weston exemplifies many of the conflicting logics that characterise the discourse and policies of regeneration in the city. Having been 'degenerated' over a period of years, 49 houses that made up the Clarina Park estate were eventually demolished, and the population dispersed in 2012, ostensibly to make way for new development. Eight years later development has failed to materialise, a fact sometimes attributed to the financial crash of 2008. Dissenting local voices see it otherwise, describing it as a 'state sponsored land grab' (McCarthy, n.d.). Ballinacurra Weston is one of the areas identified in the recommendations of the 2007 *Fitzgerald Report* to '. . . unlock the value of lands, all of which are within a short distance of the city centre' (Fitzgerald, 2007: 14). Usable

[28] The regeneration areas were first outlined in *Limerick Regeneration: A Vision for Moyross, Southill & Ballinacurra Weston and St. Mary's Park,* (LNSRA/ LRA, 2008) and in a subsequent plan *Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan* (*LRFIP*) (LCCC, 2013). In 2013 the *LRFIP* was made publicly available in draft form. An extract of this draft form is available on the Limerick City and County Council website Regeneration Page, listed under 'latest documents'. In 2014 a final version of the *LRFIP* was published, with some changes made in response to feedback to the draft publication. As the draft version is the version that is most easily accessible to the public this is the version most commonly referred to here. References to the final version can be distinguished by the 2014 date in the citation.

CONTESTED SPACES # 4

CLARINA PARK WALK

FW: So we are standing here at the top of Blake's Boreen. . . on the statutory boundary which marks out this particular regeneration area.
CMC: Yes, we are just at the edge of it. In the middle of the road is where it ends officially.

FW: What exactly does the statutory boundary confer, what does that mean?
CMC: They were introduced in 2008 when they amended the ministerial orders which established the regeneration agencies. They included deposited maps as well as adding other people onto the regeneration board. The purpose of the deposited maps was to make it legal for them to board up a house in the area. Once an area has been marked out for Urban Renewal, that allows the council to purchase a house in the area and board it up without any legal obligations to refurbish and relet or any obligation to demolish if it's derelict. They can sit and wait.

FW: Even though the Regeneration Agency has changed, there has been a transfer from a semi-independent agency back into the council, the nature of the areas themselves, what this boundary actually marks out, that hasn't changed?
CMC: That hasn't changed and I thought it would. What they did when they handed power back to the council regarding regeneration, there was a transfer of functions and legislation was amended to say that the functions that once applied to the agency now applied to the council. I had assumed they would scrap it completely but they didn't. Those deposited maps for the north side and south side still are on the statute books. The red line still exists and the functions of the agency are now the functions of the council.

FW: We are going to walk down Blake's Boreen and we are going to walk around the Clarina Park Estate. Is that right?
CMC: Well, the former Clarina park estate is now gone. We will be going through Ballinacurra Weston and Clarina Avenue. We will then go up Hyde Avenue and Lenihan Avenue and Byrne Avenue because we are going to look at those houses as well.

FW: Sometimes, it's very hard to fathom the different logics that are operating. That's one of the things I'm interested in. These things happen and there must be somebody who has a logic for it somewhere but it's very hard to track it down. Often they are in conflict.
CMC: The logic is there. The official agenda doesn't correspond with their actual agenda which I believe is to get rid of everybody and then redevelop the land.

FW: Everybody, how far would that everybody extend, in the entire statutory zone?
CMC: Certainly they had named in the legislation, certain areas. They claimed only the named areas were targeted. That's stated in the legislation: "which includes" and then it names the areas.

FW: It was kept deliberately vague?
CMC: I have a letter from Regeneration say that the boundaries were so wide because then they could expand regeneration if they wanted to. I have that letter from Brendan Kenny. I also saw the deposited maps in advance of them being made law. ...It's smaller here... It's bigger up further.

FW: I know this is something of a problem corner for you because you have pointed out how dangerous it is. People walk on that wall. There's a steep fall off on the other side.
CMC: Back in the 80s a child had a serious fall further up that boreen. He was hospitalised. They still do. Their plan was to remove the fence and knock that section wall and they were going to put rock armour in there.

FW: This is the rock armour?
CMC: Yes, That would create problems. It would have created a picnic area. As you know we've had problems there. Open space....a lot more vulnerable.

FW: Passive security (means) having the neighbourhood police the area?
CMC: Parts of the security worked because it's at the main road. If you have traffic going through that can provide passive security. But here there's no one really looking. The context of the passive security as it was outlined in the new plan. There was Garda... up in Dublin that came up with it. That's the design expert; he often features on Crime Watch. The context of that was with houses being built there. Passive security would be provided by new houses with the residents in them. There is no new houses there as you can see. So opening up the site that goes against their stated ideas.

FW: This site now, I've seen the houses that were on it on google earth from 2009, how long is it since the site has been cleared?
CMC: 2012, the last two houses were demolished.

FW: Were they inhabited?
CMC: No they were the Community Development Project.

FW: So, 5 years?
CMC: 5 years, they were all tenants. There was 49 houses in total. They were built in 1996. There was nothing wrong with them, physically.

FW: What happened was, this process of sequence of events that happen, where they start to, I think the term you use is de-tenanting?
CMC: De-tenanting, yes. They offer the tenant the same rate in another area. Then the house gets boarded up, looted and burnt out. I have loads of photos of that happening in Clarina Park. In Clarina Park they were all tenants. In the rest of Weston they were mostly homeowners. The tenants were peppered throughout the area. They removed them and then would board up the house on the block, or two houses on the block. They would get the homeowner to then sell their house back or as they call it become a tenant elsewhere. You go from a homeowner to a tenant and get compensated for €30,000. Of course that money would be gone in rent in three or four years.

FW: I can see why people would resist that.
CMC: Yes, as best they can.

FW: The fact that the house would be emptied and boarded up, that wouldn't happen in other parts of the city. They would either have to demolish or refurbish.
CMC: A house that was derelict they would have to demolish. A house that was not derelict would have to be refurbished and relet. That's the law.

FW: The stated logic of why they would board up, is there a stated logic?
CMC: The stated logic is to keep the property safe. In many cases it actually advertises the fact the property is now empty.

FW: As you have pointed out, first of all, people go in and strip the copper. Then often it becomes a dumping ground.
CMC: You can find examples of where the council has deviated from that policy, officially, in places like Anacusheen outside the regeneration zone in Burke Avenue which are 3 story duplex houses that were built in the 70s. There is only two tenants left in that block of houses near the station. Two tenants. Not the ones that are refurbished, the ones in Burke Avenue which is just off Lord Edward Street. There is only two tenants left in those. Looking at them you would think that they were all occupied because they are boarded up from the inside with curtains covering the boarding. At the back you can see the boarded. They are more secure.

FW: It is a very strange policy. It is very clear from what you have described that the boarding up process, I've seen your photos aswell, what that does is often you get leaks and then you get a lot of damp penetrating into the still occupied houses next door. It's a very strange decision . . . it's hard to fathom why you would do that.
CMC: It is because you do it once, you see what happens, do it twice you see it happen again, you do it a third time, they know that this policy isn't working and the effect it's having yet they are repeating it and repeating it and ignoring the complaints about it.

FW: It isn't working at least in terms of what the apparent objective is, but the suspicion is that there is some other unstated agenda.
CMC: Well, the unstated agenda would be what I call "intimidation by proxy." It puts pressure on the homeowner to get out and to take whatever deal they are offered. It becomes intolerable to live there. Especially if you are elderly and a lot of the homeowners here were elderly and are elderly. The estate is about sixty years old.

Figure 3.4, Fiona Woods. 2018. Clarina Park Walk, Contested Site #4: walk and talk, detail from broadsheet.

public land across Ireland is increasingly converted to real estate by being transferred to private developers (Melia, 2017).

The research action began with a walk around the perimeter of Clarina Park on a grey day in June 2016, in the company of a local activist (who is unnamed at his request) (Fig 3.4). The former estate is now a large green area surrounded by high walls, some of which back onto the gardens of houses in surrounding streets. The area is grazed by a number of horses kept The former estate is now a large green area surrounded by high walls, some of which back onto the gardens of houses in surrounding streets. The area is grazed by a number of horses kept illegally on the land and contains the remnants of bonfires and occasionally a burnt-out, stolen car, though not on the day of the walk.[29] Large open green areas speak of the demolition of multiple houses. Residents of the area have been quite active in generating contrary narratives concerning the shaping of these spaces. The following lengthy quote is taken from the description of a YouTube video, *Secure the Clarina Park Site 1* (McCarthy, 2016a). It is quoted in full because this counter-narrative of regeneration exists in the kind of fragmented public space to which Negt and Kluge refer, and should be read unmediated:

> The site once had 49 perfectly good houses that were built in 1996 – the area was depopulated, and the houses demolished over a 5-year period (2007–2012). The former estate of Clarina Park is now a proposed site and has been "green-lined" for private development in the long-term (8-years). Several homes, such as the block of houses behind which the car is burning, have also been "red-lined" for demolition and "green-lined" for private development in the Council's new "regeneration" plan without any agreement with the owners. The site is not secure because the Council have an "open spaces" policy. In the interest of resident's safety and security the site needs to be properly secured (McCarthy, 2016a).

[29] There is considerable documentation of this activity online. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWtTCd9gQZo&list=PLz2mpx_LnfpcXAVnT4Mha7XV1IWaM0Myt&index=1

Widespread demolition resulted in a dispersal of the population, which a local residents' group, the Ballinacurra Weston Residents' Alliance (BWRA), has called a 'depopulation policy . . . that has devastated communities (BWRA, 2013: 20). A key factor in that devastation is the boarding up of houses that have been vacated (BWRA, 2012; Power and Barnes, 2011). A 'domino effect' (BWRA, 2011: 12) ensues from the systematic boarding up of houses resulting in a predictable pattern:

- The Local Authority identifies a block of housing that it wants to demolish, some of which may be privately owned. Owners of properties are offered a low 'market value' sum to sell the house to the Local Authority. Many owners refuse this offer.
- The Local Authority begins to depopulate the block by re-housing its tenants. Empty houses are boarded up one by one. Boarded up houses are systematically broken into and looted for copper.
- As the water supply is not automatically disconnected, the scavenging of copper results in flooding of the abandoned house. This flooding leads to damp penetrating the walls of properties on either side.
- Boarded up houses draw anti-social behaviour including drug-taking, graffiti, vandalism and so on. The gardens of abandoned houses are often used for illegal fly-tipping of rubbish.
- Boarded up houses become magnets for arson and are regularly burnt out.

The intolerable conditions brought on by the scale of deterioration drives private owners to sell the property to the Local Authority.

The site is dominated by absences and erasures, along with elements of fortification – so-called rock armour, to block the entrance to large open areas, defensive palisade fencing and security cameras (Fig. 3.5). The effect is to create or to amplify a sense of hostile space. Hostility is also a real phenomenon in the area. During my walk with a local activist, we crossed paths with an older man who is a member of an infamous family from this area, some of whom are in prison for very violent crimes. He spoke to us in a quietly threatening manner as we passed, which was picked up by my audio recorder (it is unlikely that he noticed the recorder). According to the activist, this man has encouraged his grandchildren to 'terrorise' local

Figure 3.5, Fiona Woods, 2018, Clarina Park Walk, *Contested Site #4*, Detail: defensive infrastructures.

inhabitants by breaking windows, lighting fires against the doors of houses, breaking bottles in the street, vandalising gardens, etc. The man's particular animosity towards the activist arises from the latter's insistence on recording and reporting anti-social incidents for which he has 'zero tolerance', having lived with the reality of relentless anti-social and criminal behaviour (personal communication).

Residents in the area stress that it is a small minority of people who carry out these activities (LCCC, 2013: 389), a fact that is often overlooked. The representation of anti-social behaviour in Limerick is caught between what Iyengar describes as episodic and thematic frames (1996). The media tends to push episodic representations of social disorder and violence in the city which emphasise individual rather than structural failings, while academic studies of disadvantage are often oriented towards thematic analysis, focusing on the underlying and contextual issues shaping such behaviour. Each frame imposes a homogenising identity on the residents of 'troubled estates' (Devereux *et al.*, 2011), failing to capture the complex and nuanced experience of local residents who find themselves subjected to anti-social behaviour.

Cognisant of media stereotyping of social violence as mere 'thuggery' (Limerick Post, 2010), and of the long-term effects of social disadvantage on people, the activist is nonetheless critical of what he describes as 'leftist-liberal excusing of violence and delinquency' (personal communication), which he sees as glossing over the agency and responsibility of individuals who encourage or perpetrate the relentless, low-level violence that the term 'anti-social behaviour' does not adequately communicate.[30] The complexity of this issue is such that any representation amounts to a misleading oversimplification, placing it beyond the scope of the research action discussed here. However, its significance as an aspect of the production of

[30] Much of the low-level violence is enacted by children below the legal age of responsibility according to Dr Niamh Hourigan in her study of policing, child protection and regeneration in Limerick (2011).

space in Clarina Park and Ballincurra Weston is acknowledged as a key component in the conflicted productions of space that *CS #4* set out to probe.

The site is subject to another regime of visibility, superimposed through the complex discourse of regeneration. The nature of regeneration in Limerick, its effects on the production of space and of the spatial imaginary of regeneration areas, are discussed in Chapter Four. It was also the subject of a book chapter that I wrote, 'Visualising the Contrary Logics of Regeneration through collaborative arts practice', in the publication *Gentrification Around the World, Volume 1: Gentrifiers and the Displaced* (Krase and De Sena, 2020). One of the artworks emerging from this action is short video piece, *Episodic Frame* (2021). The piece works as a found animation, based on an anomaly in Google Street View that allows Clarina Park as it was in 2009, prior to demolition, to be navigable. The video work is constructed around two pieces of dialogue; the first is based on a conversation between two residents of Clarina Park, and the second based on passages from the Limerick Regeneration plan (2011), performed by a local actor. The viewer passes through various houses (Fig. 3.6) as the 'camera' navigates the now vanished estate. The work creates a visual passage from concrete, lived reality into an abstraction of space that is both real and metaphorical.

3.3 Conclusions

The socio-spatial phenomenon of public has long been of interest to me, an object of analysis and a physical/conceptual/social site for practice-based action. Public is a social, cultural and political process animated by tensions between common and private interests, between ideals of equality and mechanisms to protect the liberties of social elites, and between modes of legitimation and contestation. Arising from the communicative and deliberative aspects of publicness, Habermas theorised the existence and the functioning of a public sphere which, as

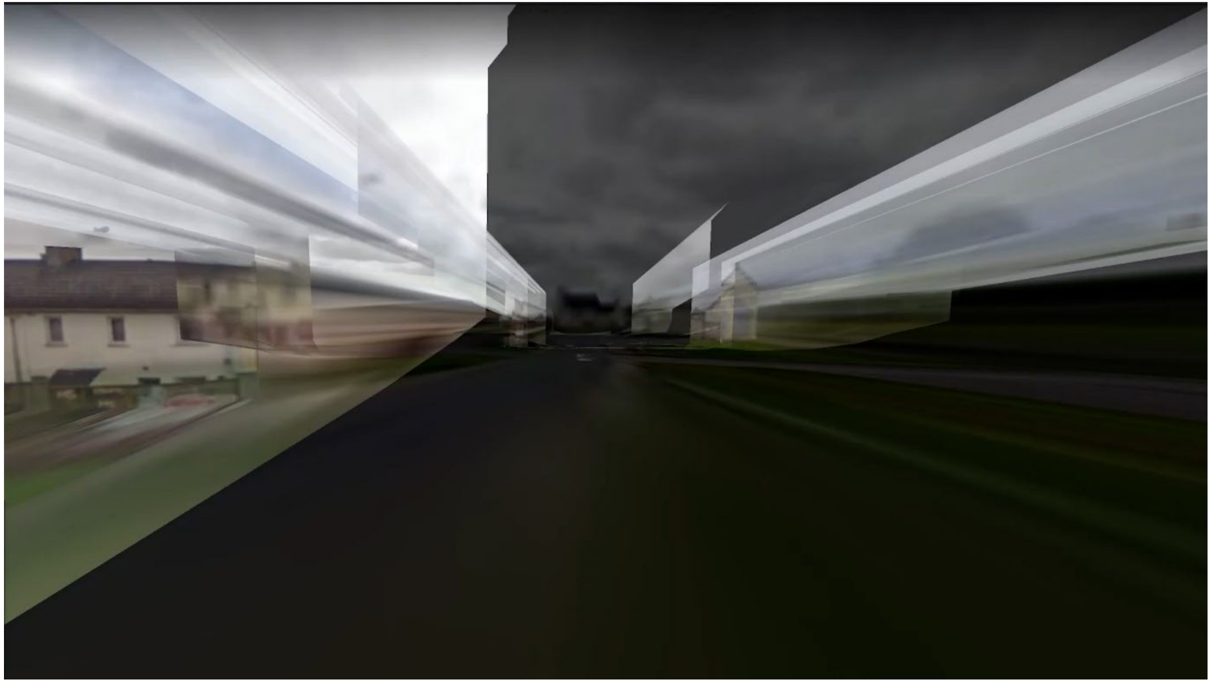

Figure 3.6, Fiona Woods, 2019, work in progress, still images from *Episodic Frame.*

Fraser has argued, is an 'indispensable' conceptual resource that makes certain kinds of critical social-theoretical analysis possible (Fraser, 1990: 111). Even the most strident critics of Habermas' account recognise that the public sphere continues to function as a mode of social organisation and integration, as a site of manipulation and of contestation, where the perception of social relevance can be controlled and where 'private' antagonisms can still be translated into political conflicts. However, the Habermasian model contained a normative aspect that occluded many of the complex processes of publicness and misrecognised some of its paradoxical energies. The first of those relates to the fact that the legitimising function of public spheres has always produced a residue of illegitimacy. It is not simply that some things are left out of the representation of the social totality; the very terms by which things are made visible negate the conception of other forms of life. What is most significant about Negt and Kluge's critique of the Habermasian public sphere, according to Fredric Jameson, is that it calls for 'a new public language', a language that does not yet exist and that can only be imagined in the gaps of present discourse (Jameson, 1988: 156).

The second conclusion to be drawn is that public both is and is not a social institution. Publicness is managed through a range of agencies and institutions that work to stabilise and regulate its effects and affects, producing the appearance of a socially institutionalised phenomenon. Michael Warner argues that this is a misrecognition of public, which is always self-organising and contingent, unstable and unpredictable; 'public is a social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse' (2002b: 422). Warner's emphasis on circulation and attention in the production of counterpublics reminds us of Negt and Kluge's idea that the possibility of social change depends upon 'the cohabitation of uneven organisational structures of publicity' (Hansen, 1993: xl), which are potentially unstable and capable of producing collisions, conjunctures and developments of an unpredictable type.

The third conclusion concerns public as apparatus and site of both violence and struggle. Physical violence and securitisation are significant elements in our embodied experiences of publicness, but they should not blind us to the systemic and cultural violence that shapes societal norms, what Rancière describes as 'the police order' (2010: 139). Negt and Kluge's project to 'reconceptualise the public from the perspective of experience' (Hansen, 1993: xxix), with the latter term taken by Hansen to mean a 'matrix that mediates individual perception and social horizons of meaning, including the collective experience of alienation, isolation, and privatisation' (ibid.: xvii), suggests a way to occupy the system whilst exploring opportunities for the production and contestation of new and existing modes of intersubjectivity.

Another significant conclusion to be drawn from this analysis concerns the boundary between public and private. The latter term comes from the Latin *privatus,* originally referring to those deprived of the rights of public existence. This meaning has been almost completely inverted, so that privacy is now considered by many as a fundamental right, the violation of which is a serious and controversial matter. The rhetoric of privacy has a significant effect on public as a political force, not only when it is used to shut down access to information and political debate,[31] but also in the way that it serves to mask the exercise of power through the realm of the personal. Privatisation is a cultural dynamic (Berlant and Warner 1998), which is bound up with the logic of property but does not restrict itself to matters of ownership. It increasingly shapes hegemonic understandings of ethics and the social totality, with

[31] Two examples are relevant here. The first is the increasing use of the term 'commercially sensitive information' to restrict public access to matters of potential significance. The second is the use of legal mechanisms (by those who can afford them) to prevent news coverage or political debate about matters pertaining to the politico-economic interests of economic actors who exert their rights as private individuals. For more on this, see Roy Greenslade, May 29th 2015, Ireland's media silenced over MP's speech about Denis O'Brien in *The Guardian,* Available at https://www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2015/may/29/irelands-media-silenced-over-mps-speech-about-denis-obrien (Accessed: 3rd August 2016].

considerable consequences for the process described here as public. However, it is important to recognise that publicness is enmeshed with the structures of property relations – legal, financial, political, ideological – meaning that is value as a site for the establishment of a real *common* interest must be called into question.

In 2007, Sheikh argued that 'the erosion of the nation-state' was leading to a situation in which 'the public sphere of 'the public' can no longer be specifically located' (Sheikh, 2007). Shiekh links this to Virno's vision of the 'terrifying' possibility of 'a publicness without a public sphere' (Virno, 2004: 40). This condition formed new relations between publicness, consumption and production, culminating in what Sheikh described as a post-public condition (ibid.). It is not a case of hankering after a previous manifestation of publicness, he says, but of finding new critical ways to institute the phenomenon of publicness as a critical, political, deliberative space. The evident deterioration of conditions of public discourse, encapsulated in the culture of fake news and conspiracy theory, along with the growing occupation of 'the public sphere' by corporate interests and mechanisms of surveillance, and the entanglement of the pseudo-publicness of social media with biopolitical life – together these hint at the arrival of Virno's spectre of 'a publicness without a public sphere' (Virno, 2004: 40).

The interrogation of publicness conducted in this chapter served as part of a critical diagnostics of present conditions, and an attempt to construct a theoretical horizon against which to imagine a 'collective organisation of meaningful experience' (Negt and Kluge, 1993: 5), with a view to giving that a material form. It was following Sheikh's essay that I entered into a study of the evolution of publicness as a historical form, to try to understand what might be possible in terms of 'critically instituting' its political, deliberative aspects. Negt and Kluge's analysis of the legitimating function of multiple public spheres (1991), and the possibility of harnessing their excluded residues to form counterhegemonic and counterpublic

spaces has been influential in the unfolding of this research. This is particularly true of the work [redacted]: *Informational Aesthetic* (title partially redacted), which I will discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: The economisation of space

In the previous chapter, conceptual, political and locational contexts were established for the *CS* actions which operated in registers from the phenomenological to the material-discursive,[32] as discussed. The *CS* actions were the earliest aesthetic actions of the research. They employed the CM methodology, teasing out some of the processes, mechanisms and logics driving the enclosure and economisation of space. The analytical models supporting the work, and their ontological foundations, were given serious consideration to ensure a robust and rigorous approach that could be carried through into subsequent aesthetic actions. The depth ontology laid out in Bhaskar's critical realism, as discussed in Chapter One, offers an account of reality as *stratified*, made up of three key strata – experience (phenomenal /empirical), events (transphenomenal/ inter- and intra-active/ actual) and mechanisms (intransitive/ generative structures /real) (Bhaskar, 1978). That depth ontology proposes a reality independent of human experience which is emergent in the open systems of the natural and social worlds. Social reality can be understood in relation to the connections that human beings have with other living beings, with the concrete world and with a social imaginary. For Bhaskar it is 'the persistent relations between individuals and groups, and . . . the relations between those relations' (Bhaskar, 1998: 71) that are the proper subject of social research.

These matters influenced the design of the *CS* actions, which operated in three stages, each one linked to the strata of critical realism's depth ontology; actions in the phenomenological register, an examination of trans-phenomenological events and processes, and a theorising of social and historical structures and generative mechanisms from which those

[32] The actions also operated in the distinct register of arts practice-based research, the significance of which is discussed in the final section on Conclusions and Contributions.

phenomena and events emerge. Stage 1, as discussed in Chapter Three, was concerned primarily with the lived experience of the sites in question, while Stages 2 and 3 of the actions engaged with a wide range of communicative materials including city plans, vision documents, semi-public property websites, public consultation events, promotional videos and official presentations. Strategic mechanisms put in place to shape the development of social space in Limerick were also considered; DAC's (designated activity companies, such as Limerick City and County Council's arms-length property development company, The Limerick Twenty Thirty Strategic Development DAC [LTTS]); BID's (business improvement districts), PPP's (private-public partnerships such as Limerick Innovation); and semi-independent agencies (Limerick Northside and Southside Regeneration Agencies [LNSRA], more commonly known as Limerick Regeneration Agency [LRA], 2008–2013). Lefebvre's triadic mode of analysis was an essential support in the untangling of that nexus of state-corporate interests which, this chapter argues, operates as a generative mechanism to infuse neoliberal values into the social imaginary of the city.

The role of the dominant public sphere, and the excluded residues generated by that façade of legitimation (Negt and Kluge, 1993), are very significant in this chapter. Passages from official documents are quoted in detail to convey the normative use of language that places and spaces Limerick's citizens according to a formal representation of space (Lefebvre, 1991: 33), and attempts to strategically harness their embodied dispositions to perform an ideological version of what the city means and who it is for. A strong counter-narrative, voiced by residents of one of the regeneration areas, is also discussed in this chapter. It demonstrates the way that dominant narratives can be destabilised by the 'accidental collisions . . . [and] unpredictable conjunctures' that may emerge from 'uneven organisational structures of publicity' (Hansen, 1993: xl). Negated social experience operates in the shadow of the public

sphere, but also constitutes its shadow in the sense of unacknowledged and repressed libidinal energies that may subvert established norms in unpredictable ways. Extended passages from that counter-narrative are also presented with minimal mediation because those fragmented perspectives demand to be heard on their own terms. It is only on those terms that this specific distribution of the sensible (Rancière, 2004) can be rearranged.

4.1 Concrete and abstract space

In Lefebvre's analysis of the social production of space, the concrete space of lived experience is always under siege by forces of abstraction. It will be apparent from matters discussed in Chapter Three that two parallel urban development/ regeneration processes in Limerick city informed the aesthetic actions under discussion. *Limerick Regeneration* and *Limerick 2030, an Economic and Spatial Plan* [L2030] are development processes carried out by subsidiary agencies of Limerick City and County Council. Stages 2 and 3 of these *CS* actions involved drawing on discursive materials generated by those processes to clarify logics and practices at work in the production of space at each site, followed by theoretical work to visualise the dynamics underpinning those logics and practices.

A programme to 'regenerate' the socially ravaged areas of Limerick city was launched in 2008. The *Masterplan for Limerick Regeneration* was described at the time as 'the most important document ever to come before a meeting of the city council' (Martyn, 2008). It presented an extraordinarily ambitious plan for the four major regeneration areas of the city, positing utopian visions for civic, public and recreational facilities integrated into an entire reconstruction of the social housing of the city (Fig. 4.1). The plan quickly stalled as a result of the economic situation, resulting in a scaled-down piecemeal implementation carried out in

Artist's impression of housing in St Mary's Park

Fundamentals first for St Mary's – waterfront penthouses afterwards

Gerard Fitzgibbon

THE corner shop in St Mary's Park is simple and public sector investment will be required for the regeneration of St Mary's Park. It is hoped that the eventually be opened up to Thomondgate through new bridges - an effort to take them when it's all finished. They don't want apartments," says Bern.

Figure 4.1, Artist's impression of housing in St. Mary's Park' (top) / St Mary's Park, 2019, Google Street view [bottom].[33]

[33] Illustration from *Limerick Regeneration Masterplan,* (Limerick Southside and Northside Regeneration Agencies, 2008: 194) reproduced in *Limerick Leader,* 2008. Although prone to flooding, St. Mary's Park is now considered a prime real estate asset, on account of its location on an island close to the centre of the city.

a highly contested fashion in the years that followed.[34] The *Masterplan for Limerick Regeneration* was re-launched in 2013 as the *Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan,* operating with 10% of the original budget. According to Mike Dwane, the mayor of the city, Kathleen Leddin, described this as

> . . . "a realistic plan" rather than the "pie in the sky" set out in the Fitzgerald Report seven years ago. . . Originally a €3 billion scheme involving huge private sector investment when announced in 2007, the City Council has this week given the green light to a more modest programme of €300 million (Dwane, 2014).

Two years later, the *Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan* [LRFIP] was subjected to a review which was described by a local councillor as 'Plan C' (Walsh, 2016). The publicity material for the launch of the review stated:

> Under Limerick Regeneration, an ambitious plan for almost 600 new housing units is being advanced, along with the upgrading of 1,400 existing houses. One hundred and ten new social homes have already been delivered under regeneration, a further 131 units are under construction and the remainder are in preparation. Nearly 900 of the upgrades of the existing homes have either been completed or are in preparation (Rebuilding Ireland, 2016).

The launch of the LRFIP review in 2016 coincided with the Irish Government's newly launched housing development project, Rebuilding Ireland, an 'action-driven plan' to address the country's housing shortage (Rebuilding Ireland, 2016). Rebuilding Ireland assumed responsibility for the supply of social housing in Limerick city, although not in designated regeneration areas. The lines between different agencies became more blurred as time went on; Rebuilding Ireland developed housing schemes in Limerick, funded under the Limerick Regeneration scheme (Rebuilding Ireland, 2018), while in 2017 Limerick City and County

[34] It is widely reported that the Regeneration areas are in a worse condition now than when the programme was launched in 2007 (Rabbits, 2019).

Council appointed an internationally renowned firm of architects and urban planners, *Allies and Morrison*, to develop a new plan, the *Limerick Southside Masterplan* for 75 hectares of land to the south of the city (LCCC, 2018).

This extraordinary matrix of plans, agencies, authorities and highly-paid consultants creates a level of opacity that is by no means unusual in the Irish context, and which generally leads to an escalation of costs and ultimately to delay and inaction.[35] In the case of the situation in Limerick, different plans and agency positions generate confusion about the numbers of housing units that are proposed or completed, with the result that it becomes virtually impossible to measure progress against any kind of base-line figure without engaging in extensive, painstaking research. Slippery language such as 'in preparation' (above) is replicated in various documents and reports; units are 'at design stage', 'in development' or 'will get underway shortly' without any actual percentages being specified. The oft-cited 'public consultations' of these plans do not have a good reputation amongst the populations of regeneration areas, as I will discuss.

4.2 Representations of space

The object of this inquiry was to test and to generate positions that could contest the economisation of space in the city, through aesthetic work. Whilst not attempting to conduct a full discourse analysis of urban regeneration and renewal in Limerick city, the economisation of space needed to be verified as a material-discursive phenomenon. Before narrowing the

[35] In January 2020, *The Irish Times* reported that the projected cost of the national children's hospital under construction in Dublin 'increased from €987 million in 2017 to . . . €1.7 billion and possibly more, making it one of the most expensive hospitals in the world' (Bray and Wall, 2020). The same report quoted 'top officials' as saying that in 2019 the builders BAM, gave a new timeline for completion which the board believes is "not in line with what is in the contract". Furthermore, the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (NPHDB), , said 'it would need €15 million to defend itself against the high level of ongoing claims being made by contractors' (ibid.).

focus to specific materials, I conducted a broad sweep of the evolution of city plans from the first recorded *Development Plan for the City of Limerick* (Limerick Corporation, 1967) through a series of action plans, area plans, development plans, strategies and vision documents (1971–2019). It is worth quoting from some of these:

- The function of the city . . . in general terms it may be stated to supply the needs, as a place in which to live, of the population of the city, and of their requirements in terms of work, shopping, community facilities, roads amenities, recreational and social facilities of its population (Limerick Corporation, 1967).
- The function of the city is to enable the Midwest to function as an eminently viable economic unit and as a strong and readily identifiable social unit. . . it must provide for (the population) a commercial, educational, shopping, recreational, social, ecclesiastical and amenity framework (Limerick Corporation, 1981).
- The primary goal of the plan is the promotion of economic and community development. Subsidiary goals include . . . assistance to communities in the provision of community facilities and services (Limerick Corporation 1996).
- The goals of the plan are the promotion of sustainable economic and community development . . . and assistance to communities in the provision of community facilities [reference to services removed] (Limerick Corporation, 1998/99).

This is not presented as a systematic analysis but rather to give a flavour of the change that occurs in the way that the Local Authority articulated its relationship to the city before and after the arrival of neoliberalism as the dominant ideology. The language used to describe the inhabitants of the city shifts (broadly speaking) from *populations*, to *communities*, to *community of people*, to *people*, to *citizens*.

4.2.1 *Contested Site #4*, Stage 2 and 3

Arising from the action *CS #4,* I took the *Masterplan for Limerick Regeneration* (LNSRA/LRA, 2008), the *Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan* (LCCC, 2013) and the *Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan Review* [LRFIP] (LCCC, 2016) as objects of analysis, focusing primarily on a series of maps in the LRFIP

(2013) relating to the Clarina Park site in the regeneration area of Ballinacurra Weston. Counterhegemonic materials produced for campaigns and protests by figures and groups within the regeneration area create a significant counterpoint to the abstracting force of official documents. Materials presented here are drawn from an extraordinary, critical, online archive compiled between 2007 - present, *Limerick Regeneration Watch* (McCarthy, n.d.).[36]

In 2007, a particularly violent incident in one of the disadvantaged areas of Limerick City prompted the Irish government to appoint John Fitzgerald to carry out an inquiry into issues of social exclusion in disadvantaged areas, and to report his findings to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion. *The Fitzgerald Report* (2007), as it is commonly known, focused on four residential areas in Limerick: Moyross, St. Mary's Park, Southill and Ballinacurra Weston. In his introductory remarks Fitzgerald stated that:

> Solutions must be tailored to meet local circumstances. They should involve significant engagement and involvement by the local community, particularly those who have been working 'on the ground' and understand the problems (Fitzgerald 2007: 8).

Two Regeneration Boards were established, one for the north side and one for the south side of the city. Fitzgerald was appointed chairperson of both, along with various stakeholders, and representatives of state agencies and government departments. The incoming CEO of the Regeneration Boards, Brendan Kenny, had been quoted in 2007 as saying:

> . . . real consultation, real participation and a real role in decision making is vital for local communities and vital in achieving a successful outcome (Kenny in Canal Communities Partnership, 2007: 4).

[36] http://www.limerickregeneration.org/index.html

This left local people feeling hopeful that decisions pertaining to the regeneration process would be made on the basis of meaningful consultation and participation. However, the consultation processes as experienced by the residents of Ballinacurra Weston did not live up to those early promises. The 'pretence of community-led participation'[37] remains a sore point among some residents of Ballinacurra Weston. While the LNSRA/LRA established Residents' Forums in the regeneration areas, the manner in which people were appointed as representatives to those forums was contentious from the start. Minutes from the public meeting to establish the Ballinacurra Weston Residents' Forum recorded the following:

> There was quite a bit of discontent amongst the group of persons being selected onto the Weston Regeneration Committee at this time. They would have preferred to see a democratic process engaged in (BWRA), 2011: 8).

After the initial meeting to establish the Ballinacurra Weston Residents' Forum 'no further public meetings were held' according to the BWRA (2011: 10). The monthly meetings held by the Forum Committee invited residents to air their grievances, but the BWRA account of those meetings is negative:

> . . . [residents] were listened to and largely ignored. Many of the questions raised by residents at the inaugural meeting went unanswered and the residents' representatives were told not to talk about what was discussed at meetings (BWRA, 2011: 8).

One Ballinacurra Weston resident described the forum as 'toothless. . . just a way to keep us quiet and pretend we were involved' (McCarthy, n.d.). This led to widespread disillusionment among the residents of Ballinacurra Weston, and a decision to quit the forum in 2010 led to the establishment of the BWRA as an alternative voice for the community (Fig. 4.2). In 2011 they

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[37] Local activist unnamed at his request, email to the author, Feb. 1st, 2018. Author's research archive, not public.

produced an information document called *Residents First; towards real community participation in regeneration areas* (BWRA, 2011) (Fig. 4.3). The foreword by Chairperson Matt Collins is quite specific about the purpose of the BWRA, 'to actively participate in civic actions to achieve the goal (of a) . . . clean, safe and secure environment while we await regeneration' (Collins, 2011: 5). He is also unequivocal in his criticism of the Residents' Forums:

> The present structures [of Limerick Regeneration] for community engagement are clearly inadequate and cannot deliver. The few members that remain on the forum are not representative of our community and do not even bother to consult with residents. In fact, very few residents are even aware of the forum's existence, it is irrelevant and ineffective and should be dissolved immediately. What we want is a level playing field where we as residents can participate as equals in the decisions that directly affect our lives. What we need is real community participation and genuine power sharing (Collins, 2011: 5).

Collins concluded by calling for community elections to elect residents to the regeneration board, insisting on the need for a 'regeneration that is centred on community need . . . a regeneration that puts residents first' (ibid.).

One of the first actions of the BWRA was to seek a 'mandate' from residents in the area (BWRA, 2011: 8). To do this they began to distribute information leaflets explaining the reason for the formation of the group. The leaflet included a BWRA membership form, some of which were returned by hand to the BWRA committee, but many were collected during initial 'door-to-door consultation(s)' (BWRA, 2011: 8). The number of membership forms returned was estimated to account for '95% of households in the immediate [Ballinacurra Weston] regeneration area' (BWRA, 2011: 8). The ongoing campaigning work of BWRA (Fig. 4.3) included the distribution of information to residents about the details contained in the Regeneration Plan documents, which were not necessarily obvious on first reading. However,

DECEMBER 2013: Postcard Campaign

The Postcard Campaign organised by our affiliated groups empowered residents to make individual submissions to the Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan and accounted for 237 of 274 recieved,

SUBMISSION FOR THE LIMERICK REGENERATION FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION PLAN:

I, the undersigned, call on Limerick City & County Council and the Office of Regeneration to immediately reform the failed structures for Community Participation in the regeneration process and local Estate Management. I support the holding of community elections to directly elect resident representatives onto reformed and empowered local regeneration and Estate Management committees. The present policy of participation by invitation-only must be replaced by a more democratic and accountable system. Residents have a fundemental Human Right to participate in the decisions that affect our lives.

Signed: ....

Address: ....

....

LIMERICK REGENERATION,
Unit 12-14b,
LEDP,
Roxboro Road,
Limerick.

ISSUED BY: BALLINACURRA WESTON RESIDENTS ALLIANCE (www.bwra.blogspot.com)

Figure 4.2, BWRA Postcard Campaign, 2013, from *Limerick Regeneration Watch*, available at http://www.limerickregeneration.org/PostcardCampaign.html

this campaigning work was not clearly understood by all of the residents that they approached. During the site walk for *Contested Site #4* an encounter took place between a local activist with whom I was in conversation (unnamed at his request) and another local man. The following transcript of an audio recording is given here in full to capture the tenor of the exchange. Names have been changed to protect identities:

> John: This block is targeted . . . on the map.
> FW: So, obviously the owners would all be well aware by now?
> John: Well actually I knocked on everyone's door when they published the maps, I showed them the maps. . . (addresses resident standing outside his house). This block here, who owns that (pointing).
> Gerry: (indecipherable) . . . fuck's sake, 'we'll do this and we'll do that'.
> John: I'm not with Regeneration.
> Gerry: But you were.
> John: No, I never was, I'm a resident like you.
> Gerry: You used come up here with Paddy.
> John: Yeah.
> Gerry: Yeah, 'we'll do this for you Gerry, we'll do that for you'
> John: We never said we'd do anything for you.
> Gerry: Paddy said to me, with you, 'we'll get this done and we'll get that done for you Gerry'.
> John: He said we were campaigning to get things done.
> Gerry: I got fuck all done anyway as you can see.
> John: You have to campaign yourself as well.
> Gerry: I did that.
> (pause).
> John; Are they knocking the houses here?
> Gerry: I don't know.
> John: We were never part of Regeneration, only residents like yourself . . .
>
> [We walked on.]
>
> John: I get mistaken for being a councillor. I get mistaken for being on the Regeneration committee. We never said to anyone we will do anything for them because we can't. We just gave people advice on what they needed to do, to go to the agency and get clarification about their house being in the red line . . . The first time we were handing out information, information residents need to know, he ripped it up without reading it.[38]

[38] Transcript of audio-recorded conversation, June 27th, 2016. Author's research archive, not public.

Figure 4. 3, Front cover of *Residents First,* BWRA, 2011,
http://www.limerickregeneration.org/Residents_First.pdf.

The mistaking of local activists for Limerick Regeneration Agency representatives suggests a lack of clarity and information on the ground that led to confusion and mistrust among residents, all of which made community organising more difficult. There is a slippage between official accounts and accounts from below, a fracture that the research set out to 'map'. The *LRFIP* (LCCC, 2013) contains a section specifically covering Ballinacurra Weston (pp. 242–262), the opening paragraph of which reads: 'Residents at Ballinacurra Weston who attended public consultation events held in March 2013 gave near unanimous support for the objectives of the refocussed Framework Plans presented' (ibid.: 242). The BWRA prepared a response titled *Submission for Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan* (BWRA, 2013), and its opening paragraph tells a different story:

> The Ballinacurra Weston Residents Alliance welcomes the publication of the *Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan* (LRFIP). The first thing that needs to be said about the LRFIP is that residents had no real input in its development. Those consultations that took place in March were farcical, The Office of Regeneration couldn't answer half our questions and there were no independent experts to help residents understand what we were being shown. We made a formal submission and it wasn't responded to. It was included in the "Statement of Community Involvement" in the back of the LRFIP, but our concerns were not heeded (ibid.: 1).

Of the 20 pages devoted to Ballinacurra Weston in Section 2 of the *LFRIP* (2013), 8 contain maps designating various forms of spatial analysis and planning (pp. 251–259). Maps are 'propositions in graphic form' (Krygier and Wood, 2009: 198), that construct reality based on certain assumptions, political interests, historical circumstances and practical considerations. Decolonial theorists recognise maps as instruments of violent subjugation, tools for imposing the 'mental universe' of the coloniser (Ngũgĩ, 1986: 16). The separation of *space* from *relations* excludes the 'messy and subjective contingencies that flow from an embodied view' (Kitchin, Perkins and Dodge, 2009: 3). Maps are aesthetic constructions that gather together scattered particulars from their 'object' (Carper, 1978) and actively transform those into a hierarchy of

significance and value. Along with plans, policy documents, public statements and promotional materials, official maps are representations of space (Lefebvre, 1991) that constitute a first step in the spatialisation of power and ideology. For people who have not acquired the skills of critical map-reading, maps are as likely to mask realities as to clarify them (Wood: 1992).

The 8 Ballincaurra Weston maps from the *LRFIP* (2014) are presented as a mosaic in Figure 4.4. In the document they are organised in the following sequence: Movement and Connectivity Map; Land Use Map; Housing Strategy Map; Open Spaces Map; Aerial view; Framework Plan: Refurbishment Plan; and Replacement Housing Strategy. The last two are presented here in Figure 4.5; the Clarina Park site is visible in both. The term 'replacement housing' is used in the report to mean social housing, while non-replacement housing is one of the terms used for private housing. The open site of Clarina Park is earmarked for private development according to bottom map. Both maps highlight houses to be demolished to create entry points for new roads in keeping with the Movement and Connectivity strategy. The blocks of houses scheduled for demolition in these maps are occupied, and some are privately owned (LCCC, 2013: 259; LCCC, 2014: 260); many of those occupants/owners first learned of the plan when members of the BWRA went door-to-door to bring it to their attention.[39]

The plan leans heavily towards the development of private housing in regeneration areas, in keeping with the policy of 'Tenure Diversity' (LCCC, 2014: 246). Improving the 'social environment of neighbourhoods' (LCCC, 2014: 126), through 'community stabilisation and social inclusion activities' (Finneran, 2009), remains one of the key goals of social regeneration

[39] A table on page 277 (LCCC, 2013) titled 'Movement Strategy' lays out a set of objectives and their current status. This table acknowledges that some of the properties scheduled for demolition will need to be 'acquired'. The status given for this activity is 'Objective not being met'.

Figure 4.4, Ballinacurra Weston, 8 maps, from *Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan,* pp. 242 – 262, (LCCC, 2014).

Figure 4.5, Refurbishment Plan; and Replacement Housing Strategy, from Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan, pp. 257–259 (LCCC, 2014).

in Limerick. Strategies directed towards building 'social capital' (LCCC, 2014: 55) in the disadvantaged neighbourhoods include investing in educational initiatives, families-at-risk and community facilities whilst promoting 'social mix' through housing construction plans (LCCC, 2014: 199). The historical practice of concentrating social disadvantage spatially through the construction of 'single-class housing estates' (Fahey, 1999: 267) had been reversed by the Irish government following the publication of the *Plan for Social Housing* (Dept. of the Environment, 1991), from which point the policy of social mix housing was advocated (although rarely, if ever, in areas of concentrated wealth).

A study commissioned by the Combat Poverty Agency in 1999, *Social Housing in Ireland, A Study of Success, Failure and Lessons Learned* (Fahey, 1999) found that the residents of Local Authority estates were, on the whole, 'proud and satisfied with the working-class culture of their neighbourhoods' (Fahey, 1999: 267). Fahey concluded that residents would not see that 'an infusion of middle-class households and middle-class values [would be required] to bring their neighbourhoods up to satisfactory standards' (ibid.: 267). Social class mix was not, Fahey concluded, a prominent concern of residents in Local Authority estates. The main problems in estates, residents report, are not the result of an absence of private housing or the middle classes but are due to 'the presence of small numbers of 'undesirables' (Fahey, 1999: 267).[40]

In spite of Fahey's observations, social mix policies, variously described as 'socially integrated' or 'mixed tenure' development (Dept. of Environment, Community and Local Government 2014: 42-49), and 'social housing structure that is blended' (Dept. of Housing, Planning and Local Government, 2017: 5), continue to be prominent in the urban renewal and regeneration plans of the Irish state and its agents. These terms skirt around class interests; the

[40] These findings continue to be relevant, as discussed in a later section.

critical term for such activity, gentrification, more clearly identifies the inherent class discrimination at work. 'Third-wave gentrification' (Hackworth and Smith, 2001) sees 'state actors use gentrification as a policy tool to create more expensive housing in (low-income) neighbourhoods' (Teernstra, 2015: 3). State-led gentrification has become an even more purposeful strategy in the context of the financialisation of housing (Bridge, Butler and Lees, 2012; Fernandez and Aalbers, 2016; Bissett, 2008; Hearne, 2017).

Following the financial crash of 2008, the Irish the state begin to function as one of the key agents of the property market, a characteristic typical of the neoliberal state (Hearn, 2017; Smith, 2002). The financialisation and commodification of housing was accelerated through state policies (NAMA, 2013: 5–6; Hearne, 2017: 63), primarily in the form of a decision by the Irish government to boost economic recovery by inviting global institutional investors to purchase distressed mortgages in the Irish housing market (Hearne, 2017: 78). With Irish lending institutions coming under pressure from the European regulator to shed their non-performing loans (Jim Carey, TD, email to author, 28th February 2018), the presence of non-bank entities in the Irish property market, also known as vulture funds, multiplied exponentially.

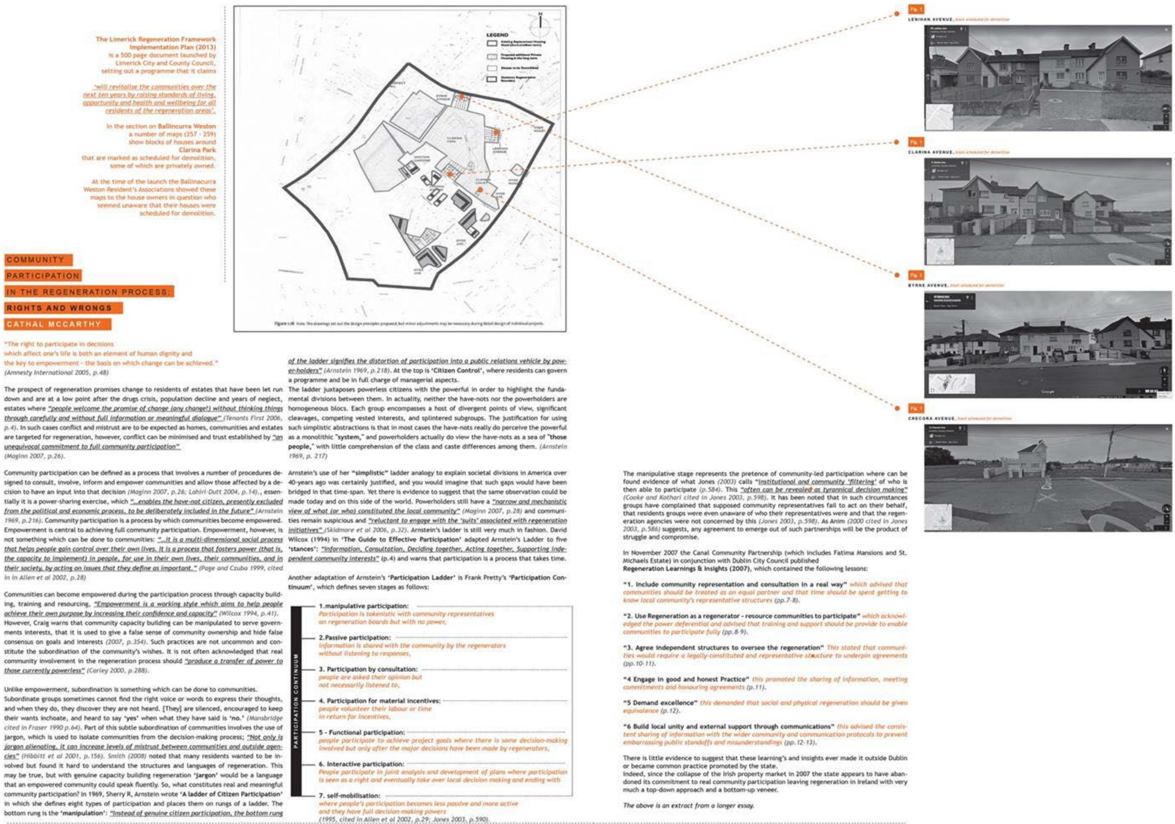
This *Real Estate/Financial Complex,* as Fernandez and Aalbers have termed it (2016), has effects that are immediately tangible and visible in Ireland. With over 180,000 accommodation units recorded as vacant during the 2016 census (CSO, 2016), the number of people without homes has recently exceeded 9,650, including over 3,680 children (Focus Ireland, 2018), approximately 0.2% of the population. Various plans put forward by the state at both national and local government levels have failed to produce significant effects. Statistics clearly demonstrate unwillingness by successive governments to address the need for social

housing,[41] although state subsidies for private rented accommodation are expected to reach €3bn in the period between 2017 and 2022.[42] This reflects a commitment to promoting free market solutions to social problems that is typical of neoliberal policies (Harvey, 2005).

As part of *CS #4* I produced an installation of materials for an exhibition of staff work in Limerick School of Art & Design (Fig. 4.6). One of the elements in the installation was a 16-page printed broadsheet that juxtaposed some of the formal representations of space with the fragmented residues of lived space. (Fig. 4.7) shows one of the double page spreads from that broadsheet, which rematerialises the blocks of houses scheduled for demolition in the maps of Figure 4.5. This broadsheet served as a sketch for a larger and more complex work, : *Informational Aesthetic* (title partially redacted), that was commissioned for the 2020 EVA Biennale in Limerick. This work was to be a culmination of several strands within the research, drawing particularly on Negt and Kluge's theorisation of the public sphere(s) of experience. Elements of social experience, they argue, are delegitimised by their exclusion from the representational apparatus of the dominant public sphere. It is not simply that some things are left out; the terms by which things are made visible negate the conception of other forms of life. The mechanisms of legitimation always generate a residue that is rendered illegitimate, fragmented, partial. The work was a collaborative endeavour with an activist in one of the regeneration areas to gather together fragments and residues arising from the collision of concrete and abstract space as that materialised on the ground. The work would have taken the form of an online platform organised by the concept of an informational aesthetic, to generate a counterpublic, counterhegemonic articulation of a lived space. The

[41] Social housing spending was cut by 72% between 2008 and 2012 (Focus Ireland, 2019).
[42] In 2016, there were 50,000 tenants in receipt of rent allowance, 16,000 Housing Assistance Programme (HAP) recipients and 20,000 Rental Allowance Scheme (RAS) recipients, at a cost of €566 million (Hearne, 2017: 84).

Figure 4.6, Fiona Woods, 2018, Contested Site #4, Installation of work, Limerick School of Art & Design.



The Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan (2013)
is a 500 page document launched by
Limerick City and County Council,
setting out a programme that it claims

"will revitalise the communities over the next ten years by raising standards of living, opportunity and health and wellbeing for all residents of the regeneration areas".

In the section on **Ballincurra Weston**
a number of maps (257 - 259)
show blocks of houses around
Clarina Park
that are marked as scheduled for demolition,
some of which are privately owned.

At the time of the launch the Ballinacurra Weston Resident's Associations showed these maps to the house owners in question who seemed unaware that their houses were scheduled for demolition.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN THE REGENERATION PROCESS: RIGHTS AND WRONGS

CATHAL MCCARTHY

"The right to participate in decisions
which affect one's life is both an element of human dignity and
the key to empowerment – the basis on which change can be achieved."
(Amnesty International 2005, p.48)

The prospect of regeneration promises change to residents of estates that have been let run down and are at a low point after the drugs crisis, population decline and years of neglect, estates where *"people welcome the promise of change (any change!) without thinking things through carefully and without full information or meaningful dialogue" (Tenants First 2006, p.4)*. In such cases conflict and mistrust are to be expected as homes, communities and estates are targeted for regeneration, however, conflict can be minimised and trust established by *"an unequivocal commitment to full community participation" (Maginn 2007, p.26)*.

Community participation can be defined as a process that involves a number of procedures designed to consult, involve, inform and empower communities and allow those affected by a decision to have an input into that decision *(Maginn 2007, p.26; Lahiri-Dutt 2004, p.14)*., essentially it is a power-sharing exercise, which *"...enables the have-not citizen, presently excluded from the political and economic process, to be deliberately included in the future" (Arnstein 1969, p.216)*. Community participation is a process by which communities become empowered. Empowerment is central to achieving full community participation. Empowerment, however, is not something which can be done to communities: *"...it is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important." (Page and Czuba 1999, cited in in Allen et al 2002, p.28)*

Communities can become empowered during the participation process through capacity building, training and resourcing, *"Empowerment is a working style which aims to help people achieve their own purpose by increasing their confidence and capacity" (Wilcox 1994, p.41)*. However, Craig warns that community capacity building can be manipulated to serve governments interests, that it is used to give a false sense of community ownership and hide false consensus on goals and interests *(2007, p.354)*. Such practices are not uncommon and constitute the subordination of the community's wishes. It is not often acknowledged that real community involvement in the regeneration process should *"produce a transfer of power to those currently powerless" (Carley 2000, p.288)*.

Unlike empowerment, subordination is something which can be done to communities.
Subordinate groups sometimes cannot find the right voice or words to express their thoughts, and when they do, they discover they are not heard. [They] are silenced, encouraged to keep their wants inchoate, and heard to say **'yes'** when what they have said is **'no.'** *(Mansbridge cited in Fraser 1990 p.64)*. Part of this subtle subordination of communities involves the use of jargon, which is used to isolate communities from the decision-making process; *"Not only is jargon alienating, it can increase levels of mistrust between communities and outside agencies" (Hibbitt et al 2001, p.156). Smith (2008)* noted that many residents wanted to be involved but found it hard to understand the structures and languages of regeneration. This may be true, but with genuine capacity building regeneration **'jargon'** would be a language that an empowered community could speak fluently. So, what constitutes real and meaningful community participation? In 1969, Sherry R, Arnstein wrote **'A ladder of Citizen Participation'** in which she defines eight types of participation and places them on rungs of a ladder. The bottom rung is the **'manipulation'**: *"Instead of genuine citizen participation, the bottom rung of the ladder signifies the distortion of participation into a public relations vehicle by power-holders" (Arnstein 1969, p.218)*. At the top is **'Citizen Control'**, where residents can govern a programme and be in full charge of managerial aspects.

The ladder juxtaposes powerless citizens with the powerful in order to highlight the fundamental divisions between them. In actuality, neither the have-nots nor the powerholders are homogeneous blocs. Each group encompasses a host of divergent points of view, significant cleavages, competing vested interests, and splintered subgroups. The justification for using such simplistic abstractions is that in most cases the have-nots really do perceive the powerful as a monolithic **"system,"** and powerholders actually do view the have-nots as a sea of **"those people,"** with little comprehension of the class and caste differences among them. *(Arnstein 1969, p. 217)*

Arnstein's use of her **"simplistic"** ladder analogy to explain societal divisions in America over 40-years ago was certainly justified, and you would imagine that such gaps would have been bridged in that time-span. Yet there is evidence to suggest that the same observation could be made today and on this side of the world. Powerholders still have a *"narrow and mechanistic view of what (or who) constituted the local community" (Maginn 2007, p.28)* and communities remain suspicious and *"reluctant to engage with the 'suits' associated with regeneration initiatives" (Skidmore et al 2006, p.32)*. Arnstein's ladder is still very much in fashion. David Wilcox (1994) in **'The Guide to Effective Participation'** adapted Arnstein's Ladder to five **'stances'**: *"Information, Consultation, Deciding together, Acting together, Supporting independent community interests"* (p.4) and warns that participation is a process that takes time.

Another adaptation of Arnstein's **'Participation Ladder'** is Frank Pretty's **'Participation Continuum'**, which defines seven stages as follows:

PARTICIPATION CONTINUUM

1.manipulative participation:
Participation is tokenistic with community representatives on regeneration boards but with no power.

2.Passive participation:
Information is shared with the community by the regenerators without listening to responses.

3. Participation by consultation:
people are asked their opinion but not necessarily listened to.

4. Participation for material incentives:
people volunteer their labour or time in return for incentives.

5 - Functional participation:
people participate to achieve project goals where there is some decision-making involved but only after the major decisions have been made by regenerators.

6. Interactive participation:
People participate in joint analysis and development of plans where participation is seen as a right and eventually take over local decision making and ending with

7. self-mobilisation:
where people's participation becomes less passive and more active and they have full decision-making powers
(1995, cited in Allen et al 2002, p.29; Jones 2003, p.590).

The manipulative stage represents the pretence of community-led participation where can be found evidence of what Jones *(2003)* calls *"institutional and community 'filtering'* of who is then able to participate *(p.584)*. This *"often can be revealed as tyrannical decision making" (Cooke and Kothari cited in Jones 2003, p.598)*. It has been noted that in such circumstances groups have complained that supposed community representatives fail to act on their behalf, that residents groups were even unaware of who their representatives were and that the regeneration agencies were not concerned by this *(Jones 2003, p.598)*. As Anim *(2000 cited in Jones 2003, p.586)* suggests, any agreement to emerge out of such partnerships will be the product of struggle and compromise.

In November 2007 the Canal Community Partnership (which includes Fatima Mansions and St. Michaels Estate) in conjunction with Dublin City Council published
Regeneration Learnings & Insights (2007), which contained the following lessons:

"1. Include community representation and consultation in a real way" *which advised that communities should be treated as an equal partner and that time should be spent getting to know local community's representative structures (pp.7-8).*

"2. Use Regeneration as a regenerator - resource communities to participate" *which acknowledged the power deferential and advised that training and support should be provide to enable communities to participate fully (pp.8-9).*

"3. Agree independent structures to oversee the regeneration" *This stated that communities would require a legally-constituted and representative structure to underpin agreements (pp.10-11).*

"4 Engage in good and honest Practice" *this promoted the sharing of information, meeting commitments and honouring agreements (p.11).*

"5 Demand excellence" *this demanded that social and physical regeneration should be given equivalence (p.12).*

"6 Build local unity and external support through communications" *this advised the consistent sharing of information with the wider community and communication protocols to prevent embarrassing public standoffs and misunderstandings (pp.12-13).*

There is little evidence to suggest that these learning's and insights ever made it outside Dublin or became common practice promoted by the state.
Indeed, since the collapse of the Irish property market in 2007 the state appears to have abandoned its commitment to real community participation leaving regeneration in Ireland with very much a top-down approach and a bottom-up veneer.

The above is an extract from a longer essay.

Figure 4.7, Fiona Woods, 2018, *C7ontested Site #4,* Detail from broadsheet (design Lucia Pola).

work would oppose the logic of 'disagreement' to the logic of 'police' (Rancière, 2004: 89) to experiment with 'a new public language' (Jameson, 1988) of regeneration and the social production of space in Limerick, with a view to changing the definition of 'the common world' (Rancière, 2010: 141).

One of the claims that Negt and Kluge make is that possibility of social change depends upon 'the cohabitation of uneven organisational structures of publicity' (Hansen, 1993: xl), which are potentially unstable and capable of producing collisions, conjunctures and developments of an unpredictable type. In the course of making this work it emerged that the unpredictable collisions and conjunctures of modes of publicity are not restricted to any one political agenda. Marginal voices and fragmented residues exist across the political spectrum. My coproducer and I found ourselves on extremely different sides of an emerging political movement. Ironically for someone who is opposed to orthodoxy, I found myself positioned within a kind 'police order' (Rancière, 2004: 89) relative to a set of views that I found to be invalid and intolerable. It became impossible to proceed with the commission, and it was withdrawn in January 2020.

4.2.2 *Contested Site #3*, Stage 2 and 3

Contested Site #3 focused on a space in the city centre that is referenced in many of the vision documents as an ideal public space. The material reality, however, involves several mechanisms that are 'designed to intercept, repel or filter would-be users' (Flusty, 1994: 16), employing the exclusionary strategy of 'crusty space' (Flusty, 1994: 17). This is a typical feature in 'the erosion of spatial justice' (Flusty, 1994: 12) that characterises the economised space of the neoliberal city. Corresponding to this concrete and material reality I selected *L2030*, as a key apparatus in reproducing and furthering the economisation of space in the city

centre, drawing from its primary document, *Limerick 2030: An Economic and Spatial Plan for Limerick* (LCCC, 2013) and also from the Limerick 2030 website where current interpretations of the plan are evident.

The *L2030* plan was produced by the newly amalgamated Limerick City and County Council in 2013. It is described in the introduction as:

> . . . a 'once in a generation' Plan to guide the economic, social and physical renaissance of Limerick City Centre and the wider County/Mid-West Region. It will guide the activities of the new City and County Council and its partners in delivering this renaissance (LCCC, 2013: i).

The vision put forward in the document anticipates that Limerick will become:

> a major economic force in the Irish and European economy, a leading centre for commercial investment – both foreign direct investment and endogenous business growth, capitalising on the strength of its higher education institutions, the skills of its workforce and its environment and heritage attributes. The City Centre will be at the heart of this economic force – an attractive magnet for retail, leisure, residential, commercial and cultural growth. Growth will benefit all citizens across the City, County and Mid-West Region (ibid.: 3–4).

I quote at length because the language and the phrasing is instrumental in the abstraction of the lived experience of the city. The population of the city are referred to first as 'workforce' (pure abstraction) and then as 'citizens', people viewed through the lens of the social contract, productive, responsible and committed to the social order. Out of the 82 words in the paragraph, references to the economic take up 16 as follows: economic force (x2), economy, commercial (x2), investment, foreign direct investment, business, growth (x3), capitalising. The term 'attributes' here suggests exchange rather than intrinsic value, while the tautology 'attractive magnet' underscores the idea of an 'economic force'.

This clear and explicit orientation is reflected in the rest of the plan. Principle 2.8 reads as follows:

> Limerick should seek to become Ireland's most business-friendly City, with investors overwhelmed by the service that the City provides to facilitate inward investment and encourage business growth. In the context of the recommended economic strategy the business role of the City Centre needs to be clear – meeting the needs of businesses in defined sectors and meeting the quality-of-life expectation of business leaders, employers, employees and their families' (ibid.: 5).

Another particularly significant proposition in terms of this research is articulated in principle 2.7:

> The Spatial Plan seeks to ensure that the City Centre in particular fulfils its full economic potential by becoming a desirable place in which to 'do business'. . . It must also develop its role as a place of creativity, culture and consumption. It is the 'shop window' for Limerick. Its role. . . [includes] providing the quality-of-life factors so important to investors, employers and skilled workers (ibid.: 5).

Following lengthy and detailed recommendations regarding economic and spatial development, the plan proposes a marketing strategy that it refers to as a 'place proposition' (ibid.: 120), to encapsulate the ambitions and themes of the plan, resulting in 'a strategic, motivational and inspirational statement of intent: Authentic~Innovative~Progressive' (ibid.: 121). This is 'a promise of what Limerick is' which embodies [its] cultural essence' as:

> . . . an authentic place of substance . . . a place of authentic and innovative people – genuine, natural, real, welcoming and friendly, leaders and achievers . . . [with] an innovative, progressive outlook to knowledge and innovation (ibid.: 121).

Authentic, genuine, natural, real – these are coded words to suggest tradition, continuity and a hint of straight-talking working class. As part of the place proposition for the city, the people of Limerick are meant to embody the performative characteristics of being 'welcoming and friendly'. Furthermore, the people who embody the essence of Limerick are 'leaders and achievers'. With its emphasis on sensibility and perception this passage clearly demonstrates the workings of the plan as a set of coordinates to determine what can/ should be visible and sayable, a police order that constructs a distribution of the sensible (Rancière, 2004).

Limerick is a city that still has a traditional working-class population living visibly in the city centre in older blocks of 'corporation flats' and purpose-built social housing. In *L2030* the following reference is made to these communities, in section 5, *City Centre Spatial Plan: Analysis,* sub-section 5.2, *Economic Function Analysis*, under the heading of *Challenges*. 'There is a predominance of social housing in the City Centre and edge of the City Centre which impacts upon image/ perception' (ibid.: 58). '*Authentic, genuine, natural, real'* can thus be read as a directive rather than a description, a stylisation of the embodied dispositions of the inhabitants of the city rather than an embrace of its large working-class population.[43]

The plan repeatedly positions the city in relation to audiences (emphasis added):

- To ensure a consistency of message and positioning for the City and County with local, national and international **audiences** (ibid.: 119).
- To build a positive perspective about Limerick with regional, national and international **audiences** (ibid.: 120).
- Living up to the expectation – prioritise the animation of the City Centre through improved all-year round coordination of events; definition and agreement of the 'Limerick Experience' of agreed quality and standards for events; and definition of the 'Limerick Welcome' of hosting key visits to the City for economic, media, educational and cultural influencers and target **audiences** (ibid.: 123).
- Whilst Limerick engages with a wide range of **audiences**, this place marketing strategy must prioritise the specific **audiences** it is seeking to influence so that activity can be appropriately targeted (ibid.: 124).
- To positively influence the perceptions, views and opinions of Limerick by target **audiences** through direct marketing activity, media management and active social media management; (ibid.: 124).

[43] The barely veiled classism at work here is echoed in other sections that have important resonances for my research. The first of these is in a technical section, Creating the Conditions for Long-term Growth: Project 5, Limerick Local Labour Agreement, *Labour supply and selection* which reads:

'Selecting job seeker participants for an LLA is a delicate process. It is not always desirable to focus on the most hard to reach groups in the local area as this can be problematic and result in construction companies not receiving the quantity or quality of recruits they desire. At the same time the LLA should not focus on those that would be able to find a job without the Agreement's existence as this reduces additionality' (ibid.: 43).

Desire and desirability are significant terms repeated throughout the visions proposed by the plan. 'Not always desirable' is a very particular choice of words in this instance, capable of sliding easily into the term 'undesirable'. An undercurrent of 'undesirables' is always present in the material-discursive arrangements of urban renewal and regeneration in Limerick, and also in the way that the material circumstance of the city are organised and policed (see news clip Figure 4.8). I discuss this in the next section.

A conclusion to be drawn from the combination of these representations relates to a mode of value between use and exchange identified by Agamben as 'exhibition value' (2007: 82). In *L2030* the city is positioned as a as a form of display ('shop window') in an experience economy, with the people of Limerick given the role of performing the 'Limerick Welcome', so that it will become 'a desirable place in which to 'do business' (LCCC, 2013: 68), 'overwhelming investors with the service that the City provides to facilitate inward investment and encourage business' (ibid.: 5). The picture of social relations constructed through the primary economic and spatial plan for the city, operational until 2030, is an unapologetic staging plan; it demonstrates a fundamental process of abstraction and alienation at work in this vision of 'revitalising Limerick' (ibid.: viii), and an attempt to take control of what the city means and who it is for.

Section 5 of *L2030* contains a brief analysis of 'Public Realm and Open Space'. It begins by pointing to 'a growing awareness across Europe of the importance of high-quality public spaces in generating footfall and creating value' (ibid.: 54). Users of public space are referred to almost exclusively as 'pedestrians', people in motion through a space rather than people who linger or loiter (see newspaper article, Fig. 4.8). Point 6.4 of the *City Centre Spatial Plan: Strategy* proposes 'a network of public squares or plazas across the City Centre – connected and promoted as a collection' (ibid.: 87). At the centre of this network the plan recommends the development of a *New City Square*:

> . . . positioned as the focal point of the city . . . the place where celebrations are held, where events take place. It should be lively and animated surrounded by shops, cafes and restaurants. It should include features that celebrate its status and function with public art and/or fountains. It must be a square where people congregate – meet, sit, rest and 'watch the world go by' (ibid.: 75–76).

The directive language employed in this version of publicness, once again assigning specific

www.limerickleader.ie WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 22, 2020

BE PART OF THE CONVERSTATION

Beggar banned from three city streets

Fergal Corcoran is banned from entering O'Connell Street, Cruises Street and William Street (above).

A STREET beggar who is banned from a number of streets in the city centre has been warned he will go to jail, if he breaches the exclusion order again, writes David Hurley.

Fergal Corcoran, 51, of McGarry House, Alphonsus Street was before Limerick District Court in relation to two offences earlier this month.

Sergeant Shane Davern said Mr Corcoran, who, last September, was banned from entering O'Connell Street, WIlliam Street and Cruises Street, was observed begging outside Penneys on January 7 and again on January 16.

The defendant previously served four days of a two month prison sentence for breaching the order last October. He has a total of 44 previous convictions including 23 for begging.

Judge Marian O'Leary imposed two separate two month prison sentences which she suspended for 12 months.

"I will not be happy the next time," she commented.

Figure 4.8, Newspaper clipping from *The Limerick Leader,* January 22nd, 2020.

embodied dispositions to its users, is replicated across all discussions of the 'network of public square or plazas' in the plan. What unfolds across the plan's designs for a 'public realm' is a socio-spatial dynamic that bears no resemblance to the unruly, political form of publicness discussed in Chapter Three. This alienated version of publicness is the phenomenon to which the lexigraph ~~public~~ alludes. The New City Square as envisaged in L2030 is shown here in two images drawn from the plan (Fig 4.9), one inside the envisaged square and one from behind where the square opens onto the river (the starting point of *CS #3* was the small park to the left of the bottom image). It doesn't require much conjecture to imagine this square as heavily securitised, with public and private policing, strict regulation in terms of access and use, monitored by security cameras. The square as laid out suggests the kind of 'paranoid . . . interdictory space' that Flusty describes as 'jittery – space that cannot be utilised unobserved' and 'prickly' in the sense that 'it cannot be comfortably occupied' (ibid.: 17). The block-style benches are positioned at such a distance from one another as to prevent the very 'congregation' that the plan calls for.

The *New City Square* at Arthur's Quay has since been relocated to the so-called Opera site, one of the developments prioritised by the Limerick Twenty Thirty Strategic Development DAC [LTTS], a property development company wholly owned by Limerick City and County Council.[44] Since it took over the implementation of the plan in 2016, LTTS has prioritised developments that generate office space in the city. In a design brief for the development of the Opera site, produced by Limerick City and County Council in February 2018, the requirements for a 'Quantum of Development – Open Spaces' is laid out:

[44] In 2016 Limerick City and County Council established the first Local Authority wholly owned special purpose vehicle in Ireland to deliver a city and countywide programme of property investment. 'The Limerick Twenty Thirty Strategic Development DAC (Designated Activity Company) is a dynamic property development company playing a pivotal role in the rapid transformation of Limerick into a leading destination for indigenous and international investment' (LTTS, 2016).

Figure 4.9, *'Photomontage of Potential City Centre Square and new retail development',* L2030, (LCCC, 2013: xv) [top]; *'Photomontage of potential new public realm and park at Arthur's Quay',* Fig. 5, L2030 (ibid.).

> Provide an appropriate quantum of open spaces within and around the site that achieves, as a minimum, the footprint envisaged in the Limerick 2030 Plan, including inter alia, a 3,700 sq. m internal square with a strong visual identity and permeable linkages, a stronger gateway at Bank Place (1,100 sq. m) and high-quality surrounding streets to provide a safe, animated and inviting public realm that optimises the pedestrian experience and linkages with surrounding areas (LCCC, 2018: 18).

This technocratic vision of a highly calculated public space demonstrates what Lefebvre describes as 'a strange kind of excess: a rage for measurement and calculation' (quoted in Wilson, 2013). The images in Fig. 4.10 are taken from the most recent brochure produced by LTTS to promote what is now called Opera Square, 'a new business hub at the heart of the city which also includes cultural, retail, and restaurant uses, all arranged around a vibrant new city square' (LTTS, 2020: 6). The full image is shown at the top, while the bottom image is a detail. An apparently shallow pool occupies the centre of the square; the bottom image shows a woman wading in the pool. Her attire, sunglasses, hairstyle mark her out as cool, stylish, carefree. She introduces an element of permitted rule-breaking into an otherwise homogenous,

highly regulated, socio-spatial order. She performs a particularity that is not threatening to the established social order, embodying a sensual approach to life, a figure of individualised liberty, free from the paranoid regulation of actual public space (where she would certainly not be permitted to wade in the pool). The images of public space must also be read in terms of absences, the kinds of body types that are allowed to be part of the staging of publicness.

CS #3 was the one of the first actions in the research to test the idea of ~~public~~, to explore its alienating effects and to place it in the context of a process of abstraction that I describe as the economisation of space. Between 2016 – 2018 I produced several more aesthetic actions that engaged with publicness as a socio-spatial form and drew on Warner's strategy of 'going public' (Warner, 2002b) to create reflexive spaces for the circulation of discourse in the shadow of the edifice of legitimation described as the 'dominant public sphere' (Negt and Kluge, 1993).

Figure 4.10, *One Opera Square,* Promotional literature, LTTS, 2020.

4.3 Spaces of representation

The *CS* actions were primarily diagnostic, exploring the relationship between hegemonic representations of the city, processes of abstraction and the fragmented conditions of concrete space. As Negt and Kluge (1993), Rancière (2004; 2010) and Lefebvre (1991) have all argued, the residual and the fragmented lie outside of the homogenising logic of abstraction; their appearance threatens the stability of abstractive structures. I developed a strand of work that had a more transformative aspiration, looking for ways to modify the field of common, sensible experience (Rancière, 2004). The transformative impulse of that aesthetic work was oriented towards inventing new ways 'to experience the "we", and the "world" that is amongst us' (Garcés, 2009: 207), which led me to focus on the idea of *the common*, thinking the common, enacting the common, finding ways of making or knowing in-common. This was not so much a break with publicness as a move towards Negt and Kluge's project to 'rematerialise' the public sphere as 'a social, collective process of production that has as its object the human senses in their interrelatedness' (1993: 7), an aesthetic process in the terms employed in this research.

Reference was made in Chapter Two to the *CC* actions, which served as sites of collective meaning-making, employing maps and processes of mapping as tools for 'thinking the common', resulting in maps as 'objects of collective knowledge (ibid.). *CC #2* was staged in response to an invitation from Creative Communities Limerick (CCL) as part of a two-day event, The Art of Community (March, 2017). CCL describes itself as 'representative network of geographical and issue-based community and arts organisations network' (CCL), made up of organisations and individuals who have an interest in developing the cultural life of communities, in the broadest sense of the word. It is described as an 'experiment', rooted in the principles of bottom-up development (ibid.). The Art of Community event was oriented

towards community development workers looking for creative ways to develop community engagement projects. The object of collective knowledge generated through *CC #2,* in response to the question *Where do communities find culture?* delineated a territory around the edges of the city.

One of those territories is the regeneration area of Moyross. *L2030* makes one reference to Moyross. Referring to the remit of *Limerick Regeneration,* with its responsibility for 'Social Economy' (LCCC, 2013: 59), the *L2030* plan lists key projects earmarked for Regeneration Areas. Moyross is designated as the 'Green Energy/ Cooperative Recycling Hub' (ibid.: 60) which would offer 'capacity building in the area of 'green energy vocational training' with the long-term objective of attracting a cluster of Green Economy business to the area' (ibid.: 60). Following references to 'multi stakeholder approaches' and 'third level partnerships', the meaning of Green Energy/ Cooperative Recycling Hub emerges most clearly in the sentence 'to form a focal point for a cooperative approach among industry practitioners/ experts (glass, fuel, metal, paper, etc.)' (ibid.) In other words, Moyross is allocated the role of waste management centre for the city. Nowhere in the description is there a reference to actual human beings; the paragraph is an exemplary case of reconfiguring a marginalised population as a functional abstraction.

Arising from the *CC* actions I invited the Moyross Women's Group to work with me on another project, *LCI,* which I discuss in more detail in Chapter Six. The voices of women from Moyross are not part of the 'public' discourse of the city, and their experience of the city is a world away from the image projected by the masterplans that strive to shape the social imaginary of the city. Taking the theme of common interest as our starting point, the women and I worked together over a period of months (2018–2019), resulting in the design and production of a banner that served as a backdrop for the performance of a play that the women

had written prior to working with me, *A political herstory of our bodies* (Fig. 4.13). Their performance was part of a full-day programme in the event-space of *LCI* (April 2019) organised around the theme of *Care as Commons,* which is discussed more fully in Chapter Six.

4.4 Conclusions

The interrogation of publicness presented in Chapter Three laid the ground for constructing a theoretical horizon against which to imagine a 'collective organisation of meaningful experience' (Negt and Kluge, 1993: 5). Public, as I argued, is a social, cultural and political dynamic animated by tensions between common and private interests, between modes of legitimation and contestation and between ideals of equality and mechanisms to protect the liberties of social elites. Public both is, and is not, a social institution, in terms discussed previously. However, Warner argues that public is the force that directly challenges regimented stability (Warner, 2002b: 422), always unstable and unpredictable, self-organising and contingent. The force of public contests the cultural dynamic of privatisation that is bound up with the logic of property. The drive to privatisation is not confined to property, but increasingly shapes hegemonic understandings of ethics and the social totality (Berlant and Warner, 1998) with consequences for the process described here as public.

In 2007, Sheikh argued that a post-public situation had come into effect through 'the erosion of the nation-state' leading to a situation in which 'the public sphere of 'the public' can no longer be specifically located' (Sheikh, 2007). This, he argued, ushered in new relations between publicness, consumption and production, culminating in new formations of publicness. The public sphere, under occupation by forces of commercialisation and securitisation, continues to function as 'a political space in which the many can tend to common

Figure 4.11, Moyross Women's Group and guests, 2019, *A Political Herstory of our Bodies, 2019,* Banner and performance, *The Laboratory of Common Interest,* April 2019.

affairs' (Virno, 2004: 40), although the idea of a single public sphere is a misrecognition of the processes at work, according to Negt and Kluge. A dominant public sphere, with legitimating and delegitimating functions, is shadowed by other 'organisational structures of publicity' (Hansen, 1993: xl), unevenly distributed, potentially unstable and capable of producing collisions, conjunctures and developments of an unpredictable type. ~~Public~~ is not a quest to restore a previous condition of publicness but marks out a space for a re-articulation of its critical, political and deliberative power. From the fragmented and residual spaces of ~~public~~, elements can coalesce to assert contrary positions and to change the field of common experience, a redistribution of the sensible in Rancière's terminology (2004).

The socio-spatial construct of the city was approached as a stratified reality (Bhaskar, 1998: 91), produced and reproduced through the dynamic interaction laid out in Lefebvre's triadic scheme for the social production of space. Those perspectives and positions were synthesised in the *CS* actions, resulting in a study of the ways in which the concrete spaces of lived, material reality does not align with processes of abstraction that operate to reconfigure what those spaces mean and who they are for. Abstract space, as described by Lefebvre, is not totalising, it cannot expunge the residues of all other modes of spatialisation. It aims to homogenise but is full of contradictions. From its fissures and fractures may emerge another kind of space, which Lefebvre described as 'differential' (1991: 368), a space of potential disalienation, heterogeneous, fragmentary, spontaneous, poetic. Likewise, the public sphere as an apparatus of legitimation and contestation has been scrutinised in the context of Limerick city, even as its fragmentation into multiple public spheres, collisions of different forms of publicity have been shown to generate the kind of counterpublic discourse that emerges from the process of 'going public' (Warner, 2002a). The commissioned work, [redacted]: *Informational Aesthetic* (title partially redacted), was proposed

as a direct exploration of the possibility of harnessing the excluded residues of the dominant public sphere to form counterhegemonic and counterpublic accounts of the lived experience of space. The breakdown of that work was a result, ironically (or fittingly), of the emergence of other residues excluded from the dominant public sphere, to claim a space and to generate a counterpublic discourse of their own, one that I could neither tolerate, nor tacitly endorse.

It was through the *CS* actions that the discourse of economisation came clearly into view for this researcher. Chapter Three and this chapter have demonstrated some of the ways in which logics of economisation dominate social and spatial development in Limerick city, reinforced by vision documents, plans, competing plans, reviews of plans, visualisations, aesthetic languages, forms of visual branding, press materials and academic analyses that circumscribe a particular distribution of the sensible (Rancière, 2004), polemical and heavily-regulated but nonetheless susceptible to being acted upon at the level of sense and sense-making. Different tools and techniques were tested in the early part of the research to generate 'a cartography of the visible, the intelligible and also of the possible' (Rancière, 2008), that could interrupt the police order regulating the sensory and spatial ordering of the spaces of the city as *economised space*. The *CS* actions were designed to reconnect spaces and relations often splintered by the processes of abstraction and commodification inherent in the discourse of economisation, and to assert the differential possibilities of the sites in question.

Politics, Rancière has argued, consists of acts that challenge the natural order of things to change the definition of 'the common world' (2010: 141). The aesthetics of politics, he states, 'lies in [the] framing of the 'we'' (ibid.: 141), but for Garcés it is not about a framing but about a common experience, of 'the "we" and the "world" that is amongst us' (2009: 207), which must be enacted in real time. Around the mid-point of the research, it became apparent that publicness is so enmeshed with the structures of property relations – legal, financial,

political, ideological – that its value as a site for the establishment of a real *common* interest must be called into question. The struggle to bring about 'a fundamental change in our thoughts, perceptions, and values' (Capra, 1982: 16) in response to the systemic violence of enclosure should open the way to a transformation from the public to the commons (Federici, 2012). The emerging social movement of the Commons, as a site of material and conceptual struggle, and a knowledge-making and world-making project, offers a clearer route towards contesting the logics of enclosure and extractivism identified in the research problem. That realisation led to the production of a durational work, *LCI*, which is the subject of Chapters Six and Seven.

Chapter Five: From Art to Aesthetic Work

As discussed in Chapter One, APBR, operating within a performative paradigm, is both productive and itself an object of inquiry (Barrett, 2014). Alongside the critical investigation of socio-spatial phenomena, ~~*public*~~ and *the economisation of space,* a critical re-examination of my practice resulted in its rearticulation as *aesthetic work,* for reasons that are discussed in depth in this chapter. The articulation of aesthetic work drew on a longstanding and extensive engagement with historical and contemporary theories of radical, political and socially engaged practice (including questions concerning the ontology of art) and through encounters with other practices. The designation of aesthetic work opened up ways of working, and thinking about working, that were not determined by the codified space of art. These matters were tested and examined in the aesthetic event, *LCI*, which is the subject of Chapters Six and Seven.

Aesthetics is a complex, material-discursive system. In addition to receptive and productive modes of sense-making and practices of meaning-making, aesthetics encompasses epistemological and discursive activity, through which its modes of praxis and politics are deliberated. The conceptual framing of *aesthetic work* drew on Rancière's theorising of the politics of aesthetics, Terry Eagelton's Marxist analysis of Modern Aesthetics, posthumanist and decolonial aesthetics (Gómez-Báris, 2017; Mignolo, 2010; Wolfe, 2009; Calarco, 2008) and feminist aesthetics (Korsmeyer, 2004, 2013: Korsmeyer and Hein, 1990). The theorisation and practice of *Arte Útil,* 'a growing user group . . . to promote ways for art to work effectively in ordinary life and to initiate and support new initiatives' (Arte Útil, 2021), also played a significant role in helping me to deconstruct the problematic of 'art', and to find other ways of accounting for the critical impulses of my work.

Reflecting critically on my practice did not begin with this research, but it was intensified within the temporal frame of the research (2015–2021). Constructing an historical ontology of the field of socially engaged practice, encapsulated in a diagram (Fig. 5.1), was a step in that process. The diagram resulted from years of engaging critically with the field of socially engaged art, as an artist, a curator and an educator. It was devised initially as a pedagogical tool to explore critical impulses feeding into the field of practice, and to make visible a particular ordering of that field through my choices about what merited study and critique. In addition to functioning as a tool for collective, conceptual mappings of the aesthetical, political and ethical values and structures integral to socially engaged practice, it also continues to serve as a mechanism for thinking through the critical impulses of my own practice, some of which are discussed in the following sections.

5.1 The ontology of socially engaged art.

When the work of art is situated in proximity to the dynamics of the everyday world of social relations, when those relations become part of the way that the work defines itself, there is an intensification of questions concerning: i) the structures that constitute art's modes of production and distribution; ii) where art is found, located and encountered; iii) the extent to which ethics is or is not part of the discourse of a work; and iv) which aspects of a practice do or do not count as art.

In 2004 a fierce debate erupted concerning the politics of socially engaged art. A critical axis was established between positions adopted by Claire Bishop (2004, 2006) and Grant Kester (2004, 2006), prompted by the question of how work carried out in the social field should be critically evaluated. Arising from Kester's seminal work, *Conversation Pieces; Community and Communication in Modern Art* (2004), Bishop charged Kester with elevating

SOCIALLY ENGAGED PRACTICE

A VERY PARTIAL GENEALOGY

FIONA WOODS • 2021

Figure 5.1, Fiona Woods, 2021, *Socially Engaged Practice, a very partial genealogy*, diagrammatic work.

the social virtue of a work above its artistic merits (2006), collapsing the categories of ethics and aesthetics, resulting in the artistically 'bland' and the critically anaemic (Bishop, 2011). Kester rejected Bishop's insistence that provocation and exposition are 'the core of [art's] efficacy' (Bishop, 2011), arguing that this stemmed from an outdated idea of art's relationship to social and political change (Kester, 2006).

Kester's re-evaluation of the tenets of critical artmaking in the context of socially engaged aesthetic work was ground-breaking, but not unproblematic. He invoked the idea of conversation and dialogue, framed as an aesthetic undertaking, as a medium of social equalisation, but only if the artist maintains constant vigilance with regard to the exercise of their privilege. The 'authority' of the artist represents a power imbalance that should be overcome through open dialogue. However, the renunciation of a power imbalance doesn't necessarily result in conditions of real (as opposed to symbolic) equality. Kim Charnley argues that critical, political art is always playing 'a double game' (2011: 49), that there is a 'prestige that accrues to art as an activity set aside from the mainstream of social existence' (ibid.: 50) upon which critical, political art depends. Charnley sees in the Bishop/Kester controversy unacknowledged sub-texts that undermine both of their positions. Kester's call for political art to negate its implicit insider/outsider relations failed to acknowledge that the condition of art relies on 'a welter of initiatory knowledge, an expanse of text and an archive of historical precedent' (ibid.: 51). That knowledge cannot be discarded, because it has 'the potential to open up different ways of thinking' (ibid.).

Bishop's stated project of protecting art's critical freedoms against the strictures of ethics is, Charnley argues, a contradictory undertaking. If 'collaborative art', to use Bishop's term, requires the expulsion of ethical considerations in order to retain its 'free' status, then participants are required to accept its fundamental claims as art. However, that poses a limit to

critical perspectives that could arise from a non-teleological, aesthetical embrace of the ethical. Furthermore, Bishop's arguments against subjecting socially engaged aesthetic work to ethical critiques have themselves been framed in ethical terms, according to Charnley. What she advocates is a 'confrontational art [leading] to "transformation" and "resistance to instrumental rationality" in the service of a "good" that remains undefined' (ibid.: 43). The polarised Bishop/Kester position has become more nuanced over time, as other perspectives and voices entered the debate.[45] The discourse of socially-engaged art has opened new perspectives onto questions outlined at the beginning of this section, questions that have been in play for at least two centuries, in relation to the structures that constitute art's modes of production and distribution, questions of where art is found, located and encountered, and the extent to which ethics is or is not part of the discourse of the work. A fourth problem, the matter of which aspects of a practice do or do not count as 'art', is the subject of the following section.

5.2 The prosthetic condition of art

A significant influence on the practice at the centre of this inquiry[46] is Arte Útil [Useful Art], a 'quasi-movement' (Hudson, 2016: 43), initiated by Cuban artist Tania Bruguera. In particular, Bruguera's 'Criteria for Arte Útil' (2012), are relevant:

> To be Arte Útil it should:
>
> 1 – Propose new uses for art within society.
>
> 2 – Challenge the field within which it operates (civic, legislative, pedagogical, scientific, economic etc)
>
> 3 – Be 'timing specific', responding to the urgencies of the moment.

[45] One of the key sites for this ongoing debate is the online journal edited by Grant Kester, *Field; A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism,* launched in 2015. http://field-journal.com/

[46] A previous work by the author, *Walking Silvermines* (2011) is included in the Arte *Útil* archive.

4 – Be implemented in the real and actually work!

5 – Replace authors with initiators and spectators with users.

6 – Have practical, beneficial outcomes for its users.

7 – Pursue sustainability whilst adapting to changing conditions.

8 – Re-establish aesthetics as an ecosystem of transformative fields (Bruguera, 2012).

Arte Útil is translated into English as 'useful art', although something is lost in the translation that is better captured by the word utility. Arte Útil proposes art as ‘a tool or device. . . [that] draws on artistic thinking to imagine, create and implement tactics that change how we act in society’ (Arte Útil, 2021). The eighth criteria in Bruguera’s list, ‘re-establish aesthetics as an ecosystem of transformative fields’ (ibid.) echoes a central aspect of the work of this research, namely aligning the practice with an expanded idea of aesthetic work, moving between different fields of action. That is discussed in relation to *LCI* in Chapter Six.

In a text closely associated with Arte Útil, *Towards a Lexicon of Usership* (Wright, 2014), Stephen Wright sets out a new syntax of ‘art’ based on the idea of usership. Wright formulates a ‘non-ontological’ condition of art (ibid.: 13), a capacity, a quality or a ‘co-efficient’ that may be temporarily present in different degrees in relation to contexts, actions, objects, gestures or events. The concept of a coefficient of art refuses the idea of art as ‘a set of objects or events, distinct from the larger set of objects and events that are not art’ (ibid.: 13), referring to ‘a degree of intensity’ (ibid.: 13) that can be identified in ‘any number of symbolic configurations, activities or passivities’ (ibid.: 13). In Wright’s scheme, ‘art’ is a temporal and circumstantial effect of certain kinds of symbolic undertakings. When placed in a ‘paradigm of usership’ (ibid.: 3), those undertakings become ‘both what they are, and propositions of what they are’ (ibid.: 3). That ‘double ontology’ (ibid.: 21) is a condition of User Art. Practices that operate in the paradigm of usership are characterised, Wright proposes,

by their ‘1:1 scale’ operations (ibid.: 3). They provide services or generate things that are useful, but they do so within a performative frame that activates ‘their secondary (artistic) ontology’ (ibid.: 21).

Wright’s formulation is problematic in many ways. His ‘double ontology’ is a cumbersome and contradictory idea, given his rejection of art as an ontological category in the first place. He anticipates that art may eventually find a way to quit the ‘ontological landscape altogether in order to gain traction somewhere else’ (ibid.: 22), although the performative frame of art seems to be essential to the entire construct of User Art. However, there are also interesting and productive implications in his theory. The condition of ‘art’ can be understood to *activate* the objects of the ‘1:1 scale’ beyond their immediate reception and use (ibid.: 4) meaning that ‘art’ can be understood as a condition of activation, a transitional and non-teleological state between other states. Although Wright rejects ‘art’s aesthetic function’ (Wright, 2014: 6), the combination of usership with the condition of art-as-activation situates an element of aesthetic suspension (Rancière, 2010) at the heart of User Art’s functionality.

A second idea that has proved to be useful in rethinking the place of ‘art’ in my practice lies in the contrasting concept of art as a ‘prosthetic ontology’ (Garoian, 2013: 19). In *The Prosthetic Pedagogy of Art; Embodied Research and Practice* (2013), Garoian argues that art’s system of meaning-making ‘extends beyond the dualism of thesis/antithesis, and the absolute closure of synthesis’ (ibid.: 29). Prosthesis is proposed as a fourth position in the dialectical relation (Gray, Figueroa-Sarriera and Mentor, 1995). The contradictory significations of prosthesis, ‘plenitude and substitute’ (Garoian, 2013: 27) create a disjunction and a paradox, which opens the dialectical resolution of synthesis ‘for a multiplicity of significations and understandings to occur’ (ibid.: 27). For Garoian, artistic research works across ‘interconnected perceptual systems’ (ibid.: 28) in ways that are both destabilising and enabling; he employs the

concept of the prosthetic to account for an ontological and epistemological surplus that he identifies with artistic research in general. That 'prosthetic pedagogy' (ibid.: 19) emerges from liminal, anomalous, contingent and unstable conditions which enable the creation of new ways of knowing and understanding through 'performances of subjectivity that intersect, critique, and extend beyond academic, institutional and corporate assumptions and sedimentations' (ibid.: 19).

Garoian's argument for embodied research and practice as a 'prosthetic pedagogy of art' draws on diverse theoretical positions from phenomenology to posthumanism, and he associates the condition of prosthesis rather broadly with concepts such as liminality, contingency and emergence. Nonetheless, the analogy has use value, and has been employed in this research in two ways. It was adapted to support the addition of the dimension of *the poetic* to the traditional research domains of empirical/interpretive/critical (Fig. 2.4), following Sullivan's model of artistic research as discussed in Chapter One. It also adds something to Wright's account of User Art. What Wright identifies as a 'co-efficient of art' (2014: 13), a proposition, a 'double ontology' (ibid.: 4), is a condition of activation that is both of and apart from the conditions of its production, in the manner of a prosthesis. It interlocks with, expands and extends socio-political phenomena, 'house-painting outfits, online archives, libraries, restaurants, mushroom hunts, whatever' (ibid.: 22), to activate latent potentialities, without concealing the artificiality of the conjunction or glossing over the awkwardness of the fit. A prosthesis has its own logics and forms; it is functional and yet marks a strangeness, a polyvalent hybridity that opens one reality onto another. It may even be beautiful without being ornamental. Wright's search for non-normative concepts to articulate this unprecedented condition of art results in some ambiguity, which is understandable but not always productive.

His account of User Art often implies the metaphor of prosthesis, although Wright would probably reject that as overdetermining or ontologising.

Bruguera's goal of 're-establish[ing] aesthetics as an ecosystem of transformative fields' (Bruguera, 2012), sets out a way of operating that does not revolve around binaries such as art/activism, amelioration/ revolution. If art can be understood as a prosthetic condition of activation, there may be occasions and occurrences where the condition of art can be a useful part of the practice of aesthetic work, without over-codifying it. To dig deeper into these matters, the research engaged with the underpinning discourse of aesthetics and politics, addressed in the sections that follow, revisiting the question of the artwork / aesthetic work in a later section.

5.3 The productive contradictions of aesthetics and politics

Aesthetics is a complex social form, something that has been touched on in several ways in previous chapters. At the risk of some repetition, this section explores what Rockhill describes as 'the productive contradictions of aesthetics and politics' (Rockhill, 2011: 48), which have supported the articulation of aesthetic work as a modality. Aesthetics has been characterised here in four ways:

i) A human capacity to sense and to make sense of the world through a perceptual architecture (the means of observing), arising from a fundamental human desire for coherence and meaning, and the ability to make and experience meaning in response to that desire.
ii) A practice that engages critically with the relationship between sense and sense-making, a means by which to interrogate and to act upon systems that shape perception to fit existing structures of power, a critical site of exploration of the politics of sense and sense-making.

iii) A social phenomenon, an ordering of the perceptual systems that underpin a society, a modality that may be operationalised by disciplinary forces, putting power to work in the sensory and nervous systems of populations (Steyerl, 2007).

iv) A political discourse with philosophical roots, an epistemological and discursive activity through which the politics and the praxis of aesthetics are teased out and deliberated.

Aesthetics is identified by the German philosopher Christoph Menke as: 'a philosophical discourse on the aesthetic' (Menke, 2015: 42), where the aesthetic is understood as:

> . . . a dimension, a dynamic, a force of the soul, and with that, a source of everything that makes us who we are – in contrast to theory, because it has neither subject nor content; in contrast to praxis, because it has no goal; in contrast to concept, because it has no rules; in contrast to society, because it has no norms; in contrast to individuality, because it has no owner (Menke, 2015: 41).

That account of the aesthetic is not dissimilar to the proposition of art as a condition of activation, drawing from Wright (2013), although the aesthetic exceeds the bounded sphere of art. In addition to the term aesthetics, and the aesthetic, this research also employs the term poetics, and the poetic. The Greek term *poiesis* (from *ποίησις*; to make) has a more focused meaning than *aisthesis;* poetics denotes ways of 'bringing meaning into being through making' (Drucker, 2013: 82). What distinguishes aesthetics from poetics,[47] speaking broadly and in the context of this research, is that where aesthetics engages with a politics of sense and sense-making, poetics refers more precisely to a kind of resonance that arises from bringing specific

[47] The modern idea of aesthetics originates in an 18th C. work by the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten, his *Meditations on Poetry* from 1735 (Guyer, 2020). The first intended meaning was a 'science of perception' (ibid.), which was later modified by a Georg Meier, a pupil of Baumgarten's, to mean 'the science of sensible cognition' (ibid.). The sensible was taken to refer to 'the lower part of the cognitive faculty' (Baumgarten, quoted in Guyer, 2020) capable of generating its own type of discourse made up of '(1) sensible representations, (2) their interconnections, and (3) the words, or the articulate sounds which are represented by the letters and which symbolize the words', with poetry described as 'perfect sensible discourse' (Baumgarten quoted in Guyer, 2020). These definitions ground the distinction made in this research between *the aesthetic* and *the poetic.*

sensory regimes into proximity. Poetics implies an element of spacing – the spaces between bodies, actions, temporalities, ways of knowing and ways of making, and a degree of rhythm.

The power to shape what we sense and how we make sense of it places aesthetics at the core of politics, according to Rancière (2004). Politics, he argues, 'revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak' (Rancière, 2004: 13). His theories open up significant avenues for thinking about the politics of aesthetics and the aesthetic core of politics, their situation in the field of common experience and their status relative to the modulation of that common field. At stake are questions concerning the power to make visible or invisible, to cause a rupture in dominant modes of sense-making and to act on the basis of that rupture to reshape the field of common experience. The force of the aesthetic is addressed in a real and substantial way in *The Politics of Aesthetics; the Distribution of the Sensible* (Rancière, 2004), albeit with contradictory effects. The following section engages with Rancière's formulations of the politics of aesthetics along with a critical analysis by Gabriel Rockhill (2011), the translator of Rancière's work, concerning the 'productive contradictions' that it sets forth.

5.3.1 The politics of aesthetics

The politics of aesthetics and the aesthetic core of politics have long been a focus in the work of Rancière, as part of his ongoing exploration of art's political efficacy. The properties of politics and aesthetics, as he presents them, are often contradictory, and the relationship between the two forms even more so. At times aesthetics and politics appear as different registers of an unfixed and unstable dynamic; at other times they are diametrically opposed positions, separate (ontological) domains that can overlap only at the expense of one or the

other (Rockhill, 2011). Such contradictory accounts of the politics-aesthetics dynamic can be traced back to the philosophical origins of Modern Aesthetics in the Enlightenment period.

Rancière extrapolates some of his positions on the dynamic of politics and aesthetics from the work of Schiller. Schiller's paradoxical proposition that the most perfect of all works of art would be 'the establishment and structure of a true political freedom' (Schiller, 1794: Letter II) constitutes a suspension of the distinction between 'art' and 'life', according to Rancière, that resulted in a productive contradiction between the domain of aesthetics and the domain of politics, which continues into the present. Beauty, for Schiller, was an educational experience arising from the 'free play of our understanding and imagination' (ibid.). An 'aesthetical education' (ibid.: Letter XI), he proposed, would cultivate in people an 'aesthetical state of mind' (ibid.: Letter XV), a harmonious interaction between understanding and imagination which was essential for a truly free state of mind.

The philosopher Terry Eagleton has also looked closely at the social phenomenon of aesthetics as it emerged from the Enlightenment, but through a Marxist lens, foregrounding the class interests at work. Eagleton finds in Schiller's call for 'an aesthetic modulation of the psyche' (Eagleton, 1992: 17) a programme of self-discipline for the new political subject of the bourgeois revolution that was unfolding around Schiller and his contemporaries. Schiller's programme of aesthetical education, along with the other normative aspects of early Modern Aesthetics, was part of an 'apparatus . . . to determine the political meaning and function of "culture"' (ibid.: 17). For theory to become ideology, according to Eagleton, it must first pass through the sensuous life of the body; 'structures of power must become structures of feeling' (ibid.: 21), which is why aesthetics initially had less to do with art and more to do with

'manners', the subtly coercive hegemony of taste.[48] Early Modern Aesthetics was, according to Eagleton, an attempt to formulate the political unconscious of the new ruling class. Rancière expresses a similar perspective but articulates it differently. Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794) ushered in a new sensory regime, described by Rancière as 'the aesthetic regime of the arts' (2004: 24). *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (Schiller, 1794) amounted to a 'manifesto' (ibid.) for this regime, a reshaping of art's ways of functioning in society.[49]

In Chapter One, I touched on the profound entanglement of aesthetics and politics that bind or unwork the sensing and sense-making aspects of a social order. For Rancière, politics consists of acts that pose a challenge to the aesthetic order which underpins the naturalised order of bodies and spaces (2004; 2010). It names 'an anarchical process of emancipation that opposes the logic of disagreement to the logic of the police' (Rockhill, 2004: 89), thereby changing the definition of 'the common world' (Rancière, 2010: 141). Politics is fundamentally 'an activity that redraws the frame within which common objects are determined' (ibid.: 139). The politics of aesthetics and the aesthetic core of politics are concerned with how that field of common experience is modulated and 'policed', to determine who and what appears or does not appear, cannot appear, can be made to appear or to disappear, and who has the power to determine the what/when/where of appearances. The aesthetics of politics 'lies in a framing of the "we"' (Rancière, 2010: 141), a reconfiguration of 'the sensible' through the emergence of the excluded and invisible 'part of no part' (ibid.: 142), which, through its demand to be heard, causes a rupture in the naturalised order of bodies and spaces.

[48] Readers of Jane Austen's novels will be familiar with this subtle form of coercion which she so precisely satirises.
[49] *The phrase 'aesthetic regime of the arts'* signifies a particular understanding of art's functioning, which is synonymous for Rancière with the politics of aesthetics (Rancière, 2010: 116).

These matters are concentrated in the formation that he describes as *The Distribution of the Sensible* (2004). On the one hand, that 'distribution' can be understood as a version of the status quo, a 'polemical distribution of modes of being and 'occupations' in a space of possibilities' (ibid.: 42), through which the sensible world is constituted. It denotes a system of inclusions and exclusions that are naturalised through a 'system of coordinates that defines modes of being, doing, making and communicating' (ibid.: 89). That system is identified as 'the police order' (ibid.: 89), structured to determine who or what has the right to be seen and heard, who can act or is acted upon, and who has the right to access spaces of political speech. In 2008, Rancière described the distribution of the sensible as 'a way of mapping the visible, a cartography of the visible, the intelligible and also of the possible' (Rancière, 2008). While every distribution is normative and heavily regulated, it is also susceptible to being reconfigured *from-below*. It can be mapped and analysed, in terms of what it makes visible or renders invisible, as a basis for interruptive action. Its 'modes of being, doing, making and communicating' (Rancière, 2004: 89) can be reshaped through political and aesthetic acts, at the frontier between what can and cannot be seen, said or heard.

The border between politics and aesthetics is problematic in Rancière's scheme. It shifts back and forth between an indeterminate zone of 'consubstantiality' (Rockhill, 2011: 29) and a highly differentiated condition in which they cannot meet, lest one collapse into the other (ibid.). Rockhill's critique of Rancière's paradoxical assertions acknowledges the value of their productive contradictions. He proposes grounding the concepts in concrete social practice, approaching aesthetics and politics not as definitive categories but as 'collective phenomena whose "being" is negotiated in the social field' (ibid.: 48). Insofar as neither is accorded a 'proper' space, delimited or carefully proscribed, Rockhill's deontological conception of aesthetics and politics as 'concepts in a struggle that vary according to the social setting and

historical conjuncture' (ibid.: 47–48) carries echoes of practices and positions discussed earlier, particularly Arte Útil and the theory of Usership to which it has given rise (Wright, 2014). The relevance of these matters is discussed later in relation to the articulation of aesthetic work.

5.3.2 Cultural action in the social field

When art operates in proximity to 'the dynamic world of the social' (Beshty, 2015: 16), questions of ethics are critical. In an earlier section of this chapter, the so-called Bishop /Kester controversy regarding the contested relationship between politics, aesthetics and ethics was briefly discussed, with reference also to more nuanced positions that developed in the years following. Walead Beshty argues that ethics, unlike morals, is always situational, particular as opposed to abstract (ibid.: 19), and that, other than 'the maximisation of the common good' (ibid.: 20), there are no fixed criteria to predetermine what an ethical response to a set of circumstances should be. Beshty flips the question regarding the ethics of aesthetic undertakings in the social field, to wonder what 'an aesthetics of ethics' would look like. When art situates itself in proximity to social relations, it does so as an operational rather than representative undertaking, it is 'an action in the social field with aesthetic implications' (ibid.: 20). The repercussions of that action, 'the effects it produces on the social field of which it is a part' (ibid.: 22) register aesthetically, ethically and politically in varying degrees. The point of an ethical analysis of a socially engaged work of art, Beshty argues, is to examine what he describes as 'the aesthetic manifestation of the ethical dimension of the work of art' (ibid.: 20). That aesthetic manifestation is revealed in the way that the work modifies the social contract, (ibid.), 'with the artwork acting as the signification of that modification' (ibid.: 20).

Modification of the social contract is an elusive object. Quoting Dorothea van Hantelmann, Beshty argues that the social conditions around the work of art establish its

aesthetic meanings and, conversely, that works of art generate processes and categories that constitute social reality (ibid.: 15). Von Hantelmann's insistence that 'artworks are not only products of given circumstances they also contribute to the existence of these very circumstances' (Von Hantelmann, 2010, in Beshty, 2015: 14) constitutes for her 'the inherent agency [of the artwork]' (ibid.: 15). That agency is problematic however. Agency indicates a relationship to structure, a capacity to act upon structures (Bhaskar, 1998: Archer, 2000; Giddens, 1984). In Von Hantelmann's account, there is a clear feedback loop arising from art's imbrication in a set of structures that support a social contract which is deeply corroded by neoliberalism. The profound structural transformations required in the face of social and ecological devastation cannot be achieved by modifying, or as O'Brien *et al.* have described it, 'tweaking' that social contract (O' Brien, Hayward, and Berkes, 2009).[50] The inseparability of the ontological category of art from the structures that perpetuate systemic violence is a source of profound conflict in political art.

According to Aleksander Rodchenko, the task of the revolutionary artist in the Soviet Union was nothing less than to invent a new form of life:

> Down with art as a beautiful patch on the squalid life of the rich! Down with art as a precious stone in the midst of the dismal and dirty life of the poor! Down with art as a means of escaping from a life that is not worth living! (Rodchenko, 1920).

His instruction to 'work in the midst of everything and with everybody' (ibid.) captures the essence of *Art-into-Life,* a phrase that is often credited to him (Andrews and Kalinovska, 1990). Russian Productivism (1922–1926), at its most 'emancipatory' (Roberts, 2009: 529), aimed to

[50] 'Social contracts, as we know them, may become obsolete because climate change is a global problem that does not rest in any existing contract domain' (O'Brien, Hayward, and Berkes, 2009)

create laboratories at the point of production, to transform the factory into a key site of creative research and collective practice by 'situating art within relations of production' (ibid.: 529).

The call to dissolve the category of art into the category of life, to invent new models for the production and distribution of cultural work, has continued to resonate both above and below the horizon of cultural visibility.[51] Interference Archive, Gregory Sholette, Gerald Raunig and others have carried out significant work, in theory and practice, to activate, document and archive on-the-ground efforts to generate and sustain counter-institutional art worlds. An invisibilised 'dark matter', as Sholette describes it (2010), has tended to orbit the formal system of *Art,* resisting but sometimes getting drawn into it. Attempts to escape the gravitational pull of the system have also generated models of alternative cultural production, some of which side-step, reframe, or attempt to reposition the problematic ontology of art (Wright, 2014). Those models have expanded the conceptual and aesthetical toolbox of politically oriented practices, paving the way for theories and practices of social engagement. The discourse of decolonisation is also adding significantly to that process, with its critique of categories of Western knowing and ways of practising, opening up new ways of thinking about what I describe as aesthetic work.[52]

Cultural actions in the social field today draw from the historical body of counter-hegemonic work, as well as other discourses and other fields of practice. By operating across different 'transformative fields' (Bruguera, 2012), those practices generate different centres of gravity by which their forms of work can be determined. Holmes' concept of 'eventwork'

[51] The dissolution of the art/life boundary is not necessarily an emancipatory fusion. Guy Debord articulated such a fusion in his concept of The Spectacle (1994 [1967]). If, as Sholette says, 'art and life have finally fused, then the life that art has merged with is as corrupt as it is appalling' (Sholette, 2017: 185).

[52] *FIELD: A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism* is one of the key sites for the evolution of the discourse of socially engaged practice. They have embraced the principle of decoloniality, foregrounding practices and theoretical political positions that challenge Western hegemony, including the idea of 'art'.

(2012) captures the way that alliances between cultural and social movements generate new forms of cultural practice. In eventwork, art, theory, media and politics converge 'into a mobile force that oversteps the limits of any professional sphere or disciplinary field'(ibid.), whilst making use of 'the knowledge and technical capacities' (ibid.) of those fields. From his study of the Occupy movement in Zucotti Park in New York, Holmes identified a 'fourfold process . . . of effective interventionism' (ibid.) consisting of i) critical research, which is necessary to address 'complex legal, scientific, and economic problems'; ii) ' participatory art . . . vital . . . because it stresses a commitment to both representation and lived experience'; iii) 'networked communications and strategies of mass-media penetration' which are necessary to extend the reach of embodied struggle; and iv) a commitment to self-organisation consistent with the prefigurative imperative to model the relations for which one struggles (ibid.).

These distinct ways of operating are not unaffected by one another; they become an ensemble with a shared aesthetic of 'organisational structures, communicative networks and economies of giving and dissemination' (Sholette, 2017: 193). Their infrastructures – material, technical, organisational, etc. – 'intra-act' (Barad: 1998), which is to say they become part of a singular phenomenon, with each part co-producing all of the others. An active component of the phenomenon of 'eventwork', I will argue, is aesthetic work; in the following section I address this claim and ground it in concrete practice.

5.4 Aesthetic work

The seeds of aesthetic work began to take shape a little over a decade ago, sharpened by an engagement with the work of radical, socially engaged architects, particularly the Paris-based

practice, aaa (*atelier d'architecture autogérée*).[53] aaa describes itself as 'a collaborative network with variable geometry, which organises itself according to different topics, contexts of intervention, competencies and availability of participants' (aaa, n.d.). Their practice is architectural in the broadest sense. Working with disused and interstitial urban spaces, '*architecture autogérée* [self-managed architecture] is an architecture of relationships, processes and agencies of persons, desires, skills and know-hows' (ibid.). Through forms of 'micro-political acting' they build 'relationships between worlds' (ibid.), making their architecture both 'political and poetic' (ibid.). aaa collaborate extensively, with neighbourhoods, migrant communities, philosophers, hackers, gardeners, artists, economists, educators, policymakers, philosophers, academics, geographers etc. (Fig. 5.2 and Fig. 5.3). Much of what they do resembles socially engaged art.[54] but without its ontological anxieties.[55] The work pictured in Figures 5.2 and 5.3, *Le Passage 56,* was initiated in 2005. In 2009, management of the site passed to an independent, local association.

The work of aaa does not depend on what Sholette describes as 'consumption capital' (Sholette, 2017: 193), neither does it depend on 'recover[ing] a specific meaning or use-value for art world discourse or private interests' (ibid.: 190). They are, however, cognisant of what Sholette describes as 'representational power' (ibid.: 193), and willing to harness it in sophisticated and political ways as necessary. The work of aaa operates across domains, definitions and modalities, collaborating with social movements, researchers and artists in

[53] aaa (translates as: studio of self-managed architecture) was one of the collaborating partners on the trans-European research project, *Rhyzom* (http://www.urbantactics.org/dissemination/ryzhom/). I was a researcher-artist with one of the other collaborating partners, PS2 from Belfast. We worked alongside one another on various research actions, culminating in a publication, *Translocal Act: Cultural Practices Within And Across* (Petrescu, Petcou and Awan, 2011). See http://www.urbantactics.org/dissemination/trans-local-act/ Available for download at https://www.academia.edu/43716956/Trans_Local_Act_Cultural_Practices_within_and_across
[54] aaa's work *Ecobox* is included in the Arte Útil archive of Useful Art. https://www.arte-util.org/projects/ecobox-2/
[55] aaa have their own complex relationship with the gravitational pull of the institution of Architecture, but that is not the subject of this thesis.

Figure 5.2, aaa, *Le Passage 56,* Paris, 2005–2009.

Figure 5.3, aaa, *Le Passage 56,* Paris, 2005–2009.

ways that are poetic and pragmatic; their work epitomises Holmes' idea of 'eventwork' (Holmes, 2012). Observing their work at first hand, it became apparent that their method of bringing different modes of meaning-making into proximity to generate new ways of knowing, producing and acting in common, relies on their considerable skill in generating a connective tissue between diverse modes of sensing and sense-making. It was by observing the work of aaa that I began to recognise a way of operating that combined the fluidity of the aesthetic with the receptive and productive aspects of work as a way of modifying the self-evident system of facts and ways of being (Rancière, 2004) that are given in a dominant social order.

That way of operating is articulated in this research as aesthetic work. It is intra-active (Barad, 1998) and emergent; it is also a form of praxis, as described by Curnow; 'an ongoing process of meaning making through action where the emergent meanings [shape] the action simultaneously' (Curnow, 2016: 35). Aesthetic work does not rely on 'the prestige that accrues to art as an activity set aside from the mainstream of social existence' (Charnley, 2011: 50) but it recognises the value of art as a space and a condition of activation, referred to earlier. The performative frame of art, its prosthetic excess, becomes a resource that can be used within a broader, non-ontological idea of aesthetic work, across an 'ecosystem of transformative fields' (Bruguera, 2012).

Choi *et al.'s* call to imagine a 'commonist aesthetics' (2015) proposes a mobilisation of the embodied dispositions of persons to begin to compose a 'we' and a world-in-common, which is also a way of articulating the concerns of aesthetic work. Connecting these ideas to the poetics and politics of the Commons showed that the receptive and productive aspects of aesthetic work could add value to the processes of transformative, collective meaning-making associated with the Commons, by bringing different sensory regimes into dialogue and drawing

attention to the resonances, strange intensities of meaning, coherence and/or beauty that can emerge through those conjunctions and proximities.

5.5 Conclusions

The subject of this chapter is the thought-process that led from art to aesthetic work, informed by theoretical and practice-based explorations that I have carried out over nearly two decades. Socially engaged practice often hovers somewhere around the borders of art; some of this discussion has focused on the problematic relationship of art to systems of validation based on the extraction of a cultural surplus-value, or what Sholette describes as ‘consumption capital’ (Sholette, 2017: 193). Critical questions concerning the ontology of socially engaged practice can be understood in relation to aesthetic work, which is not a complete rejection of art, which has value as a conceptual space, as a condition of activation and as a prosthetic extension of social conditions that can open one reality onto another.

Wright’s non-ontological account of ‘art’ (2014) denotes an ‘intensity’ (ibid.: 13), articulated here as a condition of activation, which bears some relation to the experiments of Emancipatory Productivism in the Soviet Union (1921–24), from which the term *Art-into-Life* originates (Andrews and Kalinovska, 1990). Art-into-Life retained a dependence on ‘art’ as a performative frame (Rockhill, 2011; Roberts, 2009), somewhat in the manner of a prosthesis.. The performative frame of art, its prosthetic excess, remains part of the art-into-life impulse, although aesthetic work does not rely on ‘the prestige that accrues to art as an activity set aside from the mainstream of social existence’ (Charnley, 2011: 50). Art becomes a resource that can be used within a broader, non-ontological idea of aesthetic work, across an ‘ecosystem of transformative fields’ (Bruguera, 2012).

Aesthetic work has been discussed at length in this and previous chapters and situated in relation to theories and practices that have informed that articulation. It is not without contradictions, just as socially engaged art is not without contradictions. As discussed in Chapter One, the embodied dispositions of those who work may be a potential site of extraction, specifically for the cultural worker who is dependent to some extent on the reputational economy, but also for those who participate in a coproduction. Witz *et al.* use the term *aesthetic labour* to refer to the corporate mobilisation and modulation of employees 'embodied dispositions' (Bourdieu, 1994, in Witz *et al.*, 2011: 40), but it is clear that aesthetic work must retain a degree of caution in relation to this dynamic.

The value of employing aesthetic work as a term to describe my practice is that it identifies a critical, operational kernel that the practice shares with other social actions, not limited to art, that work across what Bruguera describes as 'an ecosystem of transformative fields' (2012). In the next two chapters, I will ground some of these abstract ideas in relation to the durational work, *The Laboratory of Common Interest.*

Chapter Six: A commonist aesthetics

This chapter builds on arguments and positions developed up to this point as a basis for an interrogation of a durational work, *The Laboratory of Common Interest* (2018 – 19) [*LCI*]. In Chapter Three, an interrogation of publicness revealed that public and private are not opposites, as I had imagined at the outset, because publicness cannot be fully separated from the system of property relations. Silvia Federici argues that public space is a kind of private domain 'owned, managed, controlled, and regulated by and for the state' (Federici, 2019: 96). Chapters Three and Four explored the production of public space and public discourse, showing how it is susceptible to being co-opted by the state-corporate nexus. Federici asserts that public must still be defended because it 'has the resources we need' (ibid.), but that the struggle should 'open the way to a transformation from the public to the commons' (ibid.). Berlant likewise argues that efforts to reclaim elements of public space – resisting the enclosure of parks, the privatisation of streets etc. – create 'placeholder forms for the commons to come' (Berlant, 2016: 408). The concept of the commons, she insists, amount to a reinvention of 'the very concept of the public . . . against, with, and from within the nation and capital' (ibid.).

In the course of this research, the limitations of the (nonetheless) valuable form of publicness led me to the radical, world-making project of the Commons. *LCI* began as an experiment with ways of transforming 'from the public to the commons' (ibid.). The material-discursive phenomenon of the Commons – a discourse, a social process and political framework – is represented in this text as the Commons (capitalised). Prior to the Commons, there is *the common,* a term that comes up in many of the positions presented here. Rancière's notion of politics lies in 'the relation between "the part" and "the common"', according to Michael Hardt; it is foundational to his conception 'of both the political and the aesthetic'

(2006: 1). It is not clear in Rancière how the common comes into being; for Hardt the common is not given, but is 'dynamic and artificial, produced through a wide variety of social circuits and encounters' (ibid.: 2). Berlant sees the term as declarative, 'always political and invested in counter-sovereignty, with performative aspirations to decolonise an actual and social space that has been inhabited by empire, capitalism, and land-right power' (2016: 396). The performative assertion of 'the common' declares a complex relationality, 'an ontological and logical category that assumes and unites an internally contrasting multitude of singularities' (Gielen and Lavaert, 2018: 9). Pascal Gielen and Sonja Lavaert paraphrase Spinoza to argue that the common 'can also be summarised as: there is no freedom without equality and there is no equality without freedom' (ibid.).

It is a short, but not inevitable, step from the common to the Commons. 'Commons are not things' Federici argues, 'but social relations' (2019: 94). Massimo De Angelis states 'the social relations that we construct to reproduce ourselves are the true source of our power vis-à-vis capital' (De Angelis, 2012: xiv). It is not enough to act on external structures; commons is also a relationship of care, an active, prefigurative strategy of forming social relations in the figure of 'the common'. According to Maeckelbergh, we build the future that we want first and foremost through the type of relations that we enact in the construction of that future (Maeckelbergh, 2011).

A prefigurative approach to social action embeds action and reflection in processes of realisation, in the manner of praxis. The Commons depends upon social relations that are not organised by competitive and extractivist philosophies but emerge through the sharing of a common resource and the creation of a system to manage that resource in common. This is what Michel Bauwens, Vasilis Kostakis and Alex Pazaitis (2019) identify as a commons: *a particular resource* + *community* + *system of management to protect both* = *a commons* (ibid.).

Converting what is common into a commons depends on forms of social organising. Significant work is being done by individuals and organisations to develop legal, economical and practical models that can be used as infrastructures of self-organising. Ad hoc, ground-up practices of commoning also generate micro-systems and translocal practices that can be scaled up; the process of building a commons is not centralised. Commoning initiatives, no matter how modest their forms, are 'experiments in self-provisioning and the seeds of an alternative mode of production in the making' (Federici, 2019: 88).

LCI was such an experiment. The commons is a relatively unfamiliar social form in Ireland, although micro-practices of commoning exist by other names.[56] The work set out to build on earlier *Free*Space* actions through which a community of practice had begun to form, and to collectively generate an alternative mode of cultural production that might form the basis of a present and future commons. The problematic of generating a faux-commons, a short-lived experiment that merely invoked the idea of a commons, was evident to this researcher, so *LCI* was also set up to collectively examine how cultural practices can contribute to the larger paradigm-shift of the Commons. It did so by focusing on the practice of commoning, testing strategies and infrastructures to generate modes of commoning, and to see how the residues of an act of commoning can be carried forward into the production of other micro-commons, contributing to a praxis of the commons.[57]

In the course of this practice-based research one of the findings that emerged related to the Commons as an aesthetic undertaking. A commons amounts to a modification of the field

[56] For example, the *meitheal* is an ancient Irish denotes the co-operative labour system where groups of neighbours help each other in turn with farming work and heavy seasonal tasks; it suggests the idea of shared labour as a common resource. The term is now used much more broadly by a range of agencies in Ireland from agricultural to community development to childcare and family support, to tourism and business, with different meanings.

[57] As part of the programme of *LCI,* nascent projects related to commoning or cultural commons such as *The Living Commons, Tinkering with Commonism,* and 'public works' delivered workshops and presentations, building a wider conversation about practices of cultural commoning in Ireland and beyond.

of common experience and a transformation of sensibilities. Choi *et al.* have articulated the idea of a 'commonist aesthetics' (2015) as a proposition, highlighting the need to institute a new kind of aesthetics, to reject the mastery of representation and to think by means of relation, grounded in 'the world of the senses – to a *residually common world*, as Terry Eagleton once put it' (Choi *et al.*, 2015, italics in original). Amongst the many different facets of the collective work of *LCI*, I was concerned with trying to discern how a commonist aesthetics might appear, in terms of both its appearance and ways of appearing. The work was conducted relative to an idea of ethics proposed by J.K. Gibson-Graham; 'ethics involves the embodied practices that bring principles into action' (2006: xxvii); *LCI* was structured to support the embodiment and collectivisation of processes of sensing and making sense of the common. *LCI* manifested publicly as an 'aesthetic event' (Yepes, 2016: 125), a form of real-time composition over 13 days that generated social, aesthetical and material infrastructures to pay attention to 'the "we" and the "world" that is amongst us' (Garcés, 2009: 207).

These matters are discussed in the second half of this chapter, where three of the aesthetic actions from *LCI – #13*: *DE* [Decolonising Education]; *#14: FE* [Feminist Economics]; and *#18: LSSP* [Limerick Soviet Shilling Project] – serve as a focus for analysis and discussion. However, to begin, some of the complex nuances of the Commons are unpacked further in the following sections, as these informed the structuring of the work.

6.1 The Commons

The contemporary 'commons' is an idea, an ideal and a set of relations and material realities which has its origins in Roman law. It was given legal standing in the 6th C. as *Res Communis,* referring to those things common to humankind, namely 'the air, running water, the sea, and

consequently the shores of the sea' (*Justinian,* 1913, [6th C.]). A second legal maxim emanating from Roman law identifies *Res Nullius* as things which are held neither in common nor in private and are therefore available for capture or extraction.[58] Although the law of *Res Communis* is recognised in some legal frameworks, the maxims of *Res Communis* and *Res Nullius* are often conflated in practice. Resources such as air, water, sea, plant and animal genetics, human knowledge etc. are increasingly treated as *Res Nullius,* things available for enclosure and extraction.

A commons, as discussed, is a specific shared resource, plus the community that shares the resource, plus a system of resource management to ensure that the resource is sustained and reproduced along with the wellbeing of the community (Bauwens, Kostakis and Pazaitis, 2019). The practices that sustain and reproduce a commons are described as *commoning*. It is important to distinguish social forms such as cooperation and coproduction from commoning; while commoning involves the former, the same is not necessarily true in reverse. Practices of commoning are prefigurative in their aim to transform the structures within which those relations of mutual aid are enacted. While self-organisation is a key principle of commoning, it cannot be presumed that social relations will organise themselves horizontally, effectively or in ways that generate social justice. Theorists such as Ugo Mattei (2012), David Bollier and Silke Helfrich (Bollier and Helfrich, 2012: 2015; 2019) are developing legal, economic and practical models that can be used as infrastructures of self-organising for the Commons. Capitalism is first and foremost a legal system, founded on the concept of the rights of property.

[58] Until 1992 the Australian Constitution identified the majority of the continent as *terra nullius*. The Mabo case, as it is known, succeeded in having the legal doctrine of native title inserted into Australian law. The Court held that native title existed for all Indigenous people in Australia prior to the establishment of the British Colony of New South Wales in 1788, and that it continues to exist in any portion of land where it has not legally been extinguished (AIATSIS, 2008).

As Pocock argued, it is ‘in jurisprudence . . . long before the rise and supremacy of the market, that we should locate the origins of possessive individualism’ (Pocock, 1992: 36).

The Commons refers to a social system and a discourse that constitutes ‘a major shift in the value regime’ (Bauwens, 2017: 1), where value is determined as a common good rather than a private interest. Marx and Engels claimed ‘a thing can . . . have a price without having a value’ (1974: 197); likewise, the discourse of the Commons argues that value should be determined in ways that are not about monetary exchange (Bollier and Helfrich, 2012, 2015; 2019; Federici; 2015, 2019; Bauwens, 2017; Bauwens and Kranjc, 2020). The Commons promotes co-operative management of resources and non-exploitative modes of production, often favouring solidarity economics models (Bollier, 2016; Berik and Kongar, 2021). The Peer2Peer Foundation [P2PF] takes a practical, pedagogical and critical approach to coordinating and supporting the emergence of the social movement of the Commons as a workable, material-discursive phenomenon,[59] along with the development of practical and legal frameworks to facilitate the sustainable management of commons across a range of situations.

Mattei, a legal scholar of the Commons, analyses the common in terms of the possibilities it offers for challenging the edifice of legal systems founded on exclusive private property. ‘If properly theorised and politically perceived’, Mattei argues, ‘the Commons can serve the crucial function of reintroducing social justice into the core of the legal and economic

[59] The commons include civic infrastructure, cultural works and traditions, and knowledge, including technological development. The Peer-to-Peer movement (P2P) is a relational model of production, self-organised around the co-creation of knowledge and culture, also described as a sharing economy. Its characteristics include: Creation of common goods through open, participatory production and governance processes; Universal access guaranteed through licenses such as Creative Commons, GPL, Peer Production Licence. (The Foundation for P2P Alternatives [P2PF], n.d.). Examples of the P2P movement include free/open-source software; open access in education and science; free access to cultural production and open hardware. Different kinds of working arrangements arise through this emerging paradigm, including FabLabs, co-working spaces, and hacker/makerspaces. The aims are both short-term in relation to accessible and localised production loops, but also long-term in the sense of creating ‘common value and (to) facilitate open, participatory input across society’ (P2PF, n.d.). The term employed for this paradigm shift is Commons transition.

discourse' (Mattei, 2012). As a paradigm outside the 'State/Market duopoly' (ibid.) the Commons has the potential to create a socio-political-legal-institutional framework that would provide for 'a more equitable distribution of resources'(ibid.). Mattei identifies commons as 'an *ecological-qualitative* category based on inclusion, access and community duties' (ibid., italics in original), in contrast to relations of property and State sovereignty, which are '*economical-quantitative* categories based on exclusion (produced scarcity): a rhetoric of individual-centred rights and the violent concentration of power into a few hands' (ibid., italics in original).

The political discourse of the Commons is propositional, critical, material, organisational and relational. *The commons* (uncapitalised) refers to the actual practices, relations and resources at the centre of the system of the Commons, much of which is organised on an ad hoc basis by non-experts around an idea of something in common. Micro-systems and structures to collectively manage common resources are often arrived at through a process of trial and error. The work of collectively managing resources can function as a 'bedrock of resistance to and transcendence of neoliberalism because in [its] use, care and defence we cultivate, express and render militant non-capitalist values' (Haiven, 2016: 18). The maintenance of material (and immaterial) resources depends upon a social commitment to continually produce and reproduce material commons through some form of instituting. It is in this sense that Federici argues 'commons are not things but social relations' (Federici, 2019: 94).

The commons generates an important social imaginary and a prefigurative practice, but it has also acquired the status of 'a floating signifier' (Haiven, 2014: 3). Berlant expresses a concern that the commons claim carries 'an unbalanced load of desire' (2016: 398). The affective significance of the commons has to be balanced against a romantic enthusiasm for the

concept that can eclipse the material and conceptual struggle of which it is a key site. If the term is used too broadly or loosely it may become theoretically flabby and politically meaningless, susceptible to co-option by extractivist dynamics. A social imaginary of cooperation, reciprocity and generosity, which has given rise to forms of 'peer-to-peer, free mutual aid' (Haiven, 2014: 16) such as couchsurfing, liftshare, freecycle etc, has been re-interpreted as a 'sharing economy' based on the monetisation of ways of commoning (couchsurfing into AirBnB; liftshare into Uber, for example). Our capacities for 'sociality, empathy, creativity, connectivity, communication, community and generosity' (ibid.: 17) are at risk from what Max Haiven describes as Enclosure 3.0. Forms of cooperation and collaboration that are outside of capitalist logic amount to a 'final frontier' (ibid.: 16) for capitalism, he contends. These forms risk being distorted by capitalist logics, becoming '(a) means to generate profit or (b) means to maintain human life amidst relentless market failure' (ibid.: 16).

All aspects of the commons are susceptible to commodification, but 'the power of the common/s', De Angelis argues, 'begins with the social powers we deploy to *materially* reproduce and *affectively* care for ourselves' (De Angelis, 2012: xv, italics in original). One of the most significant aspect of the commons is emphasis on the work of care. As Bengi Akbulut describes it, 'the largest and the most fundamental commons on which all of us depend . . . [is] carework' (Akbulut, 2017). Carework is a practice and a form of labour 'that sustains social life and enables any kind of social system to function' (ibid.). In the face of what Antonio Negri has described as a 'desert caused by neoliberal capitalism [that] is insufferable in every regard' (Negri, interviewed by Gielen and Lavaert, 2018: 12), he insists that transitioning from the singularity to the common depends on imagination, love and 'subjectivity', which he identifies as 'a production of "being" . . . a practice of freedom and . . . something that transcends any

identity’ (ibid.: 8). In the ‘void between that which is finished and that which still has to begin’ (ibid. 12), competing ideas of the future proliferate, many of which, as we have seen in recent times, are ugly and violent.

The Commons is a vision and a programme for a future based on social and ecological justice. It represents a paradigm shift from a deeply engrained culture of competitiveness, individualism and enclosure, taking place at many levels. In Chapters One and Five I argued that the struggle to overcome the violence of the social relations of extractive capitalism is enacted in part at the level of the aesthetic order that underpins the social order. The knowledge-making and world-making project of the Commons is as much an aesthetic problem as a social one, an idea that is encapsulated in the notion of a commonist aesthetics.

6.2 Commonist aesthetics

The term ‘commonist aesthetics’ has been employed by Choi *et al.* as a loose theme for a number of essays and interviews gathered together in *Open! Platform for Art, Culture & the Public Domain,* over several years (2015–2019). Their choice of the term *commonist aesthetics* is not a call for political aestheticism but is used to refer to ‘the world of the senses – to a *residually common world*, as Terry Eagleton once put it’ (Choi *et al.*, 2015, italics in original). They employ terms and concepts similar to the ones laid out in this research, including a reference to Rancière’s distribution of the sensible, speculating how that might be reimagined through ‘aesthetic practice and theory’ (ibid.). Many of the essays and interviews commissioned in that series have informed this discussion of the Commons.[60] In one essay, Susan Buck-Morss accepts that the term *commonist* plays a valuable classificatory role in

[60] Federici, 2016; Negri in Gielen and Lavaert, 2018; Hardt, 2006; Lovink, 2016; Buck-Morss, 2013.

constructing a politics of the Commons, but rejects the term commonism, because the *-ism* marks out ‘a system of belief determining one’s actions in advance’ (2013). The *-ism* produces a degree of blindness relative to spontaneous emergences inconsistent with the logic of that belief system.

Dockx and Gielen take a different view. They argue that the *-ism* indicates a belief system that creates its own reality; every belief system or ideology amounts to an ‘aesthetics of the real . . . a belief or make-belief that claims realism’ (Dockx and Gielen, 2018: 54–55). Whether or not the discourse of the Commons is described as an *-ism*, they argue, it nonetheless identifies a reality that is different to the one currently performed by neoliberal, extractive, patriarchal capitalism. It is best to enter consciously into the production of its aesthetics of the real and to take responsibility for what it legitimates, ‘its signs, its words, its traditions, its values, its ideas’ (ibid.: 57).

Choi *et al.’s* ‘commonist aesthetics’ (2015) calls for a new kind of aesthetics, not unlike Dockx and Gielen’s insistence on deliberately constituting a commonist ‘aesthetics of the real’ (Dockx and Gielen, 2018: 54). This research set out to anchor those abstract ideas in a material register, through aesthetic work. In addition to the complex social form discussed up to this point, aesthetics is also a practical, technical modality, a formal arrangement of elements, modes of framing and unframing, ways of putting things ‘into relation’ to direct attention and to critically engage systems of perception. The valences of perception – visual, aural, tactile and so on – are neither entirely natural nor politically neutral.

The humanist aesthetical bias towards the visual is critiqued by posthumanist scholars; Cary Wolfe argues that to deprivilege human sight would be to open to other forms of sense-making across species boundaries, ushering in a post-optical aesthetics (Wolfe, 2009). Decolonial aesthetics also targets the role of visuality, which is recognised as a key weapon of

the aesthetico-political regime central to the ongoing violent matrix of power that Anibal Quijano describes as 'coloniality' (2000). The singular eye is decentred in decolonial perception, according to Macarena Gómez-Báris (2017: 12). These positions reject the mastery of representation and demand a new kind of aesthetics arising from intersecting spatial, affective, embodied and cognitive encounters with the world, an aesthetics that is also an aesthetics of care.

To take account of those critical demands, *LCI* was structured as a multi-faceted research action. It identified the practice of commoning as a form of aesthetic work, and worked collectively to make common cause, and to develop an imaginary of 'the common', in conditions where that imaginary does not yet exist. As a public 'aesthetic event' (Yepes, 2016), *LCI* worked with 'post-optical' aesthetic strategies – the infrastructural, the choreographic, the evental and the diagrammatic – to embody and collectivise potential processes of sensing and making sense of the common, with a view to examining commoning as a poetic, pragmatic and strategic practice.

The claims made in relation to the political effectivity of the work of *LCI* are modest; it was not an explicit form of commonist activism, but a 'nudging' of sensibility (Connolly, 2002, in Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxviii) towards the commons, which is nonetheless proposed as a relevant and meaningful form of prefigurative praxis. The next part of this chapter discusses those strategies and analyses their effects, with reference to the resonances and strange intensities of meaning that emerged through the collective actions. The final section of this chapter draws on individual and collective reflections to consider the praxic and aesthetic value of the work of *LCI,* its residues and potentials.

6.3 *The Laboratory of Common Interest* (2018–19)

LCI took the form of a year-long dialogical process, a space of experimentation with modes of commoning and with the problematic of the common. It manifested as a public event-space that ran from 15th–27th April 2019, consisting of 20 aesthetic actions over 13 consecutive days [Appendix I]. The public manifestation was timed to coincide with the centenary of the Limerick Soviet, a 12-day takeover of the city centre by workers protesting the occupation of the city by British forces and the conditions of labour under capitalism.[61] *LCI* arose from collaboratively 'mapping' the ideas and conclusions of the research up to that point but, as with all practice-based research, it also generated its own logics and sensations.

LCI combined the methodologies of CM and æ to create the conditions for a relational, temporal, and spatial exploration of commoning and the production of a social commons. While the spatial and relational aspects of my practice have been discussed extensively, temporality has remained relatively implicit; it is beyond the scope of this research to engage with the full theoretical weight of temporality. The temporal dimension of the work receives some attention in this chapter, specifically addressed through strategies that were put in place to support the emergence of critical, collective and embodied processes of meaning-making, and to experiment with tools for a politics of sense and sense-making.

The different components of *LCI* were intra-active, 'an ongoing process of meaning making through action where the emergent meanings [shape] the action simultaneously' (Curnow, 2016: 35). The chapter presents three of the aesthetic actions to look critically at how these ideas took shape in practice: *#13: DE [Decolonising Education*]; *#14:FE [Feminist Economics, Finance and the Commons for activists*]; and *#18*: *LSSP [Limerick Soviet Shilling Project]*. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the poetics and productive frictions of

[61] For more information see https://www.facebook.com/limericksoviet/

the work, relative to the prefigurative praxis of *LCI*, drawing on discussions from previous chapters, and finally with a reflection on the idea of a commonist aesthetics in relation to the other matters that have been explored and analysed in this thesis.

6.3.1 Strategy: the infrastructural

At the outset of this research I put in place ‘a conceptual and aesthetic infrastructure’, called *Free*Space,* ‘. . . created to support the development of a community of practice’ (Woods, 2016a).[62] At that point in the research I understood infrastructure as a sustaining, enabling, supportive and connective phenomenon. Infrastructures are not primarily theoretical; they are ‘defined by use and movement’ (Berlant, 2016: 393). As the critical focus of the research turned towards the Commons, the question of infrastructure became more pronounced. The commons, according to Berlant, is ‘an idea about infrastructure’ (ibid.: 396). To mediate ‘the lifeworld of structure’ (ibid.: 393) in capitalist conditions, the Commons requires the production of new infrastructures; material, legal, conceptual and relational. In the first section of this chapter, that matter is discussed in relation to work that is being done by organisations to develop legal, financial and organisational infrastructures for the Commons (Mattei, 2012; Bollier and Helfrich, 2012; 2015; 2019; Bauwens, 2017). As the ‘world-sustaining’ infrastructures necessary to maintain communities of solidarity are neglected or actively dismantled (Berlant, 2016: 397), an opportunity arises to develop other infrastructures rather than repair those that were set up to reproduce inequality in the first place. As such, Berlant argues, infrastructures ‘provide a pedagogy of unlearning while living with the malfunctioning world, vulnerable confidence, and the rolling ordinary’ (Berlant, 2016: 397).

[62] Later clarified also as a relational infrastructure (Woods, 2016b).

Infrastructure is also a micro-level undertaking. The infrastructures for *LCI* consisted of: i) relational infrastructures, formed through a network of personal, professional and institutional relationships and a series of public events; ii) material infrastructures, in the form of an open event-space in the city centre, choreographic objects, diagrammatic surfaces and various tools; iii) economic infrastructures, made up of research funding, gift economies, and unpaid labour. The aesthetic work of *LCI* involved i) putting those infrastructures into dialogue; ii) using them as framing/unframing devices to direct attention to forms of sense and sense-making; iii) finding ways to observe and communicate the poetics emerging through the work; and iv) stepping back to allow the connective tissue of aesthetics in different events to take on their own life. These are discussed in the sections to follow.

Susan Leigh Star, an ethnographer of infrastructure, argues that infrastructure is 'a fundamentally relational concept' (1999: 308). The practice of collectively creating infrastructure is prefigurative and a process of collective meaning-making that is also aesthetic. In the 2 years preceding the public event-space, I collaborated with many others on screening and discussion events, public mapping projects, round-table sessions, workshops, one-to-one conversations and pedagogical undertakings. Through that process a critical community took shape who became coproducers of *LCI*. The diagram in Figure 6.1 is an interpretation of the relational matrix that formed around and through *LCI.* The diagram consists of the following nodes: events [26]; core producers [16]; coproducers [27], active participants [18] and zones of common interest [3 zones]. The relations that are mapped in this diagram are limited to two: coproducers and users.

The core producers had an extensive level of engagement and commitment to the work. In addition to participating in discussions, conversations and dialogues in the months preceding the public event, they were responsible for several of the core elements of the work. A second

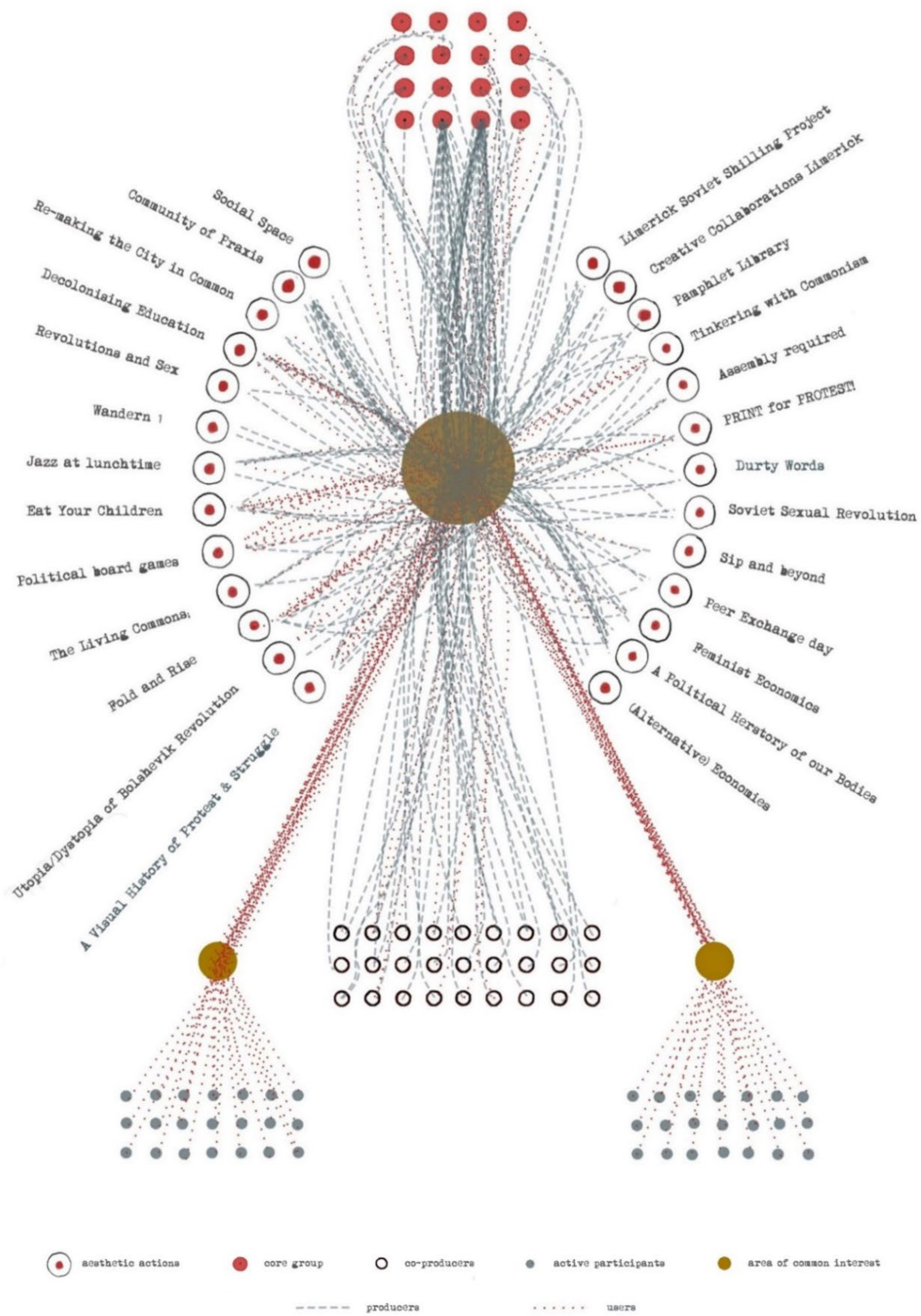


Figure 6.1, *The Laboratory of Common Interest*, relational matrix, author diagram, 2020.

group of 27 coproducers were directly involved in producing aesthetic actions during or surrounding the aesthetic event of *LCI* in April 2019. Some of those 27 coproducers had been invited to contribute, others asked to join, some people availed of the space to carry out work for their own benefit. In Chapter Seven, other diagrams present infrastructural elements in ways that are less codified and coherent, in keeping with the nature of events in a phenomenological register. The question of the infrastructural is addressed again in the concluding chapter.

6.3.2 Strategy: the choreographic

Space, for Lefebvre, is not distinct from bodies. 'Each living body', he says, 'is space, and has its space: it produces itself in space and also produces that space' (1991: 170). Derek McCormack asserts that Lefebvre's work on *Rhythmanalysis* (1992) proposes the production of bodies *in time*, 'always composed of rhythms, and these rhythms interact in ways that give a certain consistency to the spacetime of bodies' (McCormack, 2013: 167). The question of space is addressed directly in this thesis, and while time is implicated in the work in several ways, the larger question of temporality is beyond the scope of this critical analysis. Latour suggests an approach to the subject that opens onto a performative reading of space and time, which has relevance for the work of *LCI*:

> Deeper than the question of time and space is the very act of shifting, delegating, sending away, translating. We should not speak of time, space, and actant but rather of temporalization, spatialization, actantialization (the words are horrible) or more elegantly, of timing, spacing, acting (Latour 2005: 178).

Timing and spacing are choreographic notions, 'a means of registering and apprehending changing relationships between [bodies] in motion and the place they occupy' (Hannah, 2019: 13). Embodied modes of sense-making conjoin performative ideas of timing and spacing with

the rhythms inherent to individual and collective bodies. There is a resonance the develops between people who come together for a common purpose. However, that resonance is delicate. As capitalist subjects, our capacity to connect with one another is hampered by the privatisation of experience. According to Garcés, the isolated 'I' experiences itself as fragmented and impotent, but to move from the 'I' to the 'we' involves passing through a terrain of great vulnerability (2008). To enact the common, practices of commoning must pay attention to, and make space for, that vulnerability and its extension into collective action. Part of the motivation behind the strategy of *the choreographic* in the work of *LCI* was to find a way to pay critical attention to the delicate resonance of the deliberately assembled 'we', to respond to Negri's account of subjectivity as '. . . a production of "being" . . . a practice of freedom and . . . something that transcends any identity'. (Negri, interviewed by Gielen and Lavaert, 2018). For Negri the subject is 'non-identic'. It takes shape in the act of being social, collaborating with others; it is also historical (ibid.).

The actions of *LCI* were oriented towards making space for the emergence of what we don't yet know how to perceive or have not yet begun to imagine. The strategies described here were put in place to pick up unanticipated modes of being-through-collaboration. By making the idea of the choreographic explicit in the preparations and dialogues for *LCI,* the community of coproducers were invited to pay critical attention to the haptical, sensory dimensions of our coming together, to discern aesthetical and ethical dynamics immanent to the spaces that develop between bodies, objects and structures in the 'real-time composition' of socially engaged aesthetic work.

The choreographic, as discussed in Chapter Two, also has a macro-political logic. Hewitt has argued that a social order has a choreography, a way in which it structures the movement or non-movement of bodies, both individual and collective. Hewitt's idea of social

choreography has been picked up and developed by practitioners and scholars (Cveić and Vujanović, 2013; Klein, 2013; Milohnić, 2013) as an expanded idea of choreography. Echoing Rancière's articulation of the distribution of the sensible, Klein also takes up Hewitt's proposal, affirming his idea that 'the aesthetic is embedded in political and social practices and social figurations' (Klein, 2013: 32). It is those same practices and figurations that space people socially, determine their 'political manoeuvring space' (ibid.).

Choreography is understood by some as a medium rather than a discipline (Forsythe interviewed by Neri, 2014), an investigation and animation of 'intersecting spatial, corporeal, affective and informational dimensions of being entangled with the world' (Adash, Cnaani and Schmitz, 2020). The renowned choreographer, William Forsyth, makes a distinction between choreography and dance, 'two distinct and very different practices' (Forsyth, n.d.). Speaking of what he describes as a 'proliferation of choreographic thinking across the wider domain of arts practice', Forsyth recognises the choreographic as a form of 'potential organisation and instigation of action-based knowledge' (ibid.).[63] The choreographic also denotes a mode of poiesis that is haptic, embodied and emergent, involving clusters, points of connection and voids. It suggested a way of thinking about a commonist aesthetics as a post-optical phenomenon.

To experiment with these possibilities, I created a set of 'choreographic objects', a term proposed by Forsyth to denote 'a categorising tool that can help identify sites within which to locate the understanding of potential organisation and instigation of action-based knowledge' (Forsyth, n.d.). These choreographic objects included 6 free-standing, double-sided backboards (Fig, 6.2); one hexagonal backboard table that could also stand vertically as an object in the

[63] Choreography is employed as a technique in Business Management, as even has its own graphic form: Business Process Management Notation (BPMN): Choreography. See Polančič, 2016.

space (Fig, 6.3); a small hexagonal blackboard table with a shelf of specially commissioned pamphlets (Fig, 6.4); a clear-topped display table (Fig. 6.5); a wall-based paper scroll that captured each day's actions (Fig. 6.6) (which later formed the basis of an audio score); and a wall-based diary, an assemblage of materials and traces from each of the 13 days (Fig. 6.7). These objects were arranged in the space prior to each event as tools and mechanisms of action, interaction and intra-action (Fig. 6.8). In many cases the objects moved around in the space to accommodate changing aspects of an event. The purpose of these choreographic objects was to make manifest a potency, to invite a collective materialisation of the coproduction that unfolded each day.

Several of the choreographic objects produced for *LCI* were designed as diagrammatic surfaces, to prompt diagrammatic actions on the part of producers and participants which amounted to a collective materialisation of the coproduction. Blackboards (and for larger events, paper-covered surfaces) facilitated and encouraged the production of diagrams as both site and trace of the modes of poiesis immanent to each event. The diagrams produced each day were made available to subsequent events through photographic documentation included in the daily log (Fig. 6.7) The choreographic object described as *the paper scroll* (Fig. 6.6) operated as a site on which I recorded the general choreography of each event, in terms of the location of objects in the space, the general movement of bodies, and the kinds of actions that took place. Drucker argues that in qualitative research, or when the production of knowledge is recognised as arising from situated, partial and circumstantial conditions of inquiry, data should be reconceived as 'capta' (Checkland and Howell, 1998), from the Latin term capere, to take, meaning knowledge that is 'taken' not simply given as a natural representation of pre-existing fact (Drucker, 2011: section 3). Diagrammatic information from *LCI* has been

Figure 6.2, Fiona Woods, 2019, Choreographic objects, standing blackboards,
The Laboratory of Common Interest, Limerick, April 2019.

Figure 6.3, Fiona Woods, 2019, Choreographic objects, blackboard tables, *#13: DE, The Laboratory of Common Interest*, Limerick, April 2019.

Figure 6.4, Fiona Woods, 2019, Choreographic objects, small blackboard table and pamphlets,
The Laboratory of Common Interest, Limerick, April 2019.

Figure 6.5, Fiona Woods, 2019, Choreographic objects, display table,
The Laboratory of Common Interest, Limerick, April 2019.

Figure 6.6, Fiona Woods, 2019, Choreographic objects, paper scroll.
The Laboratory of Common Interest, Limerick, April 2019.

Figure 6.7, Fiona Woods, 2019, Choreographic objects, wall-based log,
The Laboratory of Common Interest, Limerick, April 2019.

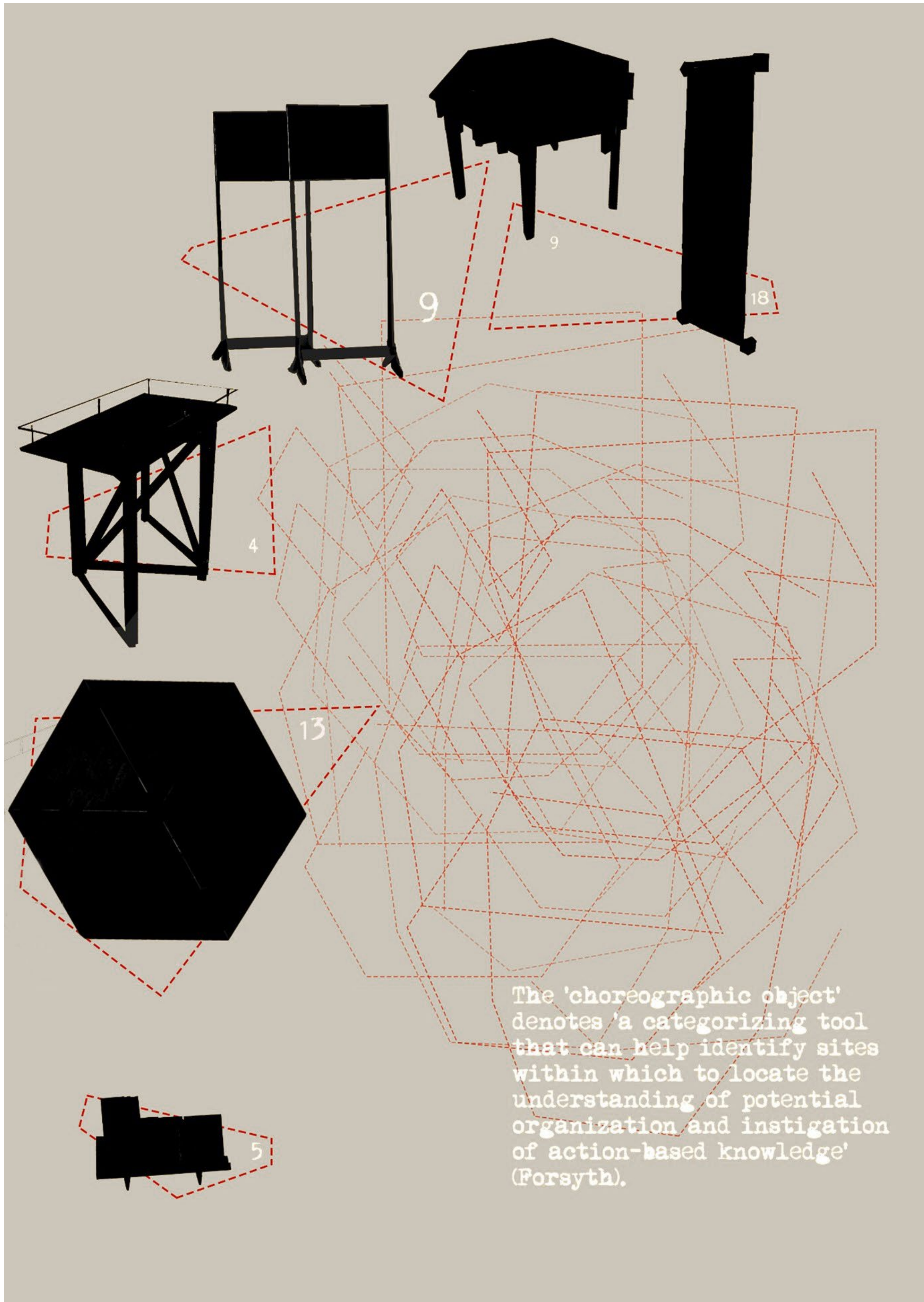


Figure 6.8, Shaping spaces, choreographic objects, *The Laboratory of Common Interest, diagram.*

interpreted as capta and reimagined through subsequent working processes (see Chapter Seven).

6.3.3 Strategy: the diagrammatic

According to Drucker, the diagram is a system for creating values; it is a 'knowledge producing form' rather than a 'formal representation of knowledge' (2013: 84). Not only do the different elements of the diagrammatic system intra-act, they 'work', they are operational in the working out of ideas, not representations after-the-fact (Drucker, 2013). While some diagrams may be used to reduce ambiguity and uncertainty in the presentation of data, they also offer a way of 'making sense' that does not conceal the messy entanglement of intersecting realities out of which sense is forged. Diagrams can be conventional, but they can also have a poetics, that is, a way of 'bringing into being of meaning through making' (ibid.: 85) and bringing different sensory regimes into dialogue.

The difference between the diagram and the diagrammatic is not dissimilar to the different between the map and mapping, as discussed in Chapter Two. The diagrammatic is a system of meaning-making and a way of making-legible that combines visual, textual, spatial, organisational and affective operations. Diagrammatic thinking is primarily relational, a process that may result in a diagram, or not. The value-producing actions of the diagram often arise from the use of spatial logics – '*hierarchy, juxtaposition, embedment, entanglement, enframing, interjection, branching, recursion, herniation, extension, penetration'* (Drucker, 2013: 85). The diagrammatic is closely connected to the choreographic; diagrams are a common component of choreographic processes. Systems of dance notation by Margaret Morris (1928), Rudolf Laban (1928), Oskar Schlemmer in the 1920's (Schlemmer, 1990), Anna and Lawrence Halprin (1970), and more recently Trisha Brown (Rosenberg, 2012), have

generated poetical, graphic forms, not all of which look like diagrams, but all of which are diagrammatic.

Diagrammatology refers to the academic study of diagrams (Stjernfelt, 2007), but the term was coined by W.J.T. Mitchell (1981) in an article on literary criticism, a call for a 'systematic study of the way that relationships among elements are represented and interpreted by graphic constructions' (Mitchell, 1981: 623). For Mitchell, the diagram mediates form, an interface between an abstract ideal of form and its material instantiation (ibid.: 622). This is similar in some ways to Vishmidt's account of infrastructures as mediating between imagination and the material realm (Vishmidt, 2017). The diagram, in this sense, is approached as an infrastructural element in the critical politics of sense-making that was operational in this research. Like other strategies discussed here, the diagram exists in a push-pull relationship between sensing and sense-making. It operates between CM and **æ** to give form to matters sensed below the surface of the empirical and the phenomenal. The diagrammatic is employed in Chapter Seven to make new knowledge from the raw knowledge-making processes of *LCI,* and to stake a claim regarding the value of the 'unfinished thinking' invited by artistic research (Borgdorff, 2012: 183).

6.3.4 Strategy: the evental

In probability theory, the event is the potential for something to happen, distinguished from the occurrence which is an actual happening (Intelligent Systems Lab, 2020). In general terms, an event is a spatio-temporal phenomenon, a singularity, something that deviates from the norm. To create an event is to set something apart from the general flux of social conditions. The combination of these different usages of the term results in a charged concept with applications from mathematics to philosophy, from statistics to pedagogy to aesthetics. As a political

concept, event is a name given to the potential for something to happen, a possibility to be seized, a productive suspension of the usual. Quoting Badiou, Glenn Loughran argues that 'an event is not the affirmation of "what already exists" in the order of social reproduction . . . but rather a proposition for the future' (2020: 204). What Loughran refers to as 'the evental site' (ibid.) is not outside of the social order, but 'names a formal gap . . . a void internal to the situation' (ibid.), a site from which 'a radical new' (ibid.) may emerge.

Dimitris Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson and Vassilis Tsianos are critical of this idea of the event. Because the event 'is never in the present' (Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2008: xii), but always 'designated . . . in retrospect or anticipated as a future possibility' (ibid.), it works against the social transformation that arises in 'the potence of the present that is made of people's everyday practices' (ibid.). The event, they suggest, is an avant-garde notion. However, the present moment is not unaffected by the brutalising effects of capitalist time that shape everyday practices, with alienating and distorting effects. To identify fissures in the temporal conditions of capitalism, in the sense identified by Lefebvre, serves as a basis for the construction of a different kind of time-space. Lefebvre identifies these fissures as moments. Goonewardena *et al.* argue that his ideas of 'moment' and 'event' 'highlight temporalities which conflict with linear repetitive time either within the residualised habits of daily life or in intense periods of political struggle' (Goonewardena *et al.*, 2008: 30). Holmes articulates another concept of the event that is productive in relation to the need for struggle. For Holmes, 'eventwork' (2012) is a combination of critical and constructive action that derives its force from 'perceptual, analytic, and expressive collaboration, which lends an affective charge to the interpretation of a real-world situation' (Holmes, 2012). The evental is mobilised in relation to a social order that is oppressive on many levels and must be addressed as such, not only at the level of everyday practice.

Associated with the political concept of the event is an idea of rupture, an idea that is very significant in Rancière's politics of 'the distribution of the sensible' (Rancière, 2004). Distribution of the sensible denotes a field of common experience shaped by an inherently unjust 'system of divisions and boundaries' (Rockhill, 2004: 1) that he describes as 'the police order' (Rancière, 2004: 3). In this model, the event is an unprecedented, immanent, transformative undoing and reconfiguration of the social order. However, Rancière's idea of a social order that conceals an invisibilised, underpinning, chaotic multiplicity may be anachronistic. Chaotic multiplicity has become a defining characteristic of the current social order, not its critical shadow, as a result of extreme deregulation, the free-for-all of social media and the psychological and physical impacts of climate change, which may be understood to have eventalised everyday experience.

Negri reads current socio-political conditions as a 'void between that which is finished and that which still has to begin' (Negri, interviewed by Gielen and Lavaert, 2018). The void, as argued by Loughran, is typically an 'evental site' (Loughran, 2020: 204). Part of the work of this research has been to consider how those disparate perspectives can productively co-exist, and how aesthetic work might navigate their contradictions vis-à-vis the project of the Commons. An influential idea in the research has been that of 'the aesthetic event' as described by Yepes (2016: 124), discussed in relation to the Bogota-based group *Mapa Teatro,* 'an artists' laboratory dedicated to trans-disciplinary creation' (Mapa Teatro, 2021). Their work is devised in collaboration with disparate groups and communities, creating conditions for those without political representation to speak truth to power by generating spaces 'for transgressing – geographic, linguistic, artistic – boundaries, and for staging local and global issues through various "thought-montage" operations' (ibid.). Active since 1984, Mapa Teatro describe their work as 'the production of poetic-political events' (ibid.) and employ the metaphor of

cartography to describe the distribution of their work across different times, spaces and mediums.

Based on his experience and reading of a specific work by Mapa Teatro, *C'undúa: Testigo de las Ruinas* (2002–2013), Yepes articulates the aesthetic event as a constructed, spatio-temporal phenomenon that holds potential for 'an eruption, an emergence, one that assembles disparate elements whereby a suspension of the relationality that configures the habitual world is put into place' (Yepes, 2016: 125). The aesthetic event assembles diverse elements that include 'the materiality of the objects and actions presented', as well as their 'discursive content [and] the affects and sensations they elicit' (ibid.), framed within other discourses including those that the spectator or participant bring themselves (ibid.).

It is also important to state the significance of the *non-evental* dimension of aesthetic work, which refers to an ongoing potentiality that never arrives at a point of emergence, but sustains the conditions for such a possibility, mediating between the evental and the everyday. The aesthetic non-event, as I am using it, denotes a facet of the practice that holds and supports elements and fragmented residues that are latent in the rhythms and practices of everyday lived experience. The aesthetic non-event is not remarkable, but its presence must be acknowledged.

The four strategies discussed here – the infrastructural, the choreographic, the diagrammatic and the evental – worked together to create conditions for critical processes of collective meaning-making, and to navigate the contradictions of political, aesthetic work. The strategies were present in the work of *LCI* in forms that were more raw than this analysis suggests. The reflexive work of the text has been to make sense of what was sensed in the work, to extrapolate from and frame those strategies with a degree of coherence. That is one of the reasons why Chapter Seven tries to make sense of the work of *LCI* using a completely different language, the diagrammatic, to hold a space for the raw and the unfinished. In the following

section, one of the aesthetic actions from the public event-space of *LCI* is discussed, in which these overarching strategies manifested in varying degrees.

6.4 Event-space: *#13: DE*

LCI culminated in a public event-space that lasted for 13 days in April 2019. Event-space is a concept that emerged from the explorations of the architect Bernard Tschumi in relation to the performative dimension of architecture (Hannah, 2019). It is a form in which event and space are co-implicated but do not merge seamlessly; the hyphen, according to Hannah, denotes a spatiotemporal interval (Hannah, 2019: xxi), a pause in the usual flux of time and space. Several of the aesthetic approaches discussed in the research thus far come together in the event-space. The social production of space, the role of infrastructure, the performative dimension of enacting collective processes of meaning-making, the aesthetic event – these aspects overlap in the event-space, as I will show.

This section focuses on a particular action from *LCI* titled *#13: Decolonising Education* [*#13: DE*] to ground some of the ideas that have been discussed and to engage in some analyses vis-à-vis the claims and proposals in the research. The action took place on Tuesday 23rd April 2019, between 10.30am and 2.00 pm. Like most of the actions of *LCI,* it was located in the project space of FabLab Limerick. The action was a closed session rather than an open public session, made up of a group of 14 people who had been invited to attend and/or had requested to attend, plus a guest presenting via Skype (Fig. 6.4). Chaired by Dr Anne Mulhall, the purpose of this session was to consider the contested position of Akademia-as-sanctuary, in light of the non-recognition of the educational background of people seeking international protection. It was coproduced with Evgeny Shtorn, a civil society activist, organiser and LGBTQ+ researcher

from Russia who, at the time, was living in the Direct Provision system,[64] pending Irish refugee status. Attendees included 6 members of the core group, 8 coproducers (including Evgeny), and a guest, Ahmet Öğüt of the *Silent University* via Skype. The group included several academics employed at third level institutions, and some third level students, two of whom were at various stages in the asylum seeker process.

The Silent University [SU], initiated by Öğüt in 2012, describes itself as a 'solidarity-based knowledge exchange platform by displaced people and forced migrants' (Silent University, n.d.). It operates outside of 'the migration laws, language limitations and the other bureaucratic obstacles' (ibid.). Those who lead the SU projects in different places are often academics and researchers whose prior qualifications are not recognised in the country in which they reside (Fig. 6.9). SU is a fluid and context-specific work that manifests in different ways in each of the localities where it operates. Some manifestations were supported financially and organisationally by art institutions. The process of negotiating with institutions, according to Pelin Tan, opened complex questions about roles and relations, and the organisational infrastructures of the host institution, often challenging the institution to 'decide whether it wants to be part of the social affect as a transforming instituting practice or to continue to a neoliberal, bureaucratic instrument of culture' (Tan: 2016: 26). Practices like SU, Tan argues, 'are part of the formation of a micro-society' (ibid.).

[64] Direct provision is a system established by the Irish government in March 2000 to house people entering the Irish State in search of international protection. It was proposed as an 'interim' solution to a growth in the number of asylum seekers, to provide accommodation for six months while people awaited a decision on their asylum application. 'As of April 2020, there were approximately 7,400 asylum seekers living in 38 direct provision and emergency accommodation centres around the country. Of those, at least 2,250 are children. Each adult receives a weekly allowance of €38.80 (€29.80 for children) and an annual clothing allowance of €200. As of November 2019, a third of direct provision residents had been in the system for more than two years. Many have no access to cooking facilities, must share rooms with non-family members and have limited access to the labour market. This is State-sponsored poverty and it must end' (Mfaco, 2020, 'I live in direct provision. It's a devastating system – and it has thrown away millions', in *The Irish Times,* Jul 4, 2020).

Towards A Transversal Pedagogy
The Silent University Principles and Demands:

1. Everybody has the right to educate.

2. Immediate acknowledgement of academic backgrounds of asylum seekers and refugees.

3. Acting knowledge without language limitations.

4. Acting knowledge without legal limitations.

5. Participatory modes of usership.

6. Artistic pedagogical practices need to be emancipated from commonly used terminologies such as "projects" and "workshops".

7. Pedagogic practices must be based on long-term engagement, commitment and determination.

8. We act in solidarity with other refugee struggles and collectives around the world.

9. Extra-territorial, trans-local knowledge production and conflict urbanism must be priorities.

10. Decentralized, participatory, horizontal and autonomous modality of education, instead of centralized, authoritarian, oppressive, and compulsory education.

11. Acting beyond limitations of border politics.

12. Adhocracy instead of bureaucracy.

13. Action Knowledge can only be produced through assemblage methods.

14. Revolution of decolonising pedagogies.

Figure 6.9, Silent University Principles and Demands, *silentuniversity.org*.

The work of education-as-art has a lineage that goes back as far as Josef Beuys' 1973 *Free International University for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research* (Lee Podevsa, 2017). What distinguishes SU from other education-as-artworks is that it focuses on the educators, people whose qualifications, skills or professional trainings are not recognised in countries where they reside as people seeking international protection, or for other status-related reasons. Its manifests in diverse ways across different social/geographical/political contexts. In a text collectively authored by members of SU Copenhagen, they argue that SU

> . . . is not a way to 'upscale' unrecognised academic knowledge and skills to an existing educational system. Instead it is about questioning the devaluation of some people's knowledge in today's societies (Friktion, 2018).

#13: DE took as its focus the question of decolonising education, in the context of the Irish asylum seeker system in particular. A question quickly emerged as to whether everyone in the room was equally positioned. It was evident that several people were speaking from privileged positions inside the bounded academic domain, inside the concepts of knowledge and qualification and legitimacy enclosed by the institution of academia, while others were excluded from that realm, and/ or could not gain recognition for their academic credentials from other systems. To that extent the action was also an unframing of the mechanisms of that privilege, not least in the geopolitics of the discussion which, it was observed, was marked by a general lack of familiarity with the non-European field of academic research.

The action therefore involved the framing of an awkward 'we'; awkward because an evident desire for solidarity and recognition was marked from the inside by a glaring disparity in terms of privilege. A particular police order – the Irish system of academia intertwined with the system of Direct Provision – exposed a structural conflict of interest between those persons

in terms of privilege. A particular police order – the Irish system of academia intertwined with the system of Direct Provision – exposed a structural conflict of interest between those persons with the official right to speak and to be seen, and those deprived of that right. In the terms outlined by Rancière 'a conflict between a sensory presentation and a way of making sense of it, or between several sensory regimes and/or 'bodies' (ibid.: 139) is the basis of a process that he describes as dissensus. When the right to appear was brought face to face with the absence of that right, a kind of unframing took place regarding the power to act, and the failure to act. The uneven distribution of power marked the different bodies in the space, generating a kind of affective choreography that was uncomfortable and even painful.

The chorographic objects – blackboard tables, standing blackboards, chalk pens – were organised as a kind of round-table formation. The blackboard surfaces were organised to gather traces of the dialogue in the form of diagrams, constituting a 'cartography of the sensible and thinkable' (Rancière, 2008: 11) that emerged through the event. The traces that materialised on the blackboards (Fig. 6.10, 6.11, 6.12) identify questions about access and the terms of access, about the coloniality of the system, about the geopolitics of the canon, about the consumerist model of education which, it was proposed, amounts to a colonisation by market forces. The question of 'the undercommons' (Harney and Moten, 2013) and the parasitic para-institution were also part of the conversation.

The real-time composition of *#13: DE* was situational and relational, with modes of poiesis that were haptic and emergent, immanent to the spacing of bodies, objects and structures. Some of the diagrammatic renderings of this event have been translated, through a specific process, into a sound-work, which is available as part of the archive of the work. The intention is to translate the affective choreography of the event into a form that is open for interpretation and use. *#13: DE* is also interpreted in Chapter Seven, Diagram 5.

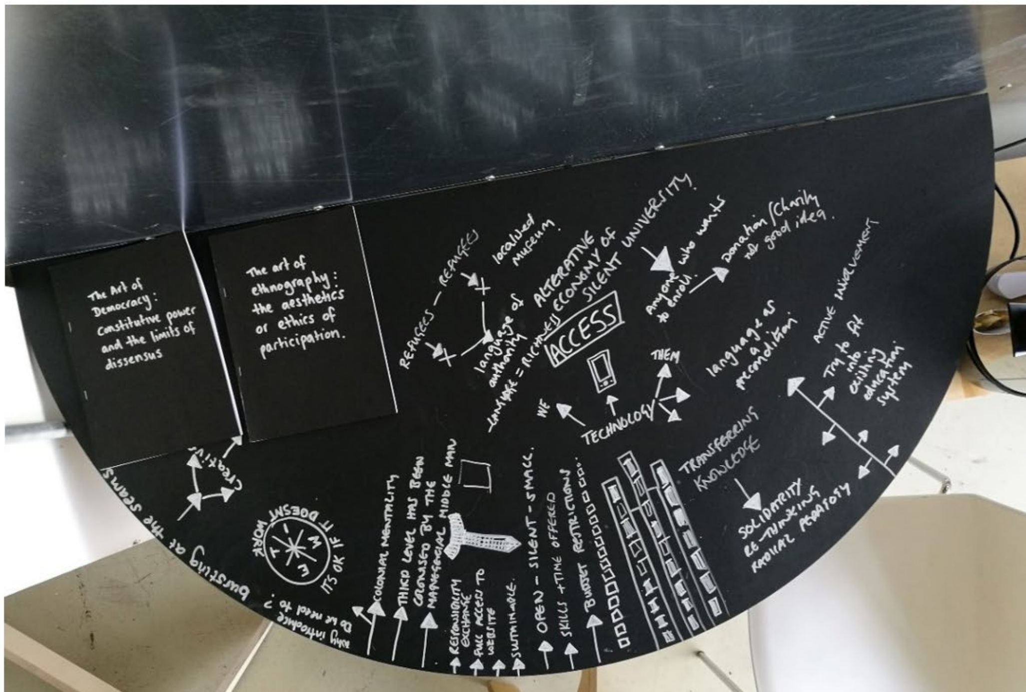


Figure 6.10, Blackboard traces from *#13: Decolonising Education*, April 2019, (bottom blackboard: Creative Collaborations Limerick Workstation).

Figure 6.11, Blackboard traces from *#13: Decolonising Education,* April 2019.

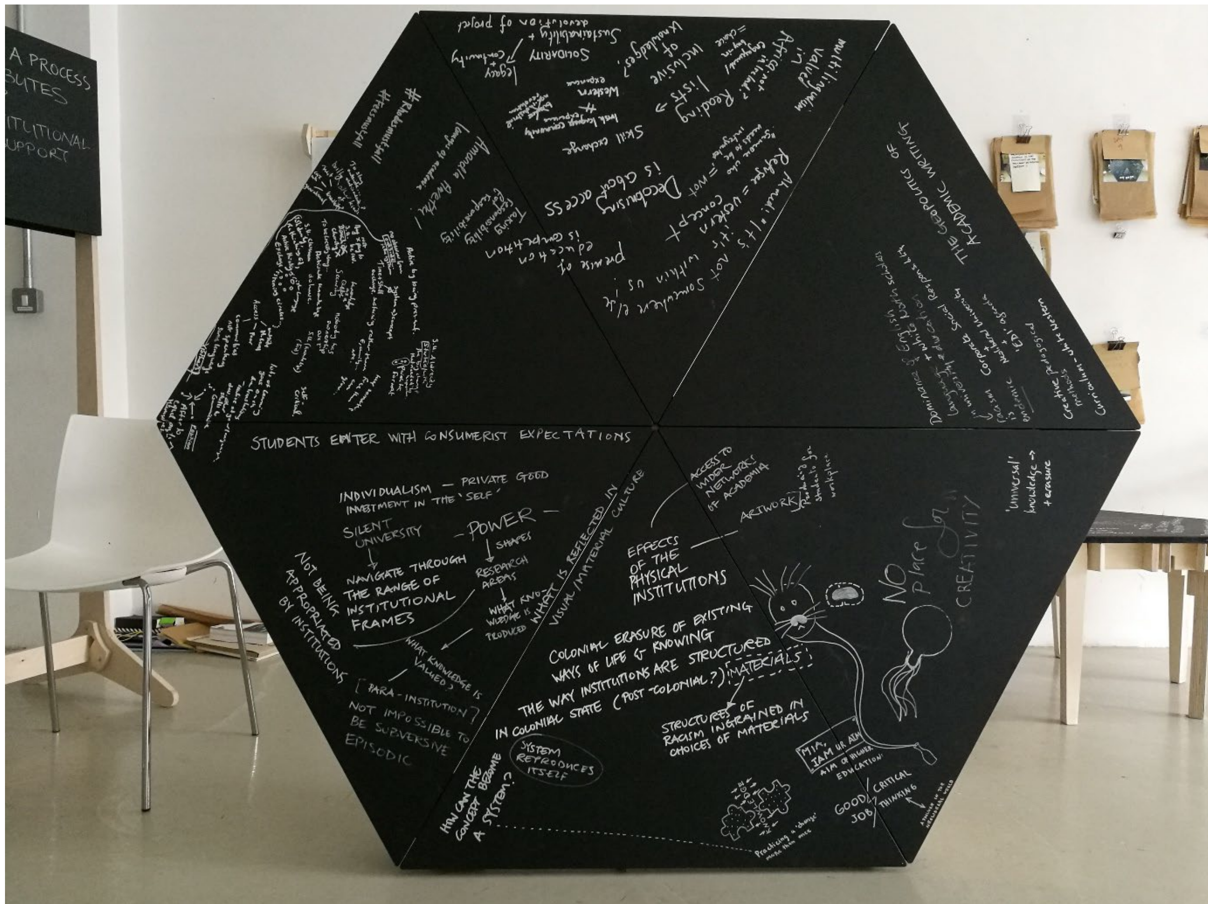


Figure 6.12, Blackboard traces from *#13: Decolonising Education,* April 2019.

6.5 Economic logics: a critique

In the course of the research I spent some time looking at the use of diagrams in the field of business management. The *Strategy Diamond* (Hambrick and Fredrickson, 2001) is a tool created to support enterprise managers to generate a coherent strategy to address how their enterprise should 'engage its environment' (ibid.: 52), employing the following questions:

> Arenas: where will we be active?
> Vehicles: how will we get there?
> Differentiators: how will we win in the marketplace?
> Staging: what will be our speed and sequence of moves?
> Economic logic: how will we obtain our returns? (ibid.: 53).

I employed a reconfigured version of that model to examine aspects of *LCI* and how those could evolve towards a more extensive and coherent form of prefigurative praxis in subsequent work, which resulted in a two-tier diagram. The first tier (Fig. 6.13) relates specifically to the engagement of *LCI* with its environment, in terms compatible with the idea of prefigurative praxis:

> Arenas: what are the immediate sites of possible action?
> Vehicles: what modes of action generate the right conditions and political dialogues?
> Differentiators: what will distinguish the work from the social relations of 'art' and/or commercial exchange?
> Staging: how will these be formalised?
> Economic logic: what logics will be aspired to? Operationalised?

This model served to draw out different logistical dimensions of the work of *LCI.* Of particular interest to the analysis here was the focus on economic logics. Broadly speaking, the Commons is associated with a solidarity economy, properly described as the Social and Solidarity Economy [SSE], which works 'from the principal of a humanised economy that champions

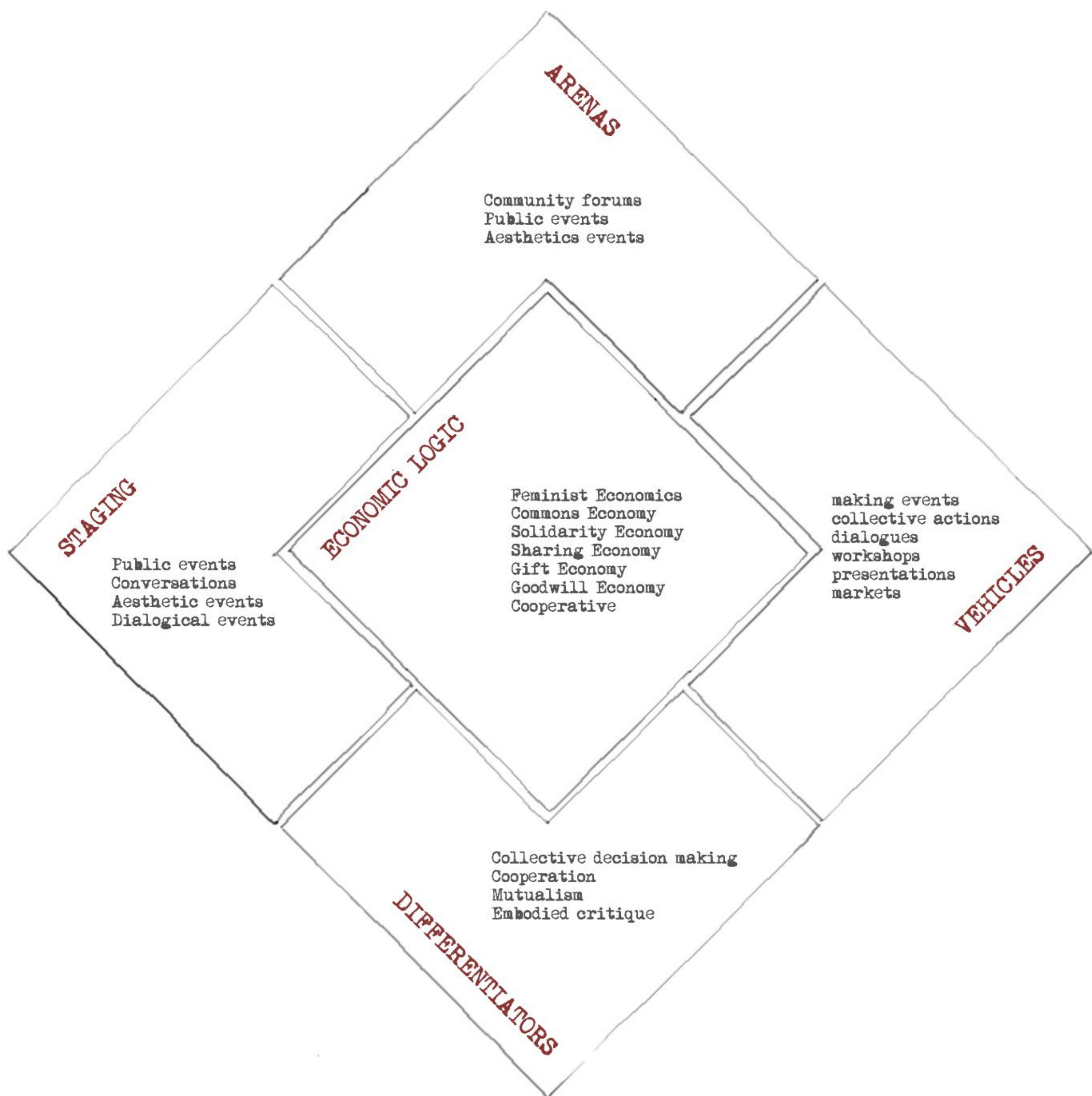


Figure 6.13, Strategy Diamond for The Laboratory of Common Interest.

alternative, sustainable, socially responsible consumption, production and services' (Irish Development Education Association [IDEA], 2015, n.p.). Producing *LCI* depended heavily on a currency of solidarity and goodwill, forms of sharing and modes of cooperation arising from previous relationships that I had built up with the core group and other producers, or between members of the core group and their networks. Monetary resources were limited; I tried to pay expenses for everyone and offered different kinds of exchanges – mentoring and writing mostly – with some of the coproducers. This type of precarious economy, based on a lot of voluntary work, is typical of socially engaged aesthetic work, but it is not socially responsible or sustainable. Self-exploitation and the precarious economy of goodwill are difficult to manage critically. The goodwill economy operates with the risk of exhaustion on one side and of over-formalising exchanges on the other.

Alternative economies, and the complexity of money and debt, were explored through aesthetic actions at different points in the research: *Money, Space and Cinema* (2017), a series of 4 film-screening and discussion events co-curated with Rod Stoneman; *Alternative Economies* dialogues (2018–19), co-curated with Ciaran Nash; *#14: FE* (*Feminist Economics, Finance and the Commons for activists*), coproduced with Dr Conor McCabe; and *#18*: *LSSP* (*Limerick Soviet Shilling Project),* coproduced with Ciaran Nash, Victoria Brunetta, The Limerick Soviet 100 Committee, local businesses and contributing artists, Kerry Guinan, Jim Furlong, Tom Prendergast, Olivia Furey and James Kearney. The idea of alternative economies was informed by *Take Back the Economy, An Ethical Guide for Transforming Our Communities* (Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy, 2013), and in later stages by Gibson-Graham's *A Postcapitalist Politics* (2006). In spite of engaging with some of the theoretical work around alternative economic logics, this aspect of *LCI* was the most problematic and also

the most promising, in terms of future work. That critical perspective is discussed in a later section, following a discussion here of the aesthetics actions *#18: LSSP* and *#14: FE.*

6.5.1 *#18: LSSP*

Economic logics were embedded in the production of *LCI* conceptually, practically, critically, and also uncritically, as I will discuss. The question of alternative economies was explored in a number of dialogues in the months prior to the event-space, informed partly by the 1919 Limerick Soviet, where the worker's committee issued their own currency, the Soviet Shilling, to maintain a functioning economy during the uprising. The first *Alternative Economies* dialogue posed the question: could an alternative currency operate during the 12-day centenary of the Limerick soviet, and if so, how would it work? In the course of that dialogue, it became clear that none of us could fully grasp the social nature of money. For the second dialogue, Dr Conor McCabe, author of *Money* (2018), addressed the opaque and abstract form of money as a social relation and as a technology of power. He suggested that alternatives to this system involve facing up to deep, economic class divisions in Irish society.

Through these dialogues, the aesthetic action *#18: LSSP* came into existence. Relative to matters that had emerged through the discussions of the previous 12 months, the artist Ciaran Nash proposed to give those abstract phenomena of money and alternative economies a concrete manifestation. During the workers' occupation of the city centre in 1919 they developed a temporary currency called the Soviet Shilling to sustain economic activity inside the soviet zone. Nash devised a system of exchange that operated during the centenary of the Soviet, from the 15th–27th April, 2019. With the designer Victoria Brunetta, Nash generated a physical currency, made up of 1, 5, and 10 shilling notes, each of which featured a work

Limerick businesses now sell these...

Limerick Soviet Shillings

- **The Celtic Bookshop**, Rutland Street
- **The Urban Co-op**, Ballysimon
- **Lucky Lane**, Catherine Street
- **The Commercial Bar**, Catherine Street

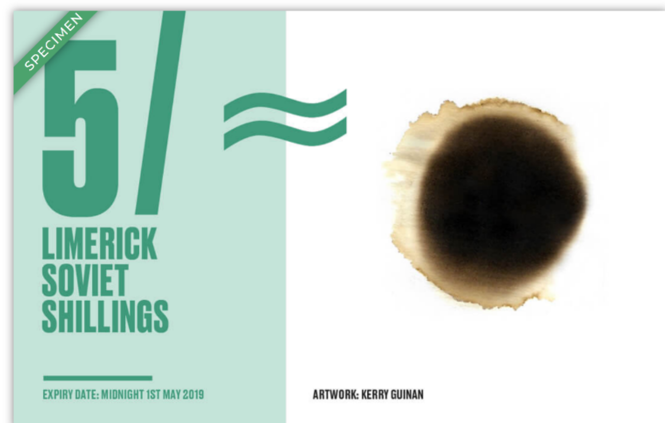
OUR MONEY. OUR CITY.

This project will be run partly in commemoration of the Soviet shilling, but also as an act of solidarity and defiance against financial capitalism and its ravaging of everything from housing to healthcare.

This action may be a trial for a real alternative currency for Limerick City.

We need to bring together anyone who is interested in making this work.

The Shillings are available for sale at The Celtic Bookshop on Rutland Street, The Limerick Urban Co-op in BallySimon and at Lucky Lane and The Commercial Bar on Catherine Street.



One Kerry Guinan 5/- 2019 Limerick Soviet Shilling note. Green. 133 x 72 mm. Stamped and embossed. 100gsm paper. Sold as one of one in a pack of 20 Shillings for €30. The above is a digital mockup.

Figure 6.14, Ciaran Nash, 2019, *The Limerick Soviet Shilling Project,* screenshot from project website, https://saiocht.ie/wordpress/

commissioned from a local artist, curated by Nash (Fig. 6.14). 7 local businesses agreed to accept the Shilling as currency, on limited number of items for the duration of the event. They consisted of a food co-op, a bookshop, a pub, a theatre, a second-hand market, a picture-framer and a cafe. The currency was sold in packages, consisting of 20 shillings (1x 10 shillings + 1x 5 shillings and 5x 1 shillings) for which people paid €30. The shillings were numbered and embossed with a special stamp. 80 packages of currency were sold, with a total face value of €1600. During the operational period (15th April to 1st May) 184 shillings were spent at participating outlets in the city on goods that included coffee, food, books, postcards, pints of beer and craft items. The surplus cost (50% over face value) covered production costs.

Money is an extremely complex social technology, of which physical currency is only the most tangible component. People understand currency in the same way that they understand maps; it is viewed as a more-or-less neutral, functional item, rather than an 'ontogenetic' site (Kitchin and Dodge, 2007: 334) that produces a certain kind of reality. As McCabe argues, 'money is not a thing in itself, but a mechanism for dealing with issues of social organisation and distribution' (2018: 6). *#18: LSSP* was a very successful artistic action by Nash, which received a lot of attention locally and was enthusiastically supported by the Limerick Soviet 100 organising committee, a group made up of activists, trade unionists, historians and artists. *#18: LSSP* revealed interesting dynamics about the production and circulation of value; ideas about commodity and functionality; and revealed aspects of the social system of money. It was also a far more difficult, complex work than we had anticipated, exceeding the structures that we had put in place to manage the project. Nash had designed extensive documentation – agreements with businesses, clear rates of exchange, contracts of use, etc. – but once the currency went into circulation, it acquired a material existence generating modes of social organisation – distributing, exchanging, managing, cataloguing, explaining – that were more

demanding than we had predicted. The tensions between abstract-symbolic and concrete-operational aspects of the temporary currency reflected McCabe's account of money as a social technology, through which certain kinds of relations are enacted (2018).

6.5.2 *#14: FE*

Also arising from the round-table dialogues on the theme of alternative economies (2018–2019) prior to the event-space, was the action *#14: FE*. Consisting of a day-long workshop, Feminist Economics, Finance and the Commons for activists, it was coproduced with Dr Conor McCabe. It took place in the project space of FabLab Limerick on 24th April 2019. It was an open public session; 14 people, some of whom had booked in advance and some who turned up on the day, made up the group, which included 3 members of the core group, 4 project coproducers (including Conor) and 7 action coproducers on the day. The group was made up of academics, students, writers, curators, artists, filmmakers, and activists. Attendees were introduced to the arguments and ideas of writers such as Silvia Federici, Maria Mies, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Nancy Fraser, Selma James, and Feminist Fightback, and the application of those ideas to an Irish context, in terms of combating the new enclosures of financialisation.

The format included a lecture/presentation and group discussion. Aspects of the ongoing dialogue were recorded on the blackboard surfaces, which were moved around the space in the course of the day to redistribute ideas and to encourage coproducers of the action to add to them. Some blackboards were positioned by the window facing onto the street (Fig. 6.15), which drew people into the space. At the start of every action, including this one, when the work of *LCI* was introduced, themes of mutualism and common interest were stressed. Attention was drawn to the blackboards as a site of collective action and exchange. I made two

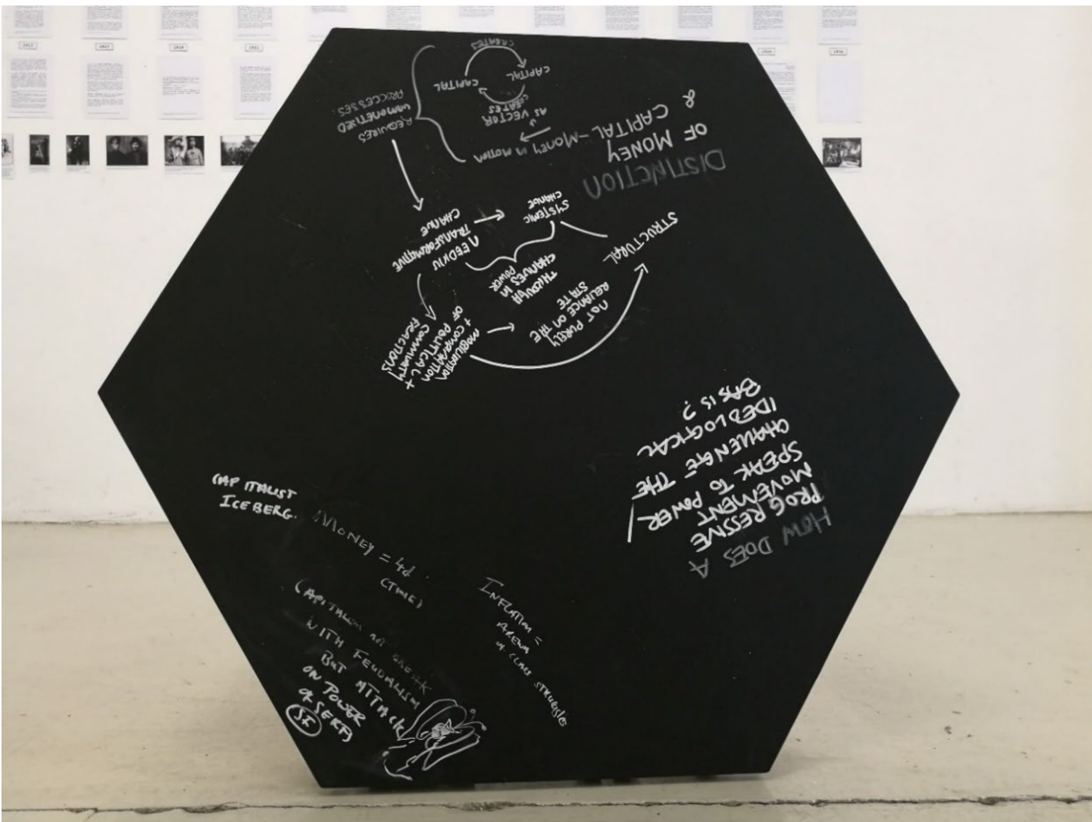


Figure 6.15, Aesthetic action and blackboard traces from *#14: Feminist Economics*, April 2019.

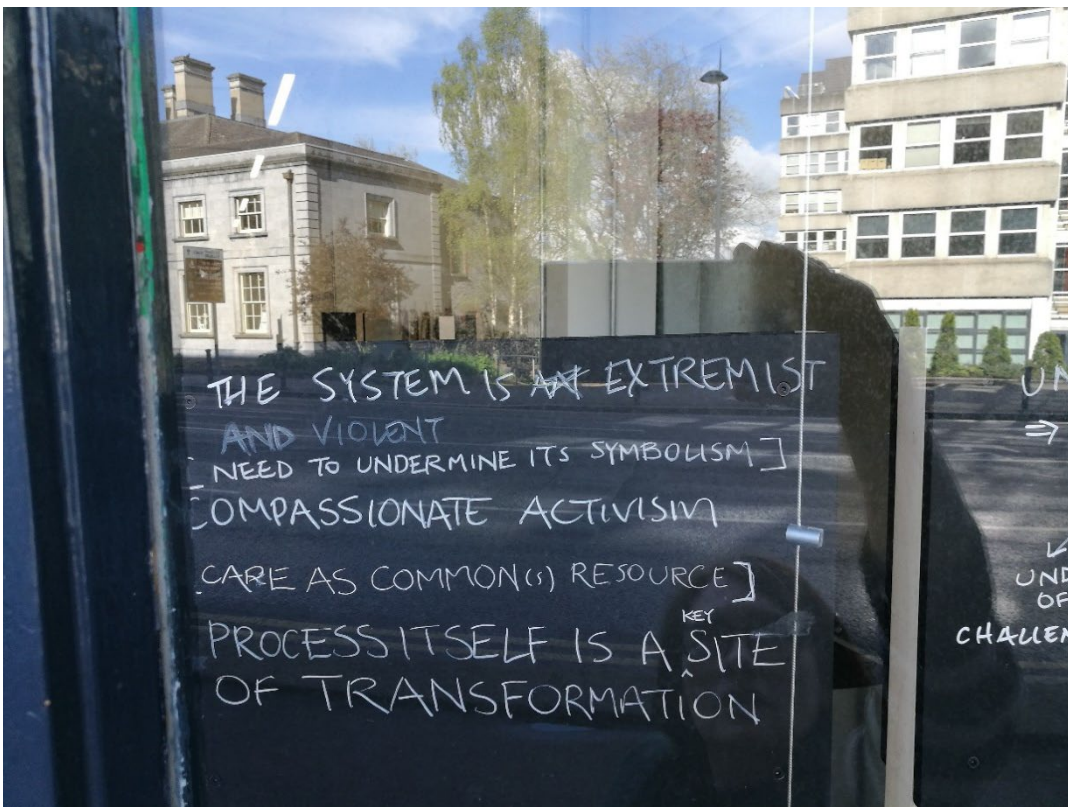


Figure 6.16, Blackboard traces from *#14: Feminist Economics,* April 2019.

requests of participants; i) that they would contribute to the work by leaving written or diagrammatic traces on the blackboards, and ii) that they would clean up after themselves. A lot of people chose to write in personal notebooks rather than leave traces on the surfaces, in spite of the focus on mutuality and collective production.

6.5.3 Performing economies

Oddly disjointed social relations arose across the life of the public event-space, arising from the different economies at work. The financial costs of the work were met by different sources: a TU Dublin research grant; free us of the FabLab workshop space and public facilities (kitchen, bathrooms, coffee maker) for the duration of the event-space, which amounted to sponsorship by the University of Limerick, who own the space, as part of their commitment to a solidarity economy in the city;[65] money from my own savings (the luxury of having an academic position) and a great deal of unpaid and voluntary labour, including my own. When the question of the 'free' economy was raised on one occasion, it generated a degree of surprise and discomfort amongst people. No mechanism had been put in place to have this difficult conversation, a shortcoming in the project that I return to in the conclusions.

LCI emerged from the longer-term project, *Free*Space,* an engagement with the socio-spatial problematic of enclosure. *LCI* was a relatively short-term experiment with practices of commoning, undertaken with a community of interest who coalesced around the *Free*Space* project. Through *Free*Space* actions and discussions, questions of economy had come to the surface. Solidarity economies, commons and feminist economies of care entered into the

[65] For the free use of their FabLab space for two weeks, the University of Limerick required that I provide insurance indemnity from my host institution, TU Dublin. It was very difficult to get the two institutions to connect around this matter. An emphasis on risk aversion is part of the neoliberal structuring of society that works against collective action, spontaneous assembly and solidarity economies.

imaginary of the work. *LCI* set out to experiment with alternative modes of cultural production that might form the basis of a present and future commons, and to collectively generate resources – space, time, administrative and organisational support, some financial support, a public profile, access to a social network – for mutual benefit. The theme of alternative economies was developed in the work of *LCI* by Nash, as discussed. The Alternative Economies dialogues that Nash and I curated in the months prior to the event-space of *LCI* led to significant discussions about the nature of money, about solidarity economies and feminist economics. Those matters became part of the knowledge-making dimension of the work. Intangible resources were developed, shared and extended beyond the immediate event-space, *Feminist Economics: A Manifesto* (fig. 6.17), produced with Conor McCabe.

In the context of conditions where people are subjected to forces of alienation, 'experienced at once as sensual saturation and physical exhaustion' (Berlant, 2016: 409), a commonist aesthetics was tested in this work as an aesthetics of care, a way of enhancing collective action, generating infrastructures to enrich collective activity, contributing tools, methods and strategies to draw out and to highlight the meaning-making aspects of collective struggle and work as a shared production. Strong and affective connections were made, ongoing processes and relationships were set in motion, and the discourse of the commons was inserted into a public event, The Limerick Soviet Centenary.

One of the critical fault-lines of the work of *LCI* was that insufficient consideration had been given to the latent economies of the project itself; many aspects of that economy were unanticipated, and there were many unintended consequences. I was as honest as possible about the scarcity and distribution of monetary resources, about the orientation of the project towards an academic research process of extraction; I regularly acknowledged the free and gift economies supporting the work, encouraged people to make use of the resources of *LCI,* and

Feminist Economics:

*provides a critical analysis of causes and effects of the invisbilisation of women's labour in patriarchal, capitalist and colonialist societies;

*takes as its starting point the reality that every society and economy has at its core the unpaid work of caring, cooperation and mutual assistance necessary to meet human needs and create solidarity for the functioning of families, communities and societies;

*rejects hierarchical, competitive, patriarchal, market-ruled capitalism as a necro-political system that is anti-human and anti-life;

*recognises that Western concepts of 'modernity' and 'growth' arise from, and amount to, a violent subjugation of nature, women, workers, indigenous peoples and traditional cultures and communities by colonial practices of extraction and exploitation;

*recognises that an economy is a social domain, not a self-determining system;

*recognises that 'The Economy' is a capitalist condition whereby the economic interests of 'investors' are prioritised over the concerns of all other stakeholders through the idealised abstraction of the so-called 'free market';

*recognises that the dictates of the so-called 'free market', including private property rights, unlimited growth and competition, rely entirely on enforcement by states;

*advocates social relations that are non-hierarchical, non-coercive, non-extractivist, co-operative, caring and trust-based;

*aligns with other forms of Solidarity Economies that are oriented towards building a just and sustainable system, characterised by cooperative management of resources, and non-exploitative modes of production and distribution;

*aligns with practices and material expressions of the Commons, based on the principle of prioritising the common good, shifting from extractivist to generative value models of creation, use, exchange and collective management of shared resources;

*anticipates a post-capitalist economy based on the care-oriented actions and social wealth implied by the original Greek term, oikonomia, 'household management';

*promotes participatory democracy and self-management.

Fiona Woods with Conor McCabe.

Figure 6.17; *Feminist Economics: A Manifesto,* Fiona Woods with Conor McCabe, 2019.

to actively exchange services and skills amongst contributors. However, ultimately, I controlled the monetary budget, which set an artificial limit to the depth of the collaboration. Things might have unfolded differently if the work had taken place outside of an academic research project. Pressures regarding the need to conclude and step back from the work in order to reflect on and analyse it, took precedence over nurturing some of the fledgling initiatives and economies that came into focus through the work. While the work of *LCI* involved a discursive imagining and enactment of an alternative economy of commoning, it was underpinned by concrete, economic dynamics that produced tensions in its performative economy. Those tensions have generated productive insights, in ways that I will discuss.

6.5.4 Revised model

The aesthetic actions presented in this thesis, including *LCI*, were conceived purposely for the research, with the intention of examining those actions from first intuition to conceptualisation, theorisation, realisation, into analysis and reflection. The purpose was to find ways of aligning my practice more productively with struggles against enclosure and extractivism and identifying ways of contributing meaningfully to the transformative ecosystem of value described as the Commons.

The second version of the *Strategy Diamond* diagram (Fig. 6.17) shows how ideas have progressed following the analysis of the work of *LCI*. *Arenas*, referring to immediate sites of possible action, is reoriented towards *existing or potential cooperatives*. Gibson-Graham have identified the importance of what they describe as 'the self-cultivation of subjects (including ourselves) who can desire other economies' (2006: xxiii). *LCI* was successful in that regard. However, there are significant political limitations to working with groups temporarily convened through aesthetic work, not least that the work relies heavily on, and is directed by,

the actions of the convener/organiser/aesthetic worker. One of the conclusions drawn is that aligning aesthetic work with other, self-directed activist practices, in the mode of 'eventwork' (Holmes, 2012), offers the best chance for contributing to transformative, social action.

Vehicles, modes of action to generate the right conditions and political dialogues, is substantially altered in the diagram, to read as follows:

i) *Infrastructures, collectively designed and developed.* Thinking of infrastructures as an interface between the material and the possible, (Vishmidt, 2017) emphasises the aesthetic work involved in their production, and their significance as sites of collective sense-making. The importance of paying attention to infrastructures is one of the takeaways from this research, in terms of future work.

ii) *Processes of making:* Discursive and dialogical practices can be tiring and repetitive. Combined with processes of making, discursive or dialogical work can be grounded and embodied in productive ways.

iii) *Making space for heterogeneity and friction:* It became clear through the work of *LCI* that friction and strangeness are vital to maintain productive tensions between the political and the aesthetic, but they are difficult to manage. Harnessing the productive force of friction through collectively negotiated infrastructures suggests a way of addressing this matter.

iv) *Working manifesto (negotiated):* A statement about action and its purposes, collectively authored.

The category of *Differentiators*, what distinguishes the work from the social relations of 'art' and/or commercial exchange, has also been modified. Reflecting on what a commonist

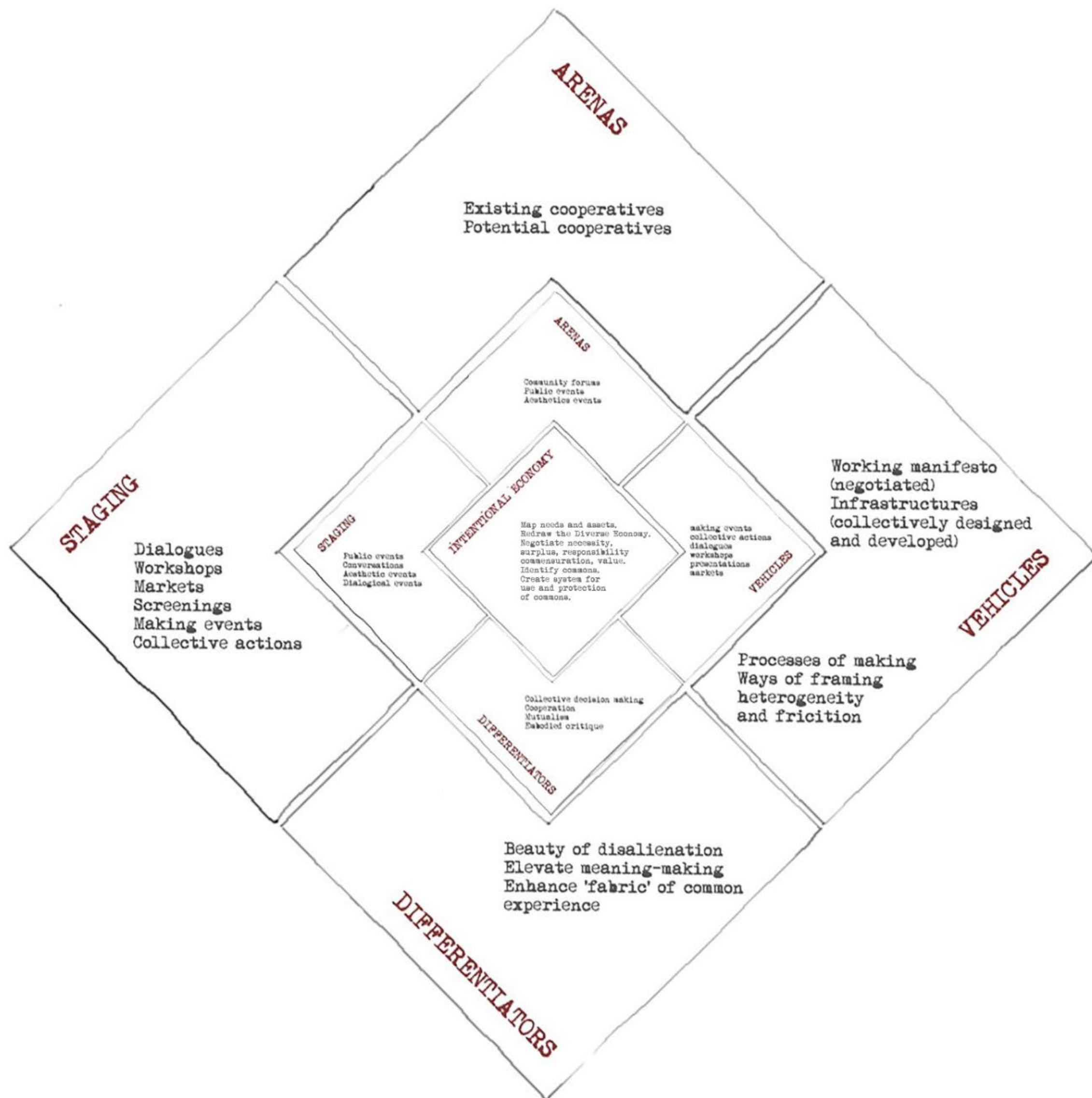


Figure 6.18, *Strategy Diamond, two-tier, post Laboratory*, author rendering.

aesthetics is capable of contributing to a process of social transformation resulted in the following principles:

i) Make use of representational power as a collective resource.
ii) Create infrastructures to support a collective politics of sense and sense-making.
iii) Bring different modes of meaning-making into proximity.
iv) Make use of the prosthetic value of 'art' to create spaces of polyvalent hybridity.

The core economic logics are also changed in the second version. Drawing on the work of Gibson-Graham, *Economic Logics* is no longer accepted as a category in itself but is reframed as 'Intentional Economy' (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 101) which is first of all an 'ethical space of decision making' (ibid.: 86), and secondly a set of agreements about production and distribution. Rather than abstract descriptors of different types of economies, this section now consists of concrete tasks for building community economies: i) map needs and assets; ii) redraw the diverse economy (Redrawing the Economy, 2018); iii) negotiate necessity, surplus, value, commensuration and responsibility; iv) identify commons; and v) create system for use and protection of commons. These matters are contextual, worked out over time and revised through processes of trial and error and negotiation.

With hindsight, the emphasis on mutualism and on constructing a common good through the work of *LCI* may have created the condition that Berlant referred to as 'a confirming affective surplus' (ibid.: 395) that made it difficult to highlight contradiction or to address relations of non-cooperation in the different actions.[66] The work lacked a clear strategy

[66] In keeping with the collective processes of production involved in the work of *LCI,* so collective processes of reflection, largely informal, were also part of the work. *Free*Space Dialogue #9*: *Between sense and sense* was a roundtable discussion convened in June 2019 with invited participants, all of whom participated in *The Laboratory of Common Interest* as co-producers and/or as participants. In the dialogue, they responded to questions and tensions that I had identified through my own reflection on the work. A full transcript of the dialogue is included in Appendix II. An invitation to reflect on the work of *LCI* was issued to all of the

to foreground ‘incompatible discourses that [came] into friction’ (Bishop, 2016). This is something that might be addressed through non-violent communication methods in future work, but that is not part of this analysis.

6.6 Conclusions

The transformative project of the Commons amounts to a modification of the field of experience at all scales, from political-legal systems down to micro-practices of commoning, and further into the realm of perception where, Fritjof Capra argues, crisis originates and also where fundamental social transformations begin (Capra, 1982: 15). At the level of perception, the Commons asserts the relational basis of our lived reality as a non-dualistic totality. In its rejection of extractivism and enclosure, the Commons challenges individualism and the destructive logics of private property. Those logics are so profoundly engrained in the social fabric, and by extension in the self, that the logic of the Commons amounts even to a reworking of the self. Federici’s insistence that even modest commoning initiatives are ‘experiments in self-provisioning and the seeds of an alternative mode of production in the making’ (Federici, 2019: 88) is a reminder that social processes are also concrete, that they take place at micro-levels, and that the action of commoning ‘matters’, it takes form as a matter of common interest in a real way.

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coproducers. In Appendix III, one of the respondees describes how he made use of the space of *LCI* to explore his own concerns. Appendix IV contains email feedback from three of the core producers a year after the public event-space, in response to a question about the economies of the work. Those captured responses are examples of a much more extensive and complex dialogical process that has informed this research. Some of the key ideas that emerged in the course of the work are encapsulated in *Feminist Economics: A Manifesto* (Appendix V), a work produced with Dr Conor McCabe following *LCI* for a workshop with *The Living Commons* in September 2019. *Feminist Economics: A Manifesto* is shared through a Creative Commons License.

A commonist aesthetics can be understood partly as a statement of intent, a mode of prefigurative praxis that breaks down into several intricate social processes. The practice presented here set out to find haptic, embodied, relational, choreographic and diagrammatic strategies for bringing different ways of knowing and being into proximity, to enact a commoning economy. Choreographic unfoldings shaped acts of collective and embodied meaning-making. The work constituted a framing/ reframing that generated unique cartographies of 'the visible, the intelligible and also of the possible' (Rancière, 2008). Material infrastructures designed for the space served practical functions, and also framed the aesthetic actions in ways that resulted in strange intensities of meaning, coherence and sensory pleasure. Spaces of polyvalent hybridity emerged in the work as different realities that opened onto one another. These moments included:

i) *#4: A Visual History of Protest and Struggle*; the intense materiality of Joe Harrington's voluminous archive of protest and activist posters from the 1970's/80's and 90s, surrounding Joe Harrington and Mary O' Donnell as they spoke about their decades of activism and labour organising;

ii) *#1: Assembly Required; tactical urban fabrications* – a group of strangers working together to design and produce an unwieldy object for mobilising in public space;

iii) *#5: Wandern 1;* the artist Baerbel Reinhart sleeping at the back of the event-space, having spent the previous 24 hours in an intensely vulnerable condition wandering through the streets and neighbourhoods of Limerick in a continuous, performative action;

iv) *#7: A Political Herstory of our Bodies*; the Circle of Friends/ Moyross Women's Group performing a play of their own devising in front of a set of embroidered self-portraits made over previous months;

v) *#12: Revolutions and Sex. What happened next?;* Nat Shastnev(a)'s installation of images and texts exploring the brief period of radical, sexual liberation that followed the Bolshevik revolution;

vi) a flickering camera obscura of the outside street projected onto the participants of a workshop by The Living Commons group (*#17: The Living Commons; collective design workshop*).

Those were not isolated events but folds in a fabric of common experience produced through collective processes.

Henk Borgdorff insists that 'artistic research is the deliberate articulation of . . . unfinished material thinking' (2012: 71). The messy, contingent business of practice preceded the sense-making functions of this textual analysis. Many of the ideas discussed in previous chapters were latent or partially articulated in the practice and refined through the process of critical reflection. It was important to bring the messy, contingent and unstable dimensions of the work into the text. Gibson-Graham argue that there is a need for a new 'technology' of theorising that 'tolerates "not knowing" and allows for contingent connection and the hiddenness of unfolding' (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxxi). It is from that set of conditions that a 'less predictable and more productive politics' (ibid.: xxxi) could emerge, combining 'specificity, divergence, incoherence [and] surplus possibility' (ibid.: xxxi).

Chapter Seven proposes the diagrammatic as a suitable technology for a different kind of thinking and theorising. In an iteration of the CM/**æ** methodology, the diagrammatic rendering of the work of *LCI* discloses 'raw' forms of sensing and sense-making that were present in the practice. Chapter Seven operates as an interruption to the scholarly language of the text, asserting the value of different knowledge-making systems, and keeping a space open for what we do not yet know how to know (Rogoff, 2018).

Chapter Seven: Diagrammatics

For the digital version of the thesis, please enable two-page display to view this section. Several of the diagrams are designed as fold-out A3 pages.

List of Diagrams

DIAGRAM 1: *The Laboratory of Common Interest* (1).

DIAGRAM 2: *Material-discursive conditions of Public/~~Public~~.*

DIAGRAM 3: *Between sense and sense* (1).

DIAGRAM 4: *Between sense and sense* (2).

DIAGRAM 5: *Aesthetic action – #13: Decolonising Education.*

DIAGRAM 6: *Aesthetic action – #4: A Visual History of Protest and Struggle.*

DIAGRAM 7: *The Laboratory of Common Interest* (2).

DIAGRAM 8: *Flowchart: Commonist Aesthetics.*

DIAGRAM 9: *Flowchart: Agency and Infrastructure.*

CONTRARY TO THE SOCIAL RELATIONS OF ~~PUBLIC~~ — See Diagram 2

THE LABORATORY OF COMMON INTEREST

embodied and collectivised forms of meaning-making

The Laboratory of Common Interest was a durational work with individuals and groups across Limerick city. Drawing on the legacy of the General Workers' Strike against British Militarism of April 1919 known as the Limerick Soviet, the Laboratory explored themes of alternative economies, modes of commonship and the politics of bodies. The centenary of the Limerick Soviet (April 2019) was a focal point for an ad hoc group of workers, activists, artists, men's sheds, food coops and more, who developed actions for this 12 day centenary through a ground-up organising process.

The Laboratory of Common Interest took form as a public event-space for the full 12 days of the centenary. Organised through a complex collaborative process, each day of the laboratory saw events taking place, formally and informally, working as much as possible with the idea of use value, encouraging users of the Laboratory to think about how the project / space might be useful or of mutual benefit. Many of the events were organised by people or groups on their own terms. Discussions, workshops, printmaking, events, open access use of the space, critical making processes and visual presentations took place. The space was inclusive and welcoming, and created opportunities for building matters and occasions of common interest, inviting people to experiment with practices of common interest and exchange.

COMMUNITY OF PRAXIS

Social commons

The beauty of being useful

SOCIAL SPACE

A SCENE OF ASSEMBLAGE AND USE

aesthetic event

PROJECT TIMELINE
July 2018 - September 2019

- CONVERSATION #8
- CONVERSATION #9
- CONVERSATION #10
- PUBLIC CONSULTATION #2
- DIALOGUE #6
- CONVERSATION #11
- CONVERSATION #12
- CONVERSATION #13
- BANNER-MAKING #1
- PUBLIC CONSULTATION #3
- BANNER-MAKING #2
- CONVERSATION #14
- DIALOGUE #7
- CONVERSATION #15
- CONVERSATION #16
- CONVERSATION #17
- DIALOGUE #8
- BANNER-MAKING #3
- CONVERSATION #18
- BANNER-MAKING #4
- EVENT SPACE
- DIALOGUE #9
- FEMINIST ECONOMICS W/SHOP
- DIALOGUE #10

EVENT SPACE
April 15 - 27 2019

- #1: Assembly required (tactical urban fabrications)
- #2: Tinkering with Commonism
- #3: PRINT for PROTEST!
- #4: A Visual History of Protest and Struggle
- #5: Ni neart go cur le cheile; (Alternative) Economies
- #6: Wandern 1 (24 hour action in public space)
- #7: Fold and Rise
- #8: A Political Herstory of our Bodies
- #9: Sip and beyond
- #10: Peer Exchange day
- #11: Lunchtime Jazz
- #12: Political board games
- #13: Utopia/Dystopia of early Bolshevik Revolution
- #14: Decolonising Education
- #15: Feminist Economics, Finance and the Commons for activists
- #16: Eat Your Children - film screening and discussion with makers
- #17: Re-making the City in Common
- #18: The Living Commons; collective design workshop
- Limerick Soviet Shilling Project
- Social Space
- Creative Collaborations Limerick
- Experimental filming
- Pamphlet library

See Diagram 6

See Diagram 5

See Diagram 8

COMMONIST AESTHETICS

Declarative, aspirational proposed modification of the field of common experience.

- Haptic
- Embodied
- choreographic
- Diagrammatic
- Dialogical

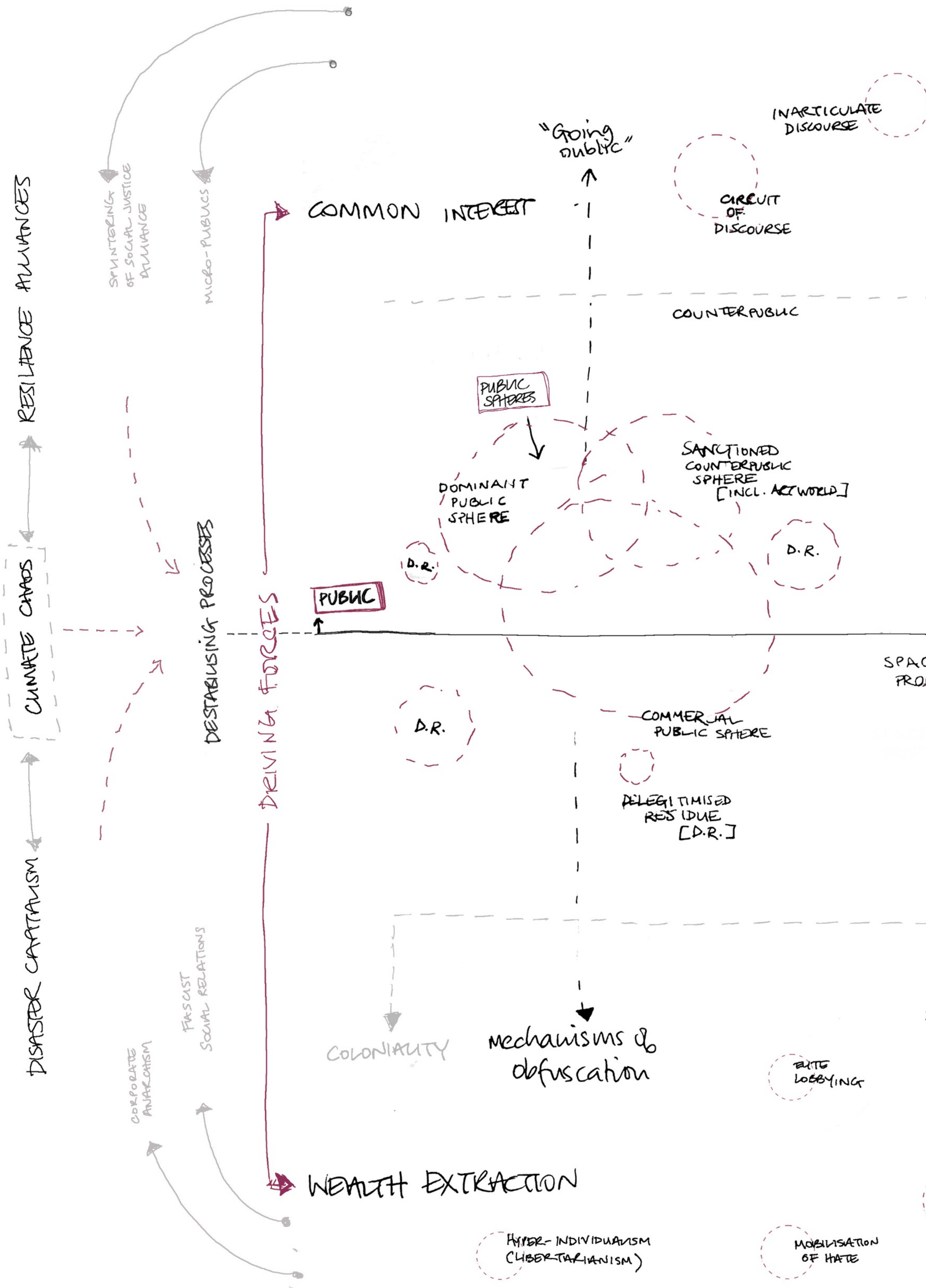
INFRASTRUCTURAL
See Diagram 9

SOLIDARITY ECONOMIES
NOT ARTWORLD ECONOMIES [only]
(gift / barter / goodwill / reputational)

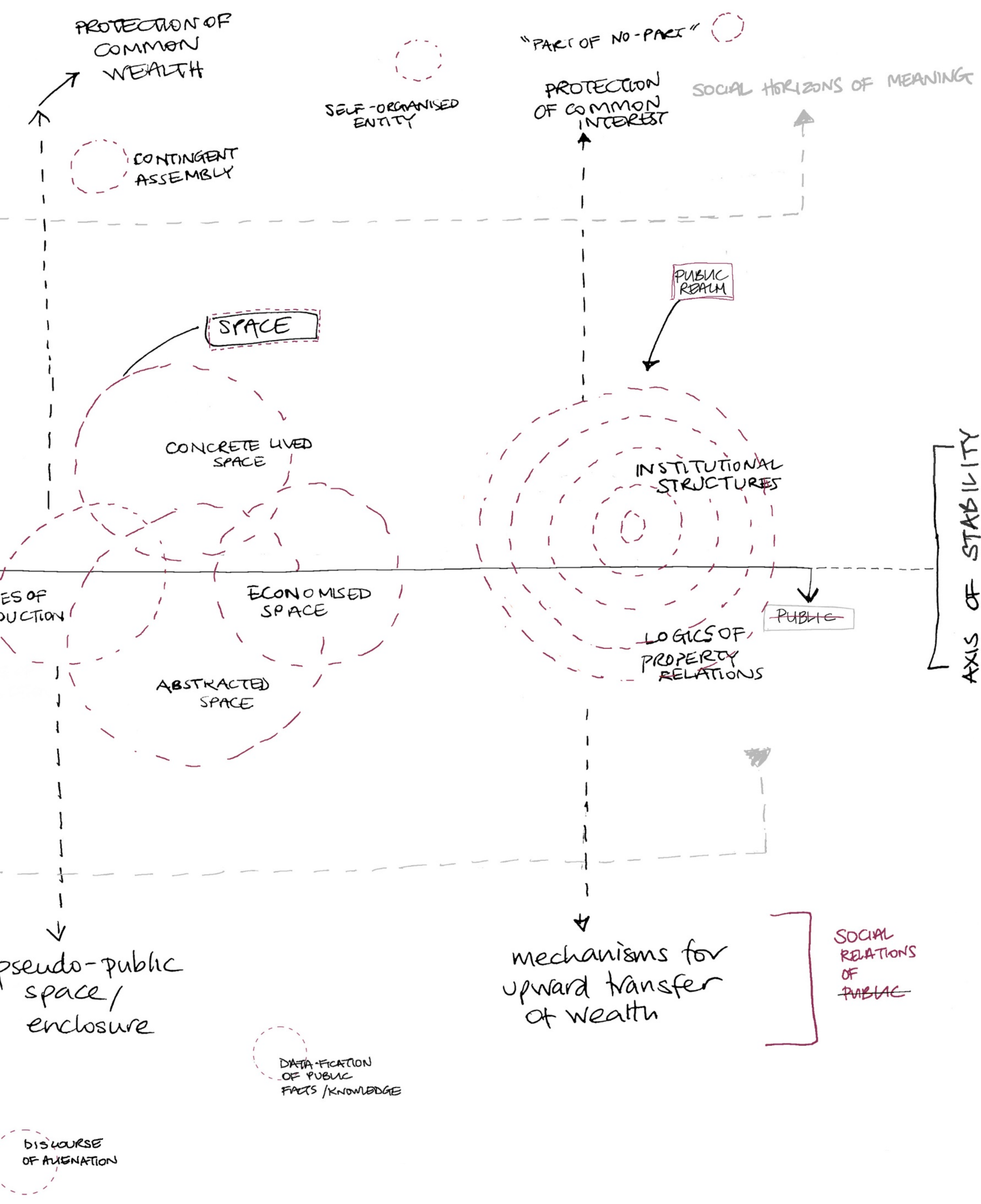
INFRASTRUCTURES

- Physical
- Relational
- Conceptual
- aesthetic

enabling
connective
supporting



"Going public"
INARTICULATE DISCOURSE
CIRCUIT OF DISCOURSE
COMMON INTEREST
COUNTERPUBLIC
RESILIENCE ALLIANCES
SPLINTERING OF SOCIAL JUSTICE ALLIANCE
MICRO-PUBLICS
PUBLIC SPHERES
DOMINANT PUBLIC SPHERE
SANCTIONED COUNTERPUBLIC SPHERE [INCL. ARTWORLD]
D.R.
D.R.
PUBLIC
CLIMATE CHAOS
DESTABILISING PROCESSES
DRIVING FORCES
D.R.
COMMERCIAL PUBLIC SPHERE
DELEGITIMISED RESIDUE [D.R.]
DISASTER CAPITALISM
FASCIST SOCIAL RELATIONS
CORPORATE ANARCHISM
COLONIALITY
mechanisms of obfuscation
ELITE LOBBYING
WEALTH EXTRACTION
HYPER-INDIVIDUALISM (LIBERTARIANISM)
MOBILISATION OF HATE



MATERIAL-DISCURSIVE CONDITIONS OF PUBLIC / PUBLIC

state of suspension
of the status quo

Dissensus —
'a conflict between a
sensory presentation
and a way of making
sense of it' (Rancière)

Aesthetics

Sense

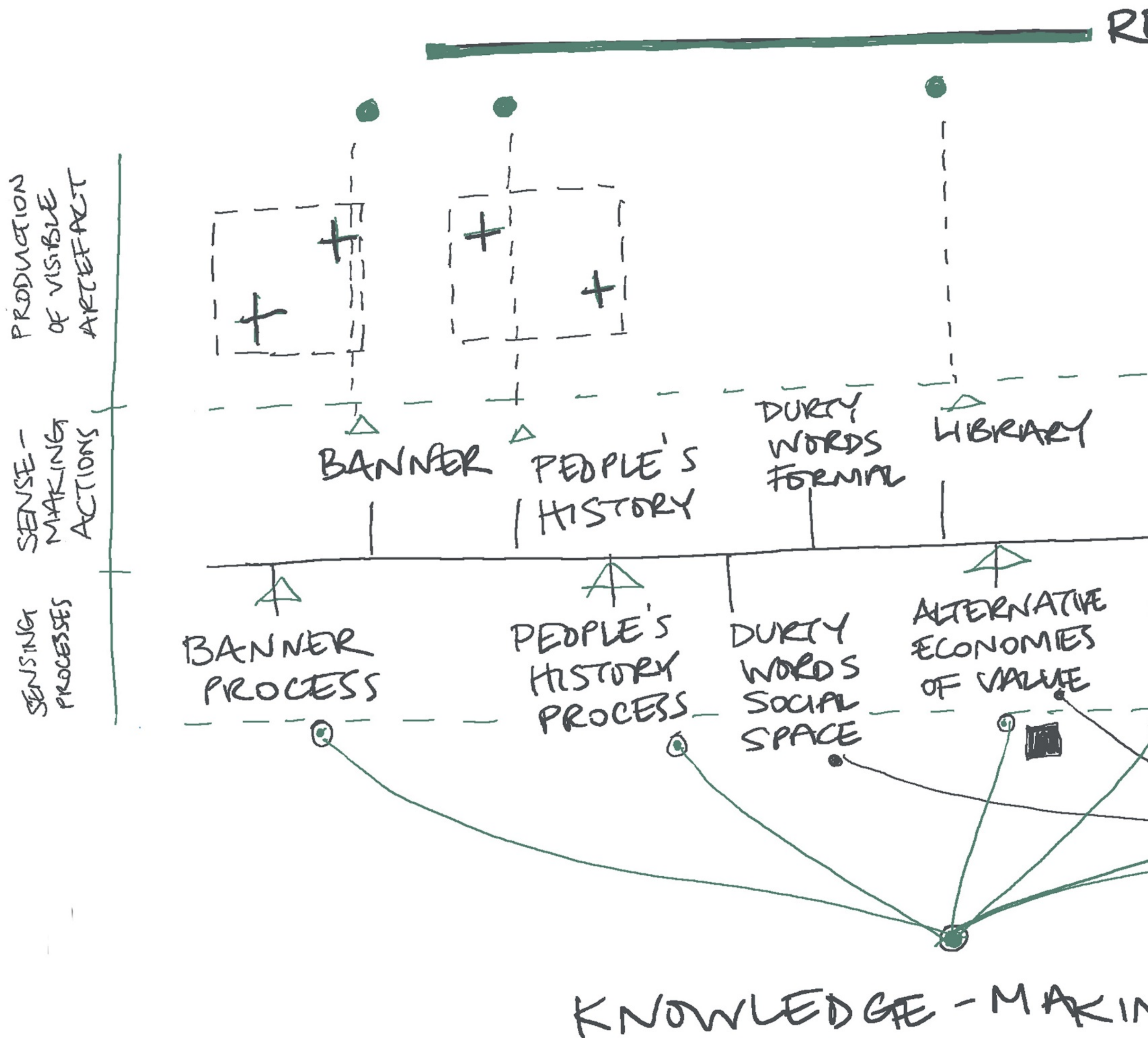
sense-making

Politics

Anaesthetic
saturation

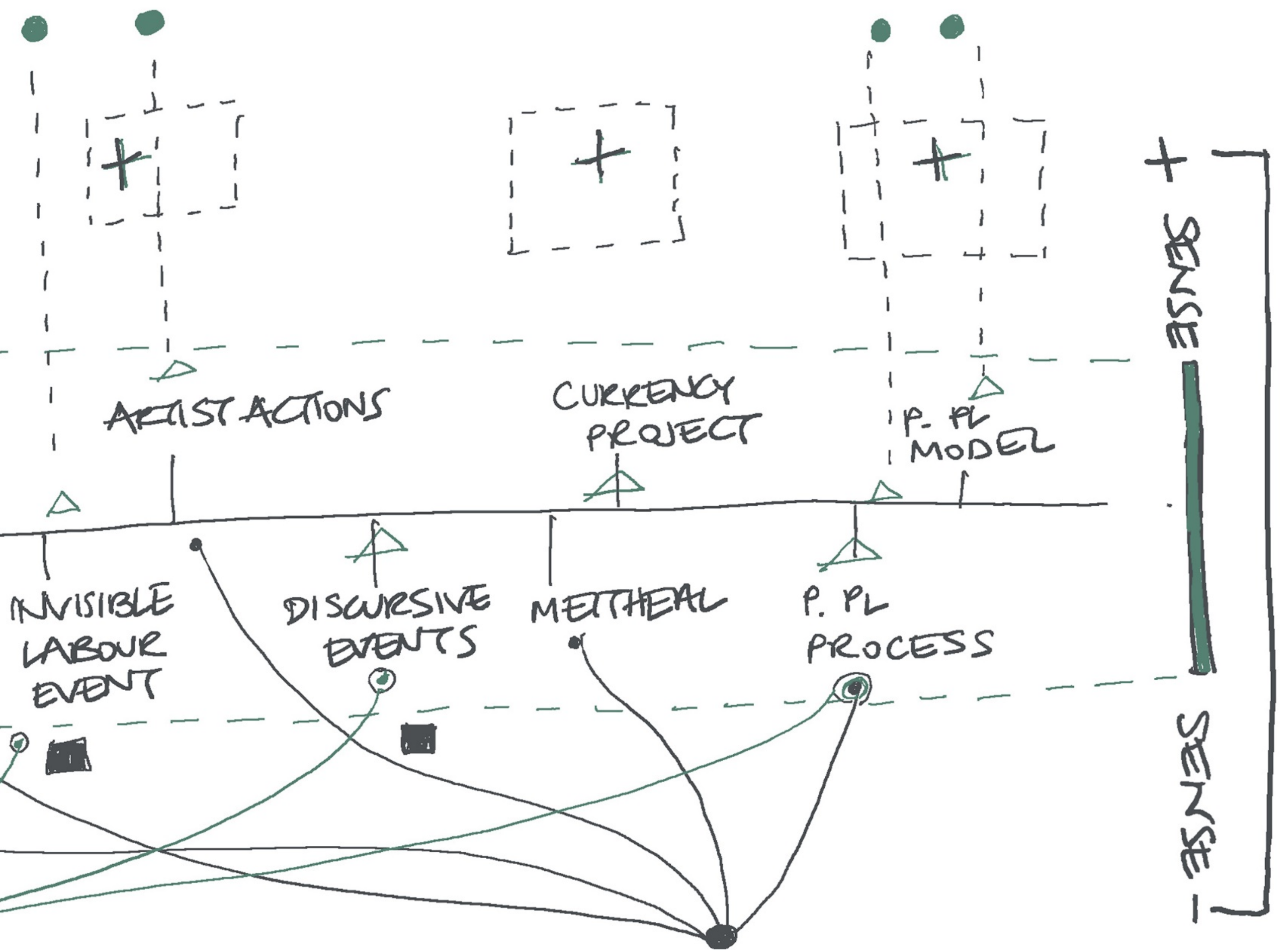
Putting power to work
in the sensory and
nervous systems of
populations (Steyerl)

Basis of a
communist
aesthetics

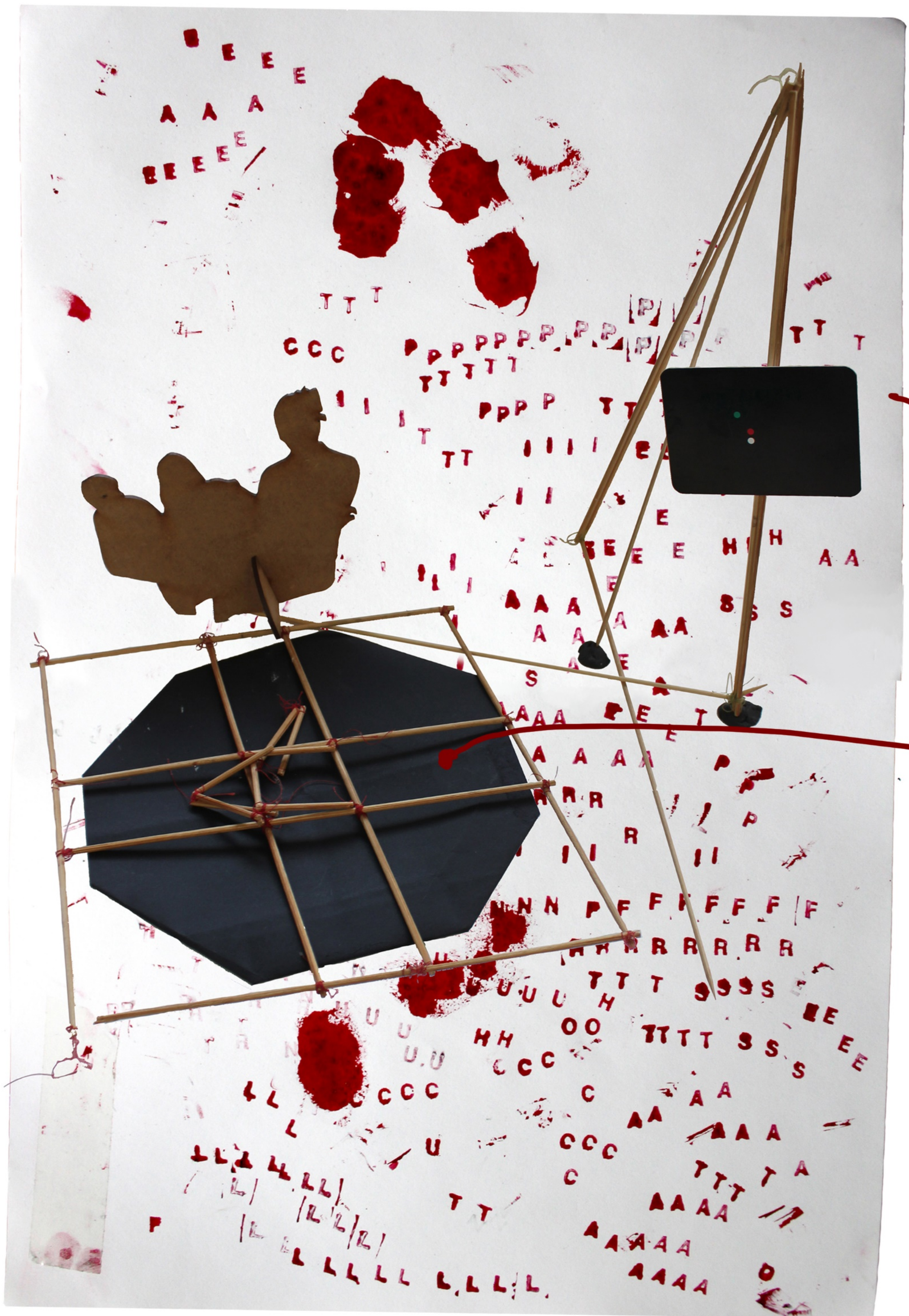


INSTRUMENTS OF INTELLIGIBILITY △

AESTHETIC ACTS — LABORATORY ±



NG + WORLD-MAKING



SENSE-MAKING

SENSE

AESTHETIC WORK – #13: DECOLONISING EDUCATION

COLLECTIVE, EMBODIED ACTION TO MODIFY THE FIELD OF COMMON EXPERIENCE

DIALOGICAL
DIAGRAMMATIC
EVENTIAL
INFRASTRUCTURAL

strategies

NON-DUALISTIC PHENOMENON

MAKING CUTS TO PRODUCE OBJECTS OF ANALYSIS

KNOWLEDGE-MAKING / WORLD-MAKING

existing infrastructures: relational institutional goodwill economy

MODES OF POIESIS

Complexity of what de/colonizing knowledge means in different locations (eg Russia)

De-institutionalized sites of knowledge + learning (eg anarchist projects in Greece)

Theft + appropriation in founding of universities (settler colonialism)

Rhodes Must Fall

Community Engagement in HE ..... problem of depoliticization, instrumentalized

REFUGEES – REFUGEES

localized museum

language of authority

language = richness

ALTERNATIVE ECONOMY OF SILENT UNIVERSITY

ACCESS

Anyone who wants to enroll.

Donation / Charity not good idea

WE

THEM

TECHNOLOGY

language as a precondition

ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT

Try to fit into existing education system

Why introduce a need to ?

COLONIAL MENTALITY

THIRD LEVEL HAS BEEN COLONISED BY THE MANAGERIAL MIDDLE MAN

RESPONSIBILITY EXCHANGE

FULL ACCESS TO WEBSITE

SUSTAINABLE

OPEN – SILENT – SMALL

SKILLS + TIME OFFERED

BUDGET RESTRICTIONS

TRANSFERRING KNOWLEDGE

SOLIDARITY
RE-THINKING
RADICAL PEDAGOGY

Airneán

LGBTQ language of academy + research -> 'western', 'colonized'

Legendary activists and labour organisers, Mary O'Donnell and Joe Harrington, Co-founders and editors of The Bottom Dog, a worker's paper from the 1970's/80's in Limerick and beyond. In the photo they are speaking about their activism surrounded by Joe's extraordinary archive of protest posters from the 1970's/80's/90's, related to issues local, national and international. Mary was also a member of the organising committee for the Limerick Soviet Centenary (April 15th – 27th 2019).

TO CONTEST DOMINANT SOCIAL RELATIONS

THE BOTTOM DOG

Friday Aug 6th Vol 3 No 70 '76

5p

"FOR OUR DEMANDS MOST MODERATE ARE --- WE ONLY WANT THE EARTH" (JAMES CONNOLLY)

THE WORKING CLASS PAPER OF NORTH MUNSTER

There is no repression or police brutality

I must recall the Dail. I need more ammunition

Offences against the state act.

Common law act.

Criminal justice act.

THE BOTTOM DOG

5 PENCE

Vol 3 No 60 Fri 19th March '76

A PAPER FOR NORTH MUNSTER WORKERS

"FOR OUR DEMANDS MOST MODERATE ARE --- WE ONLY WANT THE EARTH."

PUBLIC MEETING

PAY FREEZE

SATURDAY APRIL 3RD

FULL DETAILS SOON

BIN MEN WORK TO RULE OK

THE BOTTOM DOG

5 PENCE

A PAPER FOR NORTH MUNSTER WORKERS

GOLDEN VALE

No Cream for the Workers

THE BOTTOM DOG

THE STRIKE AT

THE BOTTOM DOG

5 PENCE

Vol. 3 No. 53 Fri. Dec. 5th

A PAPER FOR NORTH MUNSTER WORKERS

"FOR OUR DEMANDS MOST MODERATE ARE --- WE ONLY WANT THE EARTH."

WE DEFEND THE RIGHT TO WORK

EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS BLEAK - BUT GREAT POTENTIAL

EXCLUSIVE

CALLINS

THE COPS' ROLE

INSIDE

THE BOTTOM DOG

MORE REDUNDAN AT S.P.S

INCOMES FREEZE FOR WHOM?

THE BOTTOM DOG

5 PENCE

Vol. 3 No. 50 Fri. Oct 24 '75

A PAPER FOR NORTH MUNSTER WORKERS

"FOR OUR DEMANDS MOST MODERATE ARE --- WE ONLY WANT THE EARTH."

THE FERENKA CASE

The Unions Reaction....

Inside Equal Pay. Callins. Ranks. Poverty.

#4: A VISUAL HISTORY OF PROTEST AND STRUGGLE

The "we" and the "world" amongst us – see Flowchart (Diagram 9)

THE LABORATORY OF COMMON INTEREST
A MATERIAL-DISCURSIVE PHENOMENON

THE 'UNIT OF ANALYSIS' (Bohr, via Barad, 1998)

NON-DUALISTIC TOTALITY COMPOSED OF ONTOLOGICALLY INSEPARABLE COMPONENTS (BARAD, 2003)

OBJECTS ARE PRODUCED THROUGH DEMARCATIONS AND EXCLUSIONS DESCRIBED AS 'CUTS' (Barad)

CONTINGENT

ARTIFICIAL DISTINCTION

WHAT WERE ITS DISCOURSES?

aesthetics and politics
social production of space
discourses of commoning
feminist economics
the politics of bodies
the social functions of art

PRE-EXISTING ENTITY

WHAT WERE ITS MATERIALITIES?

spatial arrangements (city/site)
bodies in space / embodied actions
surfaces for gathering notes and diagrams
choreographic objects
blackboards/ chalk
printed matter
banner
sourdough
chai tea
steel pipes and wooden discs
pamphlets
printmaking equipment and prints
posters and archival materials
board games
scripts
a bean bag
tea and coffee making
projector
computer
audio equipment

WHAT DEGREE OF AGENCY WAS GENERATED?

FLOWCHART (DIAGRAM 8)

WHAT WERE ITS INTRA-ACTIONS?

INTERSECTING ~~overlapping~~ fields of meaning-making
embodied encounters with local dynamics
institutional frictions
~~knowledges and counter-knowledges~~
space-time configurations
~~a temporary alternative currency circulating in the city~~
• DIFFERENT WAYS OF PRODUCING KNOWLEDGE
• CREATING CIRCUITS FOR THE DISTRIBUTION OF IDEAS & OBJECTS

MUTUAL CONSTITUTION OF ENTANGLED AGENCIES

always emergent

WHAT WAS THE WORK?

MANAGING THE PRODUCTIVE TENSION

aesthetic events

ASSEMBLAGES OF DISPARATE ELEMENTS AND ACTIONS TO ENGENDER A STATE OF SUSPENSION OF HABITUAL SOCIAL RELATIONS

critical mapping

ORDERING PRINCIPLE
SITUATING
CONTEXTUALISING
CONNECTING

real-time composition

LIVE
EMERGENT
PERFORMATIVE
PHENOMENOLOGICAL
[WHAT IS 'TO-HAND']
RELATIONAL
PROCESSUAL
CHOREOGRAPHIC

TO GENERATE POSITIONS FROM WHICH TO CONTEST THE ECONOMISATION OF SPACE

TO TEST THE VALUE OF A 'COMMONIST AESTHETICS'

A MODIFICATION OF THE AESTHETIC ORDER UNDERPINNING THE SOCIAL RELATIONS OF PROPERTY

WHAT WERE ITS PROCESSES?

assembling
framing and unframing
creating infrastructures
fostering exchange
commoning
gifting
managing and negotiating
abstracting (capta)
ordering and displaying
interfacing
critical cartography
aesthetic events
modes of meaning-making

developing infrastructures

• INFRASTRUCTURES FORM SYSTEMS
• THEY OPERATE TO FASHION SENSIBILITIES
• DIFFERENT STYLES OF VISIBILITY
• INFRASTRUCTURES PRODUCE SENSORY EXPERIENCE
• INFRASTRUCTURES ARE TECHNICAL MEANS TO [X]
• AND SYMBOLS OF DESIRE FOR [X]

BRIAN LARKIN, 2018 'PROMISING FORMS: THE POLITICAL AESTHETICS OF INFRASTRUCTURE'

sensing — making sense

INFRASTRUCTURES / INFRA-STRUCTURES

cups
tea and coffee-making
institutional support
precarious labour
unpaid labour
network-building
spacings
reputational economy
space of art
personal relationships
privilege

choreographic objects
diagrammatic surfaces
progrmme
research framework
conceptual framework
privilege

CLOSELY RELATED BUT NOT EQUIVALENT

STRATEGIES

dialogical
diagrammatic
choreographic
evental
infrastructural
conversational
immersion / analytical distance

HOW DID IT MAKE SENSE?

polyphonic dialogue
visual materials
diagramming
assembling
discursive productions
poetics
modes of framing/ unframing

INFRASTRUCTURES HAVE AFFECTIVE AND COGNITIVE AFFECTS

KNOWLE

COMMONIST AESTHETICS

modification

'Dynam
wide va

DECLARATIVE : MANIFESTO

"with performative aspirations to decolonise an actual and social space that has been inhabited by empire, capitalism and land-right power" Lauren Berlant, 2016

THE COMMON

ONTOLOGICAL + LOGICAL CATEGORY

modes of

FORMS OF SOCIAL ORGANISING

The common is not a given; for Hardt, it is "dynamic and artificial, produced through a wide variety of social circuits and encounters". Michael Hardt, 2006

multitude of singularities

assumes + unites

AESTH

THE COMMONS

an idea about infr

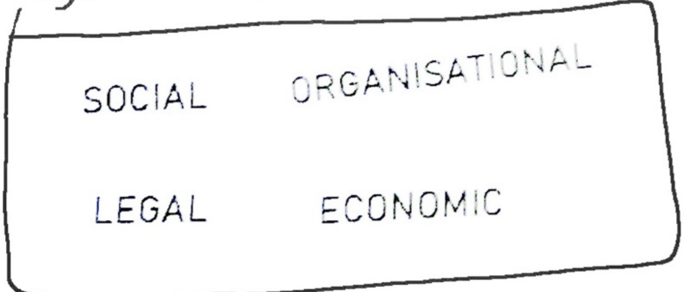
emerging system

affect

"an ecological quantitative category based on inclusion, access and community duties". Ugo Mattei, 2013

and a material-discursive phenomenon

INFR



"Not things but social relations" - Silvia Federici 2016

EDGE-MAKING & WORLD-MAKING

n of the field of common experience

nic and artificial, produced through a
ariety of social avants and encounters'

aesthetics of the real

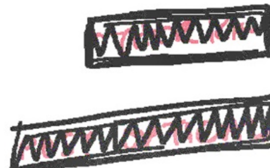
social imaginary

a poetics of relation

f intelligibility

POST-OPTICAL
AESTHETIC

HETICAL



AESTHETIC WORK

diagrammatic

astructure

generate the conditions for the realisation of the commons

HAPTIC
RELATIONAL

choreographic

evental

tive infrastructures

.ASTRUCTURAL'

NECROCAPITALIST EXTRACTIVISM

REPRODUCED THROUGH

SOCIO-POLITICAL STRUCTURES

GENERATE

EMPLOY

DEPEND UPON

FIELD OF COMMON EXPERIENCE

SYSTEMIC VIOLENCE

ANAESTHETIC SATURATION OVERLOAD

WEAK AGENCY

TO CONCEAL

TO RESTRICT

INFRASTRUCTURES

EXIST

BETWEEN THE MATERIAL AND THE POSSIBLE

ORGANISATIONAL MATERIAL RELATIONAL

TO GIVE FORM TO SOCIAL RELATIONS

PSYCHO-SOCIAL + MATERIAL BLOCKAGES

OVERCOME THROUGH

TO CONTRIBUTE TO

STRONG AGENCY

HOW TO ACHIEVE?

CAPACITY

HOW TO ENACT?

VIA

GENERATING CONDITIONS FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF STRUCTURES

TRANSFORM RATHER THAN REPRODUCE STRUCTURES

VIA

NECESSITATES

AS A BASIS FOR

CONTRIBUTE TO

PROFOUND STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION

INTERRUPT HOW

POWER IS OPERATIONALISED

SITE WHERE

MEANS BY WHICH

THE COLLECTIVE PRODUCTION OF INFRASTRUCTURES

SPACE BETWEEN THE MATERIAL AND THE POSSIBLE

CREATES

LEGEND

SUBJECT OF OTHER DIAGRAM

UNSTABLE DYNAMICS

MORE ESTABLISHED LOGIC

Credits

DIAGRAM 1: Coproducers and active participants of #*7: Fold & Rise;* Evgeny Shtorn, Coproducer of #*12: Utopia/Dystopia of early Bolshevik Revolution*; Circle of Friends, Moyross Women's Group, Coproducers of #*8: A Political Herstory of our Bodies*; Coproducers and active participants of #*11: Political board games.*

DIAGRAM #5: Coproducers and active participants of #*13: Decolonising Education;* Coproducers of #*19: Creative Collaborations Limerick*; Gianna Tomasso, table-top diagram.

DIAGRAM #6: Mary O' Donnell and Joe Harrington, coproducers of #*4: A Visual History of Protest and Struggle.* Protest posters from Joe Harrington's archive, authors unknown.

Conclusions

The research problem, *how can a creative practice operate contrary to the destructive, predatory forces of extractive capitalism?,* led to three overlapping areas of inquiry: i) the systemic, socio-spatial violence of enclosure and economisation, anchored in the concrete conditions of Limerick city; ii) the articulation of *aesthetic work* as a critical, collaborative practice with political effects, and iii) an engagement with the poetics and politics of 'commoning'. Those 'themes' are evident throughout the research, which operated in different registers; phenomenological, aesthetical, intellectual and theoretical. The initial research problem was framed as a conceptual inquiry and anchored in a particular set of material conditions in the research question: *how can aesthetic actions, in the form of embodied and collectivised processes of sense-making, work in the socio-spatial conditions of Limerick city to contest the economisation of space?* The aesthetic actions through which the practice engaged with those material conditions were mechanisms of sensing and sense-making, oriented towards the emergence of new ways of making sense of existing conditions. Discoveries arising from those actions were not always apparent as they were emerging; they often needed to run their course without being pre-empted, meaning that they were sometimes out of sync with theoretical framings. Periodic disjunctions between the sensing and sense-making processes of the research necessitated the crafting of conceptual and methodological tools to bridge those gaps.

In artistic work, and other aesthetic practices, the space between sensing and sense-making is usually kept open and in a state of productive tension. The uncertainty, ambiguity and confounding dimensions of artistic and aesthetic work, particularly where that work is situated in proximity to 'the dynamic world of the social' (Beshty, 2016: 13), are part of the

open structure of the work, vital, difficult to articulate, and impossible to ignore. The need to create a coherent research narrative risks misrepresenting the phenomenon of practice. The diagrammatic work of Chapter Seven was a response to that dilemma. It is intended to interrupt the coherence of the textual narrative, placing the impulse to structure in juxtaposition to the raw and often unstable phenomenon of aesthetic action. The diagram, as Drucker argues, is a 'knowledge producing form' rather than a 'formal representation of knowledge' (Drucker, 2013: 84). It speaks to the 'deliberate articulation of . . . unfinished material thinking' (Borgdorff, 2012: 71), that Borgdorff associates with artistic research.

By way of contrast, the thesis has also offered a space for an intellectual engagement with the stakes of the broad research question. The first stake concerned the political heart of my practice, stemming from a dissatisfaction with the ontology of art and its imbrication in the capitalist system, cognisant also of the critique of cultural practices that claim to impact on globalised systems through the staging of a kind of symbolic utopianism (Haiven, 2018). The intellectual inquiry clarified, substantiated and even revealed the operational framework of my practice, which enabled me to articulate aesthetic work as an actual practice, identifiable in a range of social actions and practices in the broader field. Aesthetic work is operational, applicable and yet open and surprising, in the way that aesthetics can be.

Also at stake in the broad research question is the problem of extractive capitalism, a problem so wide and deep and overwhelmingly existential that it is difficult to find any foothold for resistance. An intellectual engagement with the social production of space led to the field of radical geography and to a more profound engagement with the theory of critical mapping, which led in turn to decolonial, anti-extractivist movements engaged in real-time resistance to extractivist forces. Likewise, the shift of focus from public to commons came about through an intellectual analysis of material conditions and a synthesis of theoretical positions. The

intellectual work of the thesis has clarified and focused my practice, outlining a meaningful praxis-oriented approach for future work.

The research makes contributions to practice, methodology and knowledge. The boundaries between practice and methodology are not always clear. Likewise, the kinds of knowledges that are extended by the research are not only academic, but lived, embodied and sometimes activist. The remainder of the chapter is organised under four headings: i) contributions to practice; ii) contributions to methodology; iii) contributions to knowledge and iv) unfinished thinking. The final section will consider gaps and contradictions in the research that may offer productive openings for future approaches and modes of inquiry.

1. Contributions to practice

The contributions to practice are the result of insights that emerged from the interactions between action, theory and reflection, as follows:

- Society has an aesthetic basis, an underpinning aesthetic order, which is subject to modification, in ways that may be hegemonic, or counterhegemonic. This is by no means an original statement: the politics of aesthetics, as articulated by Rancière and others, invokes that aesthetic basis of society. Dockx and Gielen describe this as an 'aesthetics of the real' (ibid.: 54) which determines ways of smelling, looking, tasting, feeling and moving that affirm the reality being performed. When that realisation was connected to the politics of my own practice, in the context of the questions posed by the research, intuitions concerning the active, political dimensions of certain practices and social actions that I had been following or observing took a more definite shape, which led me to articulate the practice of aesthetic work as a critical, collaborative mode of praxis

operating across different fields and disciplines.

Aesthetic work describes a type of practice that is pragmatic, poetic and strategic. It directs critical attention towards the gap between what we sense, and how we make sense of it, to generate new ways of making sense of lived conditions. It operates in the field of common experience, in the terms outlined by Rancière (2004; 2008; 2010), grounded in the material world whilst appealing to the imaginary, through the sensory. It is systematic, to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the kind of social action through which it is enacted. Insofar as possible, the work of aesthetic work is collective and collaborative, and the embodied dispositions of those who do the work is mobilised as a form of praxis, without being fetishised or commodified.

- Actions previously seen as methods in my work, namely critical mapping and aesthetic events, were discovered to be more systematic as forms of sense-making than I had previously recognised. By paying close attention to its modes of operating, I refined that system of sense-making to form a coherent methodology, articulated in this thesis as CM/æ. Critical mapping had long been employed in my practice as a technique and organisational principle, working with methods such as cognitive mapping, social mapping, cartographic action, choreographic action, a cross-mapping of theory/practice and the production of diagrams. Critical mapping has been a valuable tool for paying attention to disjunctive spaces of sense and sense-making.

  However, bearing in mind the 'ontogenetic' character of maps, (Kitchin and Dodge, 2007: 334), other methods have been employed to keep the space of meaning-making open. Those methods included dialogical processes, actions in public space, forms of collective play, the production of props and posters, etc. When I encountered the practice of real-time composition (Klein, 2013: 30), common in choreography and musical improvisation, I

found a way to articulate those more fluid methods and techniques as a paradoxical non-systematic system, gathered under the rubric of aesthetic events.

As a conjoined methodology, CM/æ describes a coherent system of sensing and sense-making that is open and mutable, but also logical and applicable. It supported the organisational structures of the practice-based work whilst keeping a space open for the resonances, strange intensities of meaning, coherence and/or beauty that can emerge through aesthetic events.

- For reasons discussed in Chapters Three and Five, and addressed in the following section, around the midpoint of the research the focus shifted from the social phenomenon of publicness to the project of the Commons. 'The very concept of the public', Berlant argues, 'is being reinvented now, against, with, and from within the nation and capital' (Berlant, 2016: 408) through the world-making project of the Commons. The contemporary commons constitutes an alternative ecosystem of value production, emerging through peer-to-peer forms of production and distribution. It generates models and templates for open cooperativism and solidarity economics (P2P Foundation) and is formed by local systems of managing and protecting shared resources. Furthermore, the Commons builds an alternative future by enacting the types of relations on which that future depends through the practice of commoning. Commoning operates as a form of prefigurative praxis that begins by 'making common cause' (Laermans, 2018: 138), as a basis for collectively negotiating shared values and judgements towards further practices of commoning. Drawing from Laermans, commoning describes a mode of relationality that underpins the material, political composition of a common world. In the terms of this research, commoning is identified as a form of aesthetic work.

Choi *et al.'s* call to imagine a 'commonist aesthetics' (2015) has a prefigurative element in its proposal to engage the embodied sensorium of persons to begin to compose a 'we' and a world-in-common. What structured aesthetic work brings to the project of the Commons is a rigorous attention to the ongoing production and negotiation of meaning and value, emphasising poetics as part of its ecosystem of value production. Reflecting on what a commonist aesthetics is capable of contributing to a process of social transformation is articulated in the following principles:

i. Make use of representational power as a common resource.
ii. Create infrastructures to support a collective politics of sense and sense-making.
iii. Bring different modes of meaning-making into proximity and dialogue.
iv. Make use of the prosthetic value of 'art' to create spaces of polyvalent hybridity.

The last point corresponds to Holmes' account of 'eventwork' (2012), the convergence of distinct disciplinary approaches or ways of operating in the interests of transformative, cross-sectoral action.

2. Contributions to methodology

In this section, the focus is primarily on those aspects of methodology that relate to the academic framing of the research.

- Qualitative research methods supported the APBR, as discussed in Chapter One. The methodology of PAR helped to establish an ethical framework for the socially engaged dimensions of the research. The articulation of appropriate ontological, epistemological and axiological principles was supported initially by Transformative and Postcolonial/Indigenous Research paradigms (Mertens, 2007; Chilisa, 2011), but questions about structure and agency led me to re-examine that paradigm through the lens of

dialectical Critical Realism (Bhaskar, 1978; 1993; 1997). That resulted in a research paradigm with a greater degree of nuance and relevance for this research. The integration of those frameworks is proposed as one of the contributions to methodology.

- ‘Art practice as research’ (APR), according to Sullivan (2010), sits at the intersection of three research traditions – interpretivist, empiricist and critical. The APBR under discussion drew elements from those different traditions to construct its research strategies: empiricist, in the close study of socio-spatial phenomena as a lived experience and material reality; interpretive, in multiple ways, across the entire practice; and critical, not only in terms of a reflexive engagement with the conditions of production of the research but also in the sense described by Sullivan as ‘an incursion [into] existing systems, structures and practices’ (ibid.: 111).

As discussed earlier, the practice was, at times, out of sync with the methodological and theoretical framework. The specificities of artistic/aesthetic work (its performative dimension; its commitment to a space for not-knowing; its critical relationship to representation, including textual representation) generated fault-lines that interpretivist, empiricist and critical research traditions could not resolve. With hindsight, and drawing on Sullivan’s scheme for APR, in Chapter Two I proposed that recognising *the poetic* as a research domain alongside the more traditional approaches, expands the ecosystem of knowledge-making in ways that can accommodate the specificities of artistic research. In the case of this research, a poetic approach to knowledge-making, which places value on the kinds of meanings that emerge through making and acting, led to the articulation of CM/ æ as a coherent and relevant methodology, capable of combining systematic and non-systematic modalities of aesthetic work. While the term CM/ æ is specific to this research,

the argument for an expanded ecosystem of knowledge production may have value for future APBR.

- Finding a balance between retrospective analysis and the translation of temporal, ephemeral aesthetic actions into a textual representation was deeply frustrating at times. Diagrammatic language has been employed to interface between the messy vitality of practice and the sense-making drive of the text, and to demonstrate the confusion that often attends processes of sense-making. Future APBR researchers will continue to face this difficulty and must invent methods to address it; by asserting the value of the diagrammatic as a research language I hope to contribute to thinking on this subject.

3. Contributions to knowledge

The primary area of knowledge to which this research contributes is the material-discursive field described as critical spatial practice, 'an interdisciplinary terrain of spatial theory that has reformulated the ways in which space is understood and practiced' (Rendell, 2006: 1). As discussed in the Introduction, the term was devised by Rendell to describe material-discursive practices concerned with transforming 'the social conditions of the sites into which they intervene' (Rendell, 2016). Hirsch and Meissen have expanded Rendell's theory, describing a 'critical modality of spatial practice' (2012) that encompasses spatially oriented fields including architecture, art, urban studies, urban activism, critical geography and more. The socio-spatial forms of publicness and the Commons are significant areas of inquiry in this field, along with Lefebvre's theories of the social production of space, all of which have been interrogated in this research.

- A close analysis of publicness as a socio-spatial phenomenon uncovered internal, structural conflicts that limited its value as a site from which to contest the logics of extractivism and enclosure. Tracing the historical evolution of publicness as a social modality revealed an unassailable contradiction at the heart of its formation, in the form a set of exclusions and factual inequalities. The supposed horizontality of publicness as a social form is contradicted by a vertical axis of privilege that is an integral part of social systems founded on the principle of property rights.

  The inseparability of publicness from the logics of private property is captured by Federici's assertion that that public space is really another kind of private domain 'owned, managed, controlled, and regulated by and for the state' (Federici, 2019: 96). That domain, she argues, is worth fighting for, because it 'has the resources we need' (Federici, 2019). However, the condition that I had identified as ~~public~~, whilst critically important, did not open onto a viable world-making project contrary to the extractivist paradigm, as I had imagined.

- Through the work of Negt and Kluge (1993 [1972]), the so-called public sphere was recognised as a mechanism of legitimation and de-legitimation, a hierarchical, but nonetheless valuable resource, capable of operating as a site of hegemonic oppression, but also as a site for the aggregation of fragmented political subjectivities, from all sides of the political divide.
- Through the aesthetic action *CS #4* I engaged with the discourse of gentrification (Smith, 2002; Lees, 2012: Slater, 2006). Clarke has argued that the 'root causes' of gentrification are 'commodification of space, polarised power relations and a dominance of vision over sight' (Clarke, 2010: 24). Those 'root causes' were examined in relation to the state-led gentrification process (Slater, 2006) of Limerick Regeneration. The 'dominance of vision over sight' that Clarke associates with gentrification (Clarke, 2010: 24) was apparent in the

highly resourced vision documents generated through urban planning in Limerick city, 'which shape the social imaginary of the city (the set of values, institutions, laws, and symbols through which people imagine the social totality)' (Woods, 2020a: 133). Those insights were explored in 'Visualising the contrary logics of regeneration through collaborative arts practice' (Woods, 2020a), a chapter in *Gentrification Around the World, Volume 1: Gentrifiers and the Displaced,* (Krase and De Sena, 2020), in the 'Palgrave Studies in Urban Anthropology' series.

- Arising from that exploration, I identified a process that I came to describe as *the economisation of space,* a hegemonic process of meaning-making that frames urban space through the totalising logic of 'the Economy', in such a way that local inhabitants can be drawn into a performative idea of what the city means and who it is for. I traced the logics of that process through the extensive, though often redundant, policy and vision documents produced by Limerick City and County Council and their agents, and came to the conclusion that the sheer volume of those expensive vision documents was to embed the totaling logic of the Economy in the social imaginary of the city.
- Another area of knowledge to which the research has contributed is the field referred to variously as social practice, socially-engaged practice, socially engaged-art or other variations on that theme. The historical ontology that I constructed for the practice, represented as a genealogical diagram in Chapter Five (fig. 5.1), has been, and continues to be, employed as a pedagogical tool in postgraduate situations. Its value lies primarily in the identification of critical impulses feeding into the field of practice, mapping the relations and family resemblances between those impulses as they have manifested in various social actions and practices.

4. Unfinished Thinking

The unruly nature of artistic practice generates its own momentum, opening complex realities onto one another in ways that are difficult to systematise. Borgdorff argues that 'artistic research is the deliberate articulation of . . . unfinished material thinking' (2012: 71). The work of the written thesis has been partly a work of discovery, making connections between elements to understand how they worked, and to grasp their implications, but many things remained unfinished, leading to inconsistencies. These are presented with a view to opening avenues for further consideration.

- Contradictions inherent in the attempt to explore 'meaningful praxis' in the artificial, constructed situation of APBR did not go unrecognised. It was most apparent in the work of *LCI,* which was premised on the idea of 'making common cause' with others as a basis for more complex future practices of commoning. Its 'nudging' of sensibility (Connolly, 2002, in Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxviii), is relevant and meaningful within the context of prefigurative praxis. However, the relatively predetermined temporal frame of the research, and that fact that it was resourced by an educational institution and managed by this researcher limited its value as an experiment in commoning. Those limitations were considered in Chapter Six, drawing a number of conclusions, including the need to align aesthetic work with other, self-directed activist practices, in the manner of 'eventwork' (Holmes, 2012), as an effective way to contribute to transformative, social action.
- Chapter Six also discussed a problem common in socially engaged cultural work, namely making space for friction. The emphasis on mutualism and on constructing a common resource through the work of *LCI* may have created the condition that Berlant referred to as 'a confirming affective surplus' (ibid.: 395). The work lacked a clear strategy to foreground 'incompatible discourses that [came] into friction' (Bishop, 2016). Friction and strangeness

are difficult to manage, but they are vital to maintain productive tensions between the political and the aesthetic. There is scope to explore how non-violent communication methods could impact on that problematic.

- The proposal that the poetic constitutes a valid and rigorous model of knowledge-making, alongside the empirical/interpretive/critical triad, requires further research. It is unlikely to be accepted by the academy as a stand-alone research technique, and therefore its position within the nexus of research methodologies must be critically interrogated. Rogoff's insistence on 'creative practices of knowledge' (Rogoff, 2015) as a more productive term than APBR, suggests that the poetic, as a rigorous form of knowledge-making, will have an established position in the epistemological landscape at some point in the future.
- One of the glaring inconsistencies in this research lies in the situation of the research relative to the position of knowledge-making as a site of intense political struggle. The research paradigm presented in Table 1.1 asserts that knowledge is neither the production nor the property of a single individual, but a relational matter, emerging from modes of collective meaning-making. I would add here that I have a commitment to knowledge as a common resource, and I support demands by feminist, indigenous, crip, migrant and queer activists for the right to shape norms regarding what constitutes valid and valuable knowledge, and to determine how the value extracted from those knowledges is distributed.

A residency in 2019 at the Universidad de las Artes [UArtes] in Guayaquil, Ecuador,[67] introduced me to decolonial scholarship and the broader project of decoloniality: to undo, disobey and delink from the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018: 4),

[67] This residency was part of ReaLsMs (Real Smart Cities), a 3 year Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action funded research project conducted under the auspices of the EU's RISE programme (Research and Innovation Staff Exchange). The overarching objective of the ReaLsMS is to develop and implement a critical perspective on the Smart City and Smart City discourses through critical humanities research and innovation. The project was a collaboration between GradCAM; School of Creative Arts; Computer Science and Architecture at the Technological University of Dublin, along with several international partners. http://realsms.eu/

specifically its effects on epistemological, aesthetical and cultural formations, and to construct 'paths and praxis toward an otherwise of thinking, sensing, believing, doing, and living' (ibid.: 4). However, aligning my practice with knowledge activism only highlighted the contradiction of trying to challenge extractivism and enclosure through the apparatus of the neoliberal university, which is so deeply enmeshed in the paradigm of extractivism.

On the other hand, a mass exodus from the colonised structures of the academy is not a way to safeguard the production of critical thought; those structures are part of the knowledge commons and are worth fighting for. As Federici has said, the public realm must be defended because it 'has the resources we need' (Federici, 2019), but the struggle should 'open the way to a transformation from the public to the commons' (ibid.). The problematic of epistemological power hovered at the edges of this research, but there was neither the space nor the time to engage with it in a substantial way. Every iteration of APBR is implicated in this complicated politics of knowledge-making, something that critical researchers must continue to navigate with varying degrees of concern.

No research project is entirely coherent, successful or unproblematic; there is always unfinished thinking. In practice-based research, flaws and possibilities sit cheek-by-jowl. The points of friction and tension that arise when the world 'pushes back' against abstract theories and models are often the most promising sites for future work. In setting out to address the question, *how can a creative practice operate contrary to the destructive, predatory forces of extractive capitalism?*, the research has delved into these contradictions and points of friction, and arrived at a set of conclusions that open onto further exploration.

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Appendix I

The Laboratory of Common Interest, Programme of Events
15th April–27th April 2019.

#1: Assembly required (tactical urban fabrications)
Monday 15th April, 2.00 pm – 4.00 pm.

Workshop with artist Mike Cleary, the purpose of which is to question how access and utilisation of public and private spaces is facilitated or restricted. Working through a collective design process, participants will generate poetic, performative objects that activate a space (or spaces) in the city.

#2: Tinkering with Commonism
Tuesday 16th April, 11.00 am – 3.00 pm.

Discussion led by Ed Carroll. Creating the possiblity for a critical response to a set of actions framed and focused on community culture.

#3: PRINT for PROTEST!
Wednesday 17th April, 10.30 am – 4.30 pm.

A D.I.Y. Printmaking Workshop with Kate O'Shea and Aoife Barrett, Print Van Go on April 17th at the FabLab, Rutland Street, Limerick. Join us for a discussion and workshop on the idea of sharing skills and knowledge around using D.I.Y. printmaking to support and empower public actions.

Taking inspiration from the incredible archive of self-designed posters from campaigns in the 70's and 80's, come and explore low-fi printmaking techniques ideal for creating hand-printed

posters and material while on-the-go! Throughout the day you will have the opportunity to use these techniques to create your very own printed material for protest, everything from posters and stickers to banners and broadside ballads.

In the afternoon we will be co-designing a kit for D.I.Y. printmaking and protest. There will be a group discussion where you can share with us your preferred materials, tools and techniques and what you would like to see in a D.I.Y. print kit. We will also be joined by Ger Ryan from St. Mary's Men's Shed for a lunch time talk about the ideas behind the Men's Shed.

#4: A Visual History of Protest and Struggle
Wednesday 18th April, 5.00 pm – 6.00 pm

Against the backdrop of Joe Harrington's extraordinary archive of protest posters from the 1970's and 80's relating to local and international struggles, legendary activists Mary O' Donnell and Joe Harrington, who revived the Bottom Dog worker's publication in Limerick in the 1970's/80's, will discuss their involvement with various struggles over time.

#5: Ní neart go cur le chéile; (Alternative) Economies
Thursday 18th April, 9.30 am – 12.30 pm.

Drop-in session with Bernardine Carroll and Ciaran Nash to map alternative economies in Limerick city. Linked to the *Limerick Soviet Shilling Project.*

#6: Wandern 1 (24 hour action in public space)
Thursday 18th April, 10.00 am – Friday 19th April, 10.00 am.

To coincide with *The Laboratory of Common Interest*, artist Baerbel Schlueter is carrying out an independent action in public space. Titled 'Wandern 1', this action takes the form of

adurational walk in Limerick where she will explore and experiment within the public space of the City. She aims to make a subtle spectacle of herself which aims to invite a public response. The project investigates the notion of 'hypersolitude', a concept described by feminist geographer Hille Koskella as 'the idea that a woman can be radically solitary in public space – not dismissing her vulnerability but embracing it and making it a source of power.' The work will be guided by specific but flexible rules which she has developed through her long term walking based practice 'artwalz' where she embarks on durational walks engaging with the public. Her aim is to locate art and art making outside of the confines of an institution creating a social sculpture by interrupting people's day.

Baerbel's action will conclude with her arrival into *The Laboratory of Common Interest* at 10.00 am on Friday 19th April. She will occupy the Laboratory in the days that follow, unfolding the results of the Wandern1 action.

#7: Fold and Rise
Friday 19th April, 10.30 am – 1.00 pm.

Maeve Collins and Julie Griffiths will bring their travelling participatory workshop which takes breadmaking as a trope for the traditional work of women, utilising it as both metaphor and methodology in an expanding exploration of culture, identity, time and labour. They will be joined by sociologist Pauline Conroy, who will will speak about the possible meanings of Commonwealth referring to the early and idealistic attempt at a cooperative at Ralahine in County Clare. Care work can be carried out individually or in common, a theme addressed by Alexandra Kollontai in the early Soviet Union. Today care work is part of an international ‘chain’ of care workers world-wide.

#8: A Political Herstory of our Bodies

Friday 19th April, 2.00 – 3.00 pm

The Circle of Friends, Moyross women's group will perform a play which they have written about the story of Irish women and their bodies since the election of the first woman to parliament. They will do this against the backdrop of a banner that they have been making over the last number of months, A Political Herstory of our Bodies.

#9: Sip and beyond

Friday 19th April, 3.00 pm – 4.00 pm.

Pavithra Kannan will host this Tea Talk where hot Indian Chai will be served and conversations around Tea labour and Labour of Women in the production of Tea will be discussed and intends to create a space for participants to share their own stories revolving around Tea.

#10: Peer Exchange day

Saturday 20th April, all day.

Drop-in session, opportunity to get and to give feedback on work or ideas in progress.

#11: Political board games

Sunday 21st April, all day.

Face-off between *Class Struggle*, the classic board game from the 1970's, designed to teach students about Marxism and *Co-opoly*, a game where everyone wins or everyone loses.

Jazz at lunchtime.

#12: Utopia/Dystopia of early Bolshevik Revolution

Monday 22nd April, Lenin's Birthday.

All day: "Revolutions and Sex. What happened next" Installation exploring the brief period of sexual liberation that followed the Bolshevik revolution, by trans* artist Nat Schastnev(a).

1.00 pm – 2.30 pm; ‘'The Wings of Eros': Soviet Sexual Revolution at the Beginning of the Bolshevik Rule, Presentation by Alexander Kondakov.

3.00 pm- 4.30 pm; The first enemies of young Soviet State or birth of Soviet Concentration Camp. Presentation by Evgeny Shtorn, a civil society activist, organiser and LGBT researcher from Russia.

#13: Decolonising Education

Tuesday 23rd April, 10.00 am – 1.00 pm.

Chaired by Dr. Anne Mulhall from UCD, the purpose of this session is to consider the contested position of *Akademia* as sanctuary, in light of the non-recognition of the educational background of people seeking international protection. Activists and academics will be joined (via skype) by the founder of Silent University, Ahmet Öğüt.

#14: Feminist Economics, Finance and the Commons for activists

Wednesday 24th April, 10.30 am– 4.00 pm.

This activist workshop, led by Dr. Conor McCabe, author of *Money* (2018), will introduce participants to the arguments and ideas of writers such as Silvia Federici, Maria Mies, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Nancy Fraser, Selma James, and Feminist Fightback, and the

application of those ideas to an Irish context in terms of combating the new.00 enclosures of financialisation.

#15: Eat Your Children
Wednesday 24th April, 6.00 pm – 9.00 pm.

Made in response to the austerity crisis Eat Your Children examines whether Ireland today is too inactive when it comes to political protest. The film takes the form of a road-trip in which the film-makers meet activists, economists, sociologists to discuss this question. The film screening will be followed by a discussion with co-directors Treasa O Brien and Mary Jane O' Leary, in conversation with activist Mark Garavan.

#16: Re-making the City in Common
Friday April 26th, 1.30 pm – 4.30 pm.

Workshop with Torange Khonsari of public works and director of the MA Design for Cultural Commons and London Metropolitan University.

#17: The Living Commons; collective design workshop
Saturday 27th April, 10 am – 1.00 pm.

#18: Limerick Soviet Shilling Project
15th–27th April, 13 days.

Ciaran Nash, Victoria Brunetta and Free*Space, in collaboration with Limerick Soviet100 and the Urban Co-op, have devised the Limerick Soviet Shilling project, an alternative system of exchange that will operate during the centenary, using specially commissioned artworks in the

form of 1, 5, and 10 shilling notes. Six artists were commissioned to produce original artworks for the new notes: Kerry Guinan, Olivia Furey, Ciaran Nash, Jim Furlong, Tom Prendergast, James Kearney. The system of exchange will function for the 12 days of the centenary, and can be used in participating businesses.

#19: Creative Collaborations Limerick
15th–27th April, 13 days.

CCL will act as the interlocutors of *The Laboratory of Common Interest*, occupying the laboratory with a movable creative station. CCL will be present on the periphery of events but also active within events, responding to what is happening/being discussed in numerous ways – by way of immediate creative response, dissemination, textual, digital, vocal etc. by formally logging the event, writing a code in response to discussion, allowing the event to influence how they move their body, etc. They will be 'part of', 'within' and 'attending' the Laboratory all at once.

#20: Social Space
15th–27th April, 13 days.

Artist, activist, collaborator Kate O' Shea will sustain the social heart of the Laboratory project, creating a platform for solidarity and dialogue on which to enact alternatives to the social relations of capital.

Appendix II

Between sense and sense: a collective reflection on the Laboratory of Common Interest

Transcript of Free*Space dialogue #9: June 2019

A roundtable discussion with invited participants, all of whom participated in *The Laboratory of Common Interest* as co-producers and/or as participants.

FW; Artist, educator, PhD researcher/ Core producer: The Laboratory of Common Interest durational work, social structures and event-space/ Participant in several events.

KO'S: Artist / Core producer The Laboratory of Common Interest, social and event-space; Durty Words event; Print for Protest!/ Participant in several events.

GT: Artist and researcher / Core producer: Creative Collaborations Limerick research station/ Participant in three events

JG: Artist / Core producer: Fold and Rise workshop / Participant in two events.

MC: Artist/ Core producer: Fold and Rise workshop/ Participant in three events.

BS: Artist and social worker/ Core producer: Wandern: 24 hours in public space/ Participant in two events.

GD: Artist and researcher/ Participant in two events.

FW: Inviting you to come together like this, travelling from near and far, and giving up hours of your time, I am always trying to find a way for that to be mutually beneficial. So, the way that I have imagined this session is that I am using materials and ideas generated from the Laboratory events to shape a conversation about whether any kind of resource was produced that could be shared and collectively managed.

I envisage this session as operating within a space between sensing and making sense. For that reason, I want this conversation to be as material as it is discursive and I have gathered together different kinds materials and different possibilities for making or marking. What I would like to ask you to do is to have your hands be very alive and active in the conversation,

so that your skin contact with the materials of the world adds a layer of sensation to the 'making sense' that emerges through speaking.

There is some sense in which the hands are manifesting a choreography; so I am filming at the level of the hands, with a view to producing a video essay based on the conversation.

Having reflected on the work of the Laboratory event-space myself in the weeks that followed, I found that certain questions kept recurring for me. I have organised those as a set of polarities which I propose to use in order to prompt conversation, like north and south poles they generate a continuum its hard to say where one ends or the other begins.

My proposition to you is to respond by making, or marking or speaking or writing, things can be made and unmade, passed around, reworked, so that no thing is precious in itself. The table around which you are sitting is covered with various materials, some of which are residues from the Laboratory in the form of images and various tactile materials. The invitation is to make while we are talking, to emphasise the ways in which thought takes shape through concepts and through forms.

Polarity #1: Residue and potential

GT: For me always meeting new people always leaves a residue, because we are all matter, and effectively if we meet someone else or we are in the same space with anyone else, regraldess of at the time whether we think they are having any impact on us, or we are even interested, the meetings of that energy always leaves some kind of residue, so I am always mindful to think about of well I didn't get anything from that, or I did get something from that, but I suppose reflection - and to not underestimate the residue that a meeting can have

on your own psyche. Especially Ed Carroll for the Laboratory, halfway through I realised that his work is very important.

FW: I'd love to know more about that, why you think his work is important

GT: His looking at things in such a nuanced way, his holding important some very small things, a lot of in the artworld we look for grand narratives, to seem – perhaps it's the community art thing – that they hold to some very small nuance works or interrogations of situations or people – I don't think I had appreciated that before his talk, so I found the residue of his particular work – that was one residue that was left with me, having more of an interest in that community ethic and community work, which of course that's what the Laboratory was all about

BS: When you bring that up, we all get little snippets of what went on, I was only there part of the time, I haven't heard about any concepts because I was away for some of the time, so the residue is very subjective. I find as well, you also come with your own inner landscape to whatever you do as well, so when you come in and mingle you meet different life scenarios, so it always leaves something

GT: It doesn't have to always be that grand narrative or that huge importance, but when you are reflecting on stuff – I am sure that you must have that yourself with your own work, when you are going out and having interactions, working on the nuances of that as well, the residue of those interactions . . .

BS: Yeah there was great intensity about that when I was doing the 24 hour action, and I have yet to deal with all the residue, not only the collection of some materials, and some impressions, but to reflect on it and give it enough thought after, there is great learning in this intensity of work, you are in a different zone, you can dissect it afterwards – in terms of

linking in with the Laboratory, it was a revelation about this coming together of people, it was so enriching, there was a safety aspect about coming together with people who have an interest in discussions and exploring things, and being interested in different forms of thinking and exchange, probably common to all people involved and also to the visitors there was this curiosity about coming in and being allowed to have a free thinking space, that was something that resonated with me.

MC: I felt that the residue of commoning when I was thinking about the value of it, that was a felt thing, throughout the Laboratory this structure of commoning through all the different workshops, or different people's actions of coming and going, felt structural, and the two of them together – because it's such a value and it's underlying and in between everything, the values of care, and carework, and how to have that be a structure and make it visible with people, and I really valued the solidarity of it, with all of the time that goes into making structures, and the thought and reflection behind it.

On our day, when were talking about women's movements, when the Moyross women did their 100 years of women's movement, a big question was how do you keep that going? There are times when that is jaded, and other times of momentum, seeing the rhythms between the sense of it and the wanting it and the desire for it, and the values, and then how to structurally do it was really interesting.

GT: It wasn't all positive! I can only speak for the events that I was participating in, the days that I was there, I did notice that some people came in – having the capacity of sharing and commoning is a learned capacity, and not everyone has that . . . . there was one instance where there was a person with their own agenda, and they just kept saying their own thing over and over again, and it just overtook the environment. That residue was the most residue that we took from that event, so one person bringing their own issue can have a massive

effect on . . . anything where it becomes a shared environment, one person can have a massive effect. Commoning might have to be taught before it can be enacted.

JG: but is that not where the understanding comes, in the oppositional, you see yourself in those moments, you understand your position, when somebody is in an opposing position, when everybody is in the same position as you its impossible to see yourself, as you actually are, so its only in explaining to yourself in why you think this person is wrong, or misinterpreting that you begin to understand your own position

GT: In this example it was about how a person engaged with the space at the time, it wasn't even up for debate . . . Dissensus in having conversations can be great, but also I think I actually got something from that to be a bit more aware of myself

JG: I have been that oppositional person, to my eternal shame [laughter], it was an accident, I didn't mean to do it, but I felt that I needed to rail against circumstances in which I found myself. But nobody railed back against me, which felt frustrating, why is nobody else frustrated by this, it felt very saccharine, because nobody was engaging with me saying why this was good or not . . . it felt very flimsy that I could just blow on it and it went away, I didn't go away feeling good about it at all

BS: I can relate to that, while I was walking in town, I had one negative experience in the 24 hours while I was walking and it was interesting what you said about how your own position becomes much, much clearer, and I found myself becoming so strong in how I opposed that behaviour or the words that the man, it was a man, used in our conversation, I was quite upset, I thought this is really getting out of hand. It made the whole notion of hypersolitude very interesting to me to think about when you are on your own as a woman that people think you need company, that you need male company, and exactly that is what happened between

the hours of 2am and 4am which was the most uncomfortable time in Limerick city, but actually that man made my position very clear, almost like a textbook, yet it was still negative, I probably had to work for more hours throughout my walk and afterward to let that go, because it overshadowed the 23 hours and 40 minutes that were mainly positive, so if you get that opposition, if you want to call it, then you really feel I am going o against this now.

I have yet to write those words down that he said, in the conversation, really rough, I haven't been spoken to like that, I can't remember anybody ever talking to me like that. I can't write them down because I am still so angry about it.

JG: Was he sober?

BS: Yeah, I think he was – he spoke about that that men go out around that time to prey on women, and I think that's what he did himself, and it was only throughout the conversation that that came out – I don't even like using the words he used – but it made my point very clear about why I was doing this because it still seems to be really an issue that as a woman you may experience violence or lack of safety when you are on your own . . .

FW: Can I throw in a question about the term potential?

BS: how do you mean?

FW: I suppose I am thinking about what happened between all of us, and I am wondering whether anything was opened in a way that has potential – maybe it's not a question that can be answered, it's a question that I have; was it a closed experience, or was there a resource that was created that has potential for people to use. . .

GT: Absolutely, apart from just plagiarizing the structures of it! [laughter] that's a huge

potential in itself, in my experience there hasn't been a precedent – I have been at hundreds of arty events, conferences whatever, but there were distinct structural differences – that's the most basic of potential s in terms of replication, or to see it as a precedent, that this was a practice of a sort, not just relational aesthetics, beyond that – from my own interest in TD, it has a social good about it, I don't know if that was intrinsically part of it – I don't think that's what I mean – get people together and given them lunch, is that just relational aesthetics? But I think bringing in the commons and you bring in diverse people, especially people from marginal communities- although just because you have brought in people from marginal communities doesn't mean it's a good thing – it seemed that everyone had equal value by the whole event in itself

FW: I have been doing some research around social choreography – every society is choregraphed in that there is a social spacing, we are spaced according to things like class, gender, age – what I like about the idea of social choreography –I was trying to pay attention to the social spacing – it was however it was, it didn't have to be a happy experience for everybody, where everybody gets consent. I was guilty of being stroppy around the cups, getting really pissed off about people not cleaning up the cups! If I was to do it again, I know that the cups are not as important as I was making it out at the time. The social spacing doesn't have to be positive, but that's what distinguishes it from relational aesthetics is that the choreography is whatever it is . . .

KO'S: It's very different from this idea of Relational Aesthetics, that just because you bring people together that's what it is, but you placed so much importance on it, and on the structuring of it, and really took it seriously then it was a really serious thing for us to be involved it, it placed importance on what we all do. One of the main things is getting isolated

in what we do, you talked Maeve about the solidarity thing, it's not just about having a great time – because of the longevity, the 13 days, that was a big thing in it in terms of residue and potential, because its placing an importance on it all– every week something else comes out of it for me. . .

BS: It was so diverse that it was nearly like, I was wondering was it manageable? It was such a diverse event, then I questioned, when you talk about engagement, or bringing different communities, and being open, or opening up a space – we were still located in an art space, that can still be a big threshold for people. I remember standing at the door and inviting people to come inside, so that they would know there was something happening inside, so I think that's something to consider, that does play a part as well, the context of where you place yourself . . . I have yet to bridge that gap about being out on the road Vs being out in the space that we used, and how to bridge those worlds. . .

GT: Do those worlds have to be bridged? Creative practice can sometimes be framed as 'oh, we are creating bridges', as though there is some kind of social . . . .

Just because something says what it is, doesn't mean what it is, I was wondering are you going to evidence things? I am not demanding it!

BS: I have evidence! It's not shared, that's the big residue that's there to manage,

KO'S: You did it in a really nice way, that's what's great about it, it wasn't anyone that we have told it to says omg that's incredible

BS: The sharing happened there and then with the people I met and interacted with, to bring that back into . . . I don't know, it's still there – I'm not sure why I feel this need to evidence it, I took pictures and videos voice recording and I wrote down notes, and I am wondering is

that too contrived, even for myself? I am still experimenting about that as well, you cannot replicate how you feel inside when you are on a walk, and the other person that you met, they shared their experience, they are not staging this, it's real life it's happening, they are not voluntarily doing this meeting me, so there are questions around that

GD: Because there is a difference between evidence and residues, you are still trying to gather evidence, but yet still paying attention to the residues, and maybe the residues have been more of a sense of evidence than the contrived photos, or things that you feel that you have to take, because you have to have this record to look back on, what if you miss something, what if you are not retaining the right kind of stuff, so I think that's the interesting thing between something changing from looking at residues but then the deliberate gathering of them, and trying to translate those as some kind of evidence that explains what that is . . . .

BS: That's where its impossible to bridge that gap – you can also say the thing in itself, it happened, and there is no more to say about it, you could also take that stand. . .

JG: Is that the problem with documenting and evidence, it's kind of backward looking, and we are talking about potential that is future looking, looking outwards. Your man with the negative conversation, where is he now, and what effect did that conversation have on him, and has that stayed with him, was there a residue?

BS: I could find that man, I know where he works!

GT: But then if you are talking about retrospective documentation, then there is always the problem of confirmation bias, so you are looking at something where it is hard to remove yourself, for any of us to remove ourselves, inherently as humans we are looking for something that confirms what we thought was the outcome, I see a lot of that in

documentation of social artworks, it always looks for the positive confirmation bias, because its in everyone's interest to do that, which is why this is very novel.

BS: That's why I have this struggle, how I go about this, what I do with this documentation, that's not even the important part of it, I don't know if I am even that interested in it.

Polarity #2: Poetics and politics

MC: When I think of politics I think its any group of people standing together having a conversation that's a political happening. I was thinking about the spaces and the choreography of people coming and going and meeting to have that little politics. Limerick is a divided city, there are very different socio-economic areas. I personally like going from one area to another, having all those different viewpoints. There was a loose choreography but it was also very structured. I was aware of that backdrop in Limerick when I was in the LAB, I grouped people together. When we were doing Fold and Rise, we invited a group of people together who were well read in what we talked about.

So it felt like walking between different areas in the choreographed way. It can be more difficult when people come together – like I change my languages all the time when I work with different groups. I knew what to expect in the different groups that I met in the space, but I was also surprised as well. It was both easy and challenging – I felt that in my mind and in my body.

GT: What does poiesis mean?

FW: Poiesis refers to activity in which people bring something into being. Aisthesis refers to modes of sense-making arising from perception by the intellect as well as the senses. Poetic is

sometimes presented as a less abstract subset of aesthetics. In this instance the use of the term poetic draws both on the sense of something brought into being and also to a form which has affects that arise from a relationship between the said and the unsaid.

GT: That's really interesting. Its funny how two words can bring about in your mind another word that feels totally related buy. That's going back to your residue of words. Obviously when you are around people language is politics as well, and poetry as well.

I mean there was no one right wing that attended was there? Next time we have to invite them!

BS: I feel I am very biased in what I do – this word social choreography – I made sure I went through the difficult areas of LIlmerick in the morning, just so I don't meet a threat, or something that was uncomfortable for me, and I felt really shy and bad abour even considering this, and as I walked through those areas, St. Mary's Park, I felt so self-conscious and I thought oh this is ridiculous, I thought this is so contrived and its not okay to take a picture – afterwards I thought why did I not take a picture there? All those perceptions that we have about people and places which we can't free ourselves from, there are differences, people have very different life scenarios and life circumstances and backgrounds, how we were brought up and there is a reality to it and we want to be careful about it, but then why don't we challenge things or point it out, so I am kind of questioning myself about that.

JG: So, does the potential lie in the risk?

BS: Probably, and then it's all about this fear that you have beforehand, or stories you hear or knowledge you have about certain areas in Limerick, that have higher level of crime, or things that happened before, and assume a perceived higher risk and maybe there is. . .

GT: That's inherently political as well of course isn't it? I got a vision of Leo Varadkar awoith his welfare cheats! That low down kind of politics, where of course the working class areas- I come from one of the most disadvantaged areas of Scotland, and I feel my safest there. If I was in a multi-million pound estate, I would be afraid of getting arrested!

That's very political isn't it, our perceptions – or even to think, oh there is a heroin addict, he must be really unsafe person, whereas most heroin addicts that I have met are dead sound, they just want money for heroin. Most people I have met that are in multi-million pound estates are corrupt thieves, so it's just so funny that the media present our politics in such as way that is so class oriented, and it's just so hard to bring someone who is right-wing, or to bring a heroin addict into the space, its' so hard to do that because we are so polarized.

BS: I don't think anybody can be free of that. It may be just a lack of knowledge and not knowing a person. Equally on my walk I know several homeless people in town, because I have a friend who manages a homeless shelter, and then when we are in town we always meet people who are homeless – I met this guy on my walk, and he is homeless and also a heroin addict, but I know him, and I said to him, I felt really safe with him, and he said I feel safe with you. We were sitting on the floor, and the Gardai were passing and normally they wave them up to move places, but they looked over and they let him, because we were both sitting on the ground on O Connell St. and they kept going, and he made a joke that I drew attention to him, but at the same time we were allowed to keep sitting there.

Polarity #3: Structure and agency

BS: It was interesting when you said Maeve that you could be yourself, you didn't have to edit yourself, or adjust so much. . . not to be overly careful about what you were saying, how you do things, you felt free. . .

MC: I felt like a flaneur/flaneuse – if I work with different groups I change my language, but I felt that I was just going there for me. I know that I was there with the Fold and Rise, but we knew who was coming and what we wanted to talk about. I had an idea about what I wanted to get out of it, and then just the other things coming along that day.

That day that we were there, Pauline Conroy is a real academic, she is a brilliant writer, really thought-provoking, I still have to get my head around what she was talking about; and then the Moyrsoss women were so different and so grounded; and then the lady was there from India talking about her teas, so that was another culture. Just being in Limerick I felt like I was flaneuring around. I was challenged, challenged to understand and place everything that Pauline Conroy was saying., but with the Laboratory it was all set up for me to walk around the structures, to come in and test things out.

BS: the question related to agency, in terms of being myself, in terms of flow and to express yourself, . . .

GT: I don't really know what it means, agency.

FW: The opposite of being an agent is being a patient.

GT: I felt like I didn't have that much agency, because I couldn't be there, because of other commitments, which I found really fucking irritating, because I have to work and the kids or whatever. If we look at that from a feminist perspective, women working in the arts or whatever, it really grinded my gears, because I couldn't be physically in both spaces, I could only attend within certain time frames, so I didn't have any agency at all, from a personal perspective. But while I was in the space I felt I had all the agency I needed to get my point across. The demands of life . . . that includes politics and poetry as well, all of it! especially

when it inhibits your professional or political involvement, it's not like, oh the kids are in bed, I can't go to the shop, it's more like, the kids are in bed I can't got out and fuck the political system up, I can't give my full attention to things.

But then I saw the girl that had her baby there, and I thought 'go you!' I would never have done that. I would have been so self-conscious because the baby was crying, it was echoing in our ears, and it was in one way it was highly irritating, will someone take the baby away, but on the other hand I thought, go her, she is not actually allowing that to impact on her attendance. It was quite funny watching that and getting some residue off that, I wish I was more like that when I had babies.

BS: It's quite political thing to discover, that women in spaces, because they have children who are dependent on you, children should be in those spaces too, spaces should allow for that too . . .

GT: Agency is affected by so many things, by frame of mind at a given time, and maybe I am being too hard on the first instance I was talking about, maybe that person was expressing their agency by focusing on one thing, although it took away the agency of the group to operate as a group

FW: The Lab was in danger of being a utopian bubble, but actually there are all kinds of structures, the Lab had to interface with all of these different structures, maybe that wasn't explicit enough in some ways, not being able to attend is because of all of these different structures. I didn't feel that I found a way to . . . .

[interrupted recording]

BS: If you would put the Laboratory of Common Interest #2 on, it would be so different,

because it's like a lived experience and it's gone, you can't replicate it. I used to get so upset about people stealing ideas, or making gain from your knowledge that you worked hard for. . . in the end I thought nobody can really replicate what you are doing, your unique approach to anything, and that momentum and what happens there.

GT: And obviously the premise being commoning of some sort, or commons, that is when we have to let go of any kind of ownership or ego, and that what it's about. And that is the problem with commons, when it came to the world's resources, and then are we going to get to that point and go, everything is open but for the greater good. Open source, you know . . .

FW: the trouble with Creative Commons is that you make it but then corporations are free to use it. So what they are trying to figure out is a system, how to have open source, but also have it be resourced, so they are looking at licenses, so that anyone using it commercially will pay a certain amount and that goes back into the Creative Commons, so they are trying to find ways to bridge that gap between the commons as something that gets exploited but still have it be a culture

GT: You can also have permissions, that really started with video art, how do you monetise video art, some of the contracts that came out of that movement were really interesting. You can grant licenses, it's an interesting way of contracting out work to have some control over where or how it gets used.

Polarity #4: Abstract and concrete

[long silence]

GT Sometimes it's the things unsaid . . . [laughter].

Appendix III

Feedback for Free*Space, Limerick
Ed Carroll, producer of *Tinkering with Commonism* workshop @ The Laboratory of Common Interest – 2019-04-16

Introduction

There is a real conundrum when it comes to community development and culture. While there are clear traditions of silo (not negative) practices the value of interconnection and interdependency rarely emerged due to the survival mode of keeping the home-fire burning.. This is partly due to busyness, lack of resource and because it is really hard to shift values and convince people about the values of solidarity, interdependence and spatial justice. Put simply, it's hard even for those in the field to avoid the dominant individualist, populist and consumerist ones.

Tinkering with Commonism was an opportunity to look back at a 5-year + process called "Community Culture" (2015-2019) developed as a tactic to refresh and renew community art in the context of community development. Community culture emerged as a conviction among activist and artist and was nurtured by Blue Drum and supported by individuals and organizations like Claiming Our Future, Community Knowledge Initiative, Creative Communities, etc. Its stated aim is to refresh and reset the practice of community art from within communities of place so as to strengthen civil society. Practices such as community art and community development -evolved through state-level support for more than three decades but were dismantled as part of austerity measures. Austerity culminated in a gear-change within government departments and agencies towards management values of efficiency, value for money and targets. Cultural participation, cultural rights of community as rights bearers held no sway.

Under spotlight

Why make this workshop during *The Laboratory of Common Interest*? There was a practical need to review what culminating value, if any, community culture as a durational process without funding had achieved. At a more critical level there was a need to listen deeply for signals as to whether the desire for *commoning* is persuasive enough for an ecology where we act cooperatively for community sustainability. In effect, it's hoped that such considerations can help to throw light on the choices made and direction to take for the future. Three actions were represented through still/moving documentation and these were followed-up with a set of roundtable exchanges between participants. Adapting Liz Lerman's *Critical Response Process*, each participant was asked to try to respond from within 3 diverse perspectives: (i) as a participant in the action, (ii) as an outside observer and (iii) as the convener / organiser.

Action #1 – Zooming-out

The first action took place in 2011 and it was an element of the creative conversations involving people (mostly individuals rather than organizations) from across the island of Ireland that were held throughout the period. It helped to seed the idea of community culture as a process of bonding and bridge-building between locally based activists and leaders. It took place at the end of a seminar called State of Exception. Twenty participants went on a silent walk and handed over a set of documents to the Department of Arts and the Arts Council. The small box contained copies of the *Faro Convention* on the value of Cultural Heritage for Society and the *Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* to the Minister of Arts and Culture and the Arts Council. No further action was envisaged and the hand-over was purely symbolical. Most of the participants really questioned the efficacy of such 'protest' actions because by bringing people together energy is consumed, frustration or

otherwise is ventilated but soon dissipates leaving nothing in its wake. Yet, the way in which the participants kept a single line formation and fixed their gaze to the ground did evoke solidarity and something intangible. One observation concerning the documentation was how difficult it was for an ordinary bystander on the street to read the intention of the action and for the viewer of the short film to clearly understand the rationale for it going public.

Action #2 Zoom-in

The second action took place in 2017 and was local focused on a community undergoing regeneration in Charlemont, Dublin. It was the only regeneration process funded during Austerity and delivered Dublin's only social housing of 2017 – a modest 70+ units. The event was planned as an action to say goodbye to the old buildings and lived lives just days before the move to new homes and the demolition of the old blocks. While there was a need to pause it was unclear because of the demands of moving how many of the community would turn out. In the end it attracted a great gathering from the youngest to the oldest! The walk took place around all the blocks, carrying specially made banner with portraits and wishes for the future. The event involved singing, marching, poetry and recollections and concluded as an emotional and affective gathering over tea, coffee and biscuits in the last event in the community centre. From the participant exchanges it was clear that the event had resonance and meaning. On the one hand regeneration and the promises it makes to communities continues as a long drawn-out process, always focused on communities that are presumed deficient and thereby needing to be fixed. On the other hand, the history of Tom Kelly Flats and Ffrench Mullen House involved a strong inner-city identity with a protest tradition. This community had paid-for and built its own community resource centre. It too suffered the effects of the complete dismantling of a national community development programme. While the documentation itself was intended as a creative record for the

community itself the performative aspects of the event communicated the ever dormant potency of people and place.

Action #3 Zoom-in and out

Unlike the other actions, the final discussion proposed an idea that has not been realized but had been sketched out in 2018 for the Creative Europe application of the Creative Archaeology project. Called, *Cultural Contact Agreement,* this is a protocol for practice sites in different locations to agree points of connection, cooperation and co-creation. The idea is to enact a double movement and borrows from the football analogy where HOME is work on-site and AWAY is work off-site that is locally authored by the groups with a view to realizing a shared creative programme. HOME based, learning by doing, zooms-in to a local practice site with a distinct theme e.g. regeneration, cultural heritage, etc. AWAY based, learning by doing, zooms-out to lay the ground for active cross border and trans-local encounters e.g. training, exchanging, appreciation visits, etc.

Using a short film of a concert during ICAF Rotterdam in 2017to illustration the sensibility required by Met X (Brussels) and Morokan jazz to mobilize its audience into a different space than the usual performer / audience mode. It was followed by another short film of a exchange with Jeanne van Heeswijkabout how to 'construct' Homebaked, Anfield as part of a 2012 community meeting

Common to all the exchanges, the point of departure was the meaning found i.e. what was evocative or otherwise in the cultural act witnessed. No illustration was framed as 'case studies' but rather as moments in real time of a process that had not yet understood itself or

its impact. Since community culture is about refreshing and renewing creative activity from within communities it seeks to be both a platform for 'bonding/belonging and a platform for exchanging/learning across multi local contexts. Caution requires both a lead-in time for community to want a process of 'cultural contacting' and for time to build its capacity to make it real.

Thus, what is under review is how to construct a process of networked culture at community level; increased cooperation between activists and artists; deepened knowledge about the power of community as agents of social change. Such networked culture only made sense when connected to real issues on the ground such as housing and regeneration, environmental sustainability, mental health and well being, etc. The interplay of energy/potency as invisible forces (spirit) like collaboration and cooperation; the personal and collective; spiritual and physical; on-the-table and under-the-table; the practice and the values emerge not as a set of binaries but as a triptych of culture 'in', 'for' and 'as' sustainable community where community is making-community at its work bench by creating its sustainable future.

At the end it was clear that the invisibility of potency that had to still be acted upon was vital for minds and hearts to shift towards 'commonism' i.e. real practice sites based on values of interconnection, solidarity and ecological justice.

Change as Potencies.

"What is at stake then, is a life in which the single ways, acts and processes of living are never simply facts [therefore imprints for governance and rule making] but always and above

all possibilities of life, always and above all potentiality (potenza).” [p. 349 G. Agamben quoted in Commonism – A new aesthetics of the real]

Ed Carroll, National Convener for Blue Drum

Responses – Thomas Stewart

About participants:

In terms of people obviously it was a lovely affair and I think of events as memory practices more than anything else.

About the critical review process:

The process schema was an interesting one - it did seem weighted in practice towards observer. Methodologically something might have to 'fix' the roles of the triad to a greater extent - people around a table will revert to ordinary conversation, not that that’s a bad thing, just i don’t know if the intent was for the dscursive triad to be underlined.

About content

The content requires more mulling over, slowly. I’m more interested in the psychological feels than the social theory aspects that and its not easy to see the non tragic options? This might be the generational conditioning alluded to during the day....

About cultural contact agreement

On the text circulated, I’m maybe too outcomes oriented? Pretty immediately i start trying to think

-'which sites

-what happens'

I’ve a distrust of theory and words in general - what would a grounded example look like, at what scale and what would the method (or sketch of it) look like? I’ve had too many airy thoughts about similar ideas for cooperation so it helps to pull back down. What does reading the script look like? What does the *Cultural Contact Agreement* code *do* when it runs? - Ask Eamonn!:) No one wishes to overprescribe or legislate those outcomes in detail, it would seem helpful to have a gist of a notion.

Appendix IV

Further reflections one year on:

FW: I am doing some writing at the moment about the different economies in which the work operated; my intention was to make an economy operate on the basis of mutual interest, but inevitably there was a gift economy at work, there was a goodwill economy at work, there was an affective economy at work. I am wondering whether it's possible to engage in a project that is situated as 'art' without those economies being the dominant ones.

KOS: I think it is possible. I think for a lot of people involved it was mutual interest. I think you will always have the other economies at play, i think those economies are important too. I know the gift economy bothered you a lot but I think that's inevitable with public events, there will always be people who come and take but what I try and do is focus on the relationships building over time. I guess my focus is always the social relations. I've had people involved in things to start with on a gift economy but than over time they move into mutual interest and it becomes more collective. I wouldn't disregard aspects of the laboratory, just cus that happens as it takes time to shift what people are used to. For example if the laboratory becomes more permanent than potentially people would learn with it. It all just takes a lot of time. I think for me things being 'art' or not, doesnt really bother me. For me that's not what the laboratory was, for me its different ways of framing and building solidarity in building alternatives to capitalism, like the commons. As we are so entrenched in capitalist social relations it takes a lot of time. So things like people treating it like a cafe and not washing up etc at times is part of that which is important too. took me 5 years to suss out how to make people wash up etc for the people's kitchen which only worked for the first time in

Spare Room. So i think loads happened and came out of the laboratory and the laboratory is a point on a map that connects in with work you may do next or are doing already. I think as you felt also it being towards a phd also adds a layer to it that makes it challenging too.

I'm also constantly suprised where things lead to, how something years ago will come back into the picture just as people come back into the picture. Mutual interest also needs mutual support which doesnt necessarily happen at the same time. So someone who operated within the gift economy at the laboratory might down the line give back in different ways. For example, people that I have helped in the past and it was one way, came back and helped me loads in the weeks before Spare Room. I know that's personal but for me all this is about radical friendships and how we support eachother so that we can support movements in general.
Actually maybe its learning that it's about the mutual interest between the collective of people working together and than when it comes to e.g. public workshops its ok to charge money cus sometimes people do just want to learn and take something away. You don't know where that leads also.
Anyway I think this is the stuff we will always have to think about. For me it's been about finding the people with the mutual interest and treating those relationships with alot of importance and from that there is the potential to reach lots of people.
It was even the same on La Zad so remember you are very self critical but for once, a year later I would love if you could be like "actually, the laboratory was pretty spectacular, some parts of it I would change but there is lots I have learnt from it etc". It was epic :)

GT: I think in the question you ask I understand the importance of non-monetary economies (emotional or otherwise) on which the monetary economies rest, so of course when

operating in a non-monetary economy doing anything participatory we cannot escape the monetary economy, there seems little alternative. We all know (I think - some seem oblivious) that if we were to pull the non-monetary labour from the field or 'art' then its structures at all levels of reality would collapse apart from the atomised 'individual'. This means to me any economy which works in the field of art, within the time of now (pandemic aside) cannot ever be separate from the monetary economy. I think maybe the only project that could be situated as art which will have no link to the monetary or non-monetary economy would be the art of destruction - of course if there are consequences such as jail or such then it leads straight back to the monetary and non-monetary economies.

For me, if we are forced to participate in the monetary economy which in the field of art is totally propped up by non-monetary economy (emotional, mutual, gift, goodwill etc) then we should double our efforts to monetise at all levels. I dont like myself for thinking this, but I don't see an alternative. This is maybe why I am perpetually looking for funding. I dont care about the congratulatory cv part but I sure care about being forced to operate within a certain system sometimes at a clear disadvantage. One foot in one out again. I am a capitalist anarchist maybe. which is possibly the worst type.

I know you are considering that situating any of the work you do as art is the issue. Or having 'art' and personal history, employment history etc as being a situating force. As whatshername said art cannot escape itself, I probably dont agree with this.

It is interesting but I never saw the lab as being situated in art. Of course, it has aesthetic qualities, and your own histories would seem self-evident. The nuances of organisation seemed the most affective. To be honest I never really fell for relational aesthetics either. It seemed another way to try to relocate the economies of art which are of course are some of the most sketchy economies of all.

Anyway, I am not contributing anything really with this rather long mail :) that you don't already know and have had a hand in teaching me. But my answer is to the negative. It is not possible for anything in the art world to be situated outside the monetary economy or the non-monetary which props up the monetary.

AB: my basic instinctive answer is this: Before engaging with your Alternative Economic talks in Limerick I hadn't much thought of economics when I engaged with art. What dominated my perception was the immediate work. That said, ever since I started contemplating art as a career, as a teenager, the dominating factor was the economics of it (monetary and social) and so I chose what I deemed to be a safer option at the time. In this personal sense, art production/accessibility can be enabled or disabled by monetary economics. In projects, I would think that the levels of dominance differ for each individual engaged in a project. Someone engaged in a project, who is also undergoing financial stress, might not be able to engage as much as they'd like to due to colonised headspace. In that case the economics of engaging in a project (ex. taking leave from work) might dominate their level of engagement with the art. Someone rich in financial, emotional, and other economies might find it easier to allow a project to dominate.