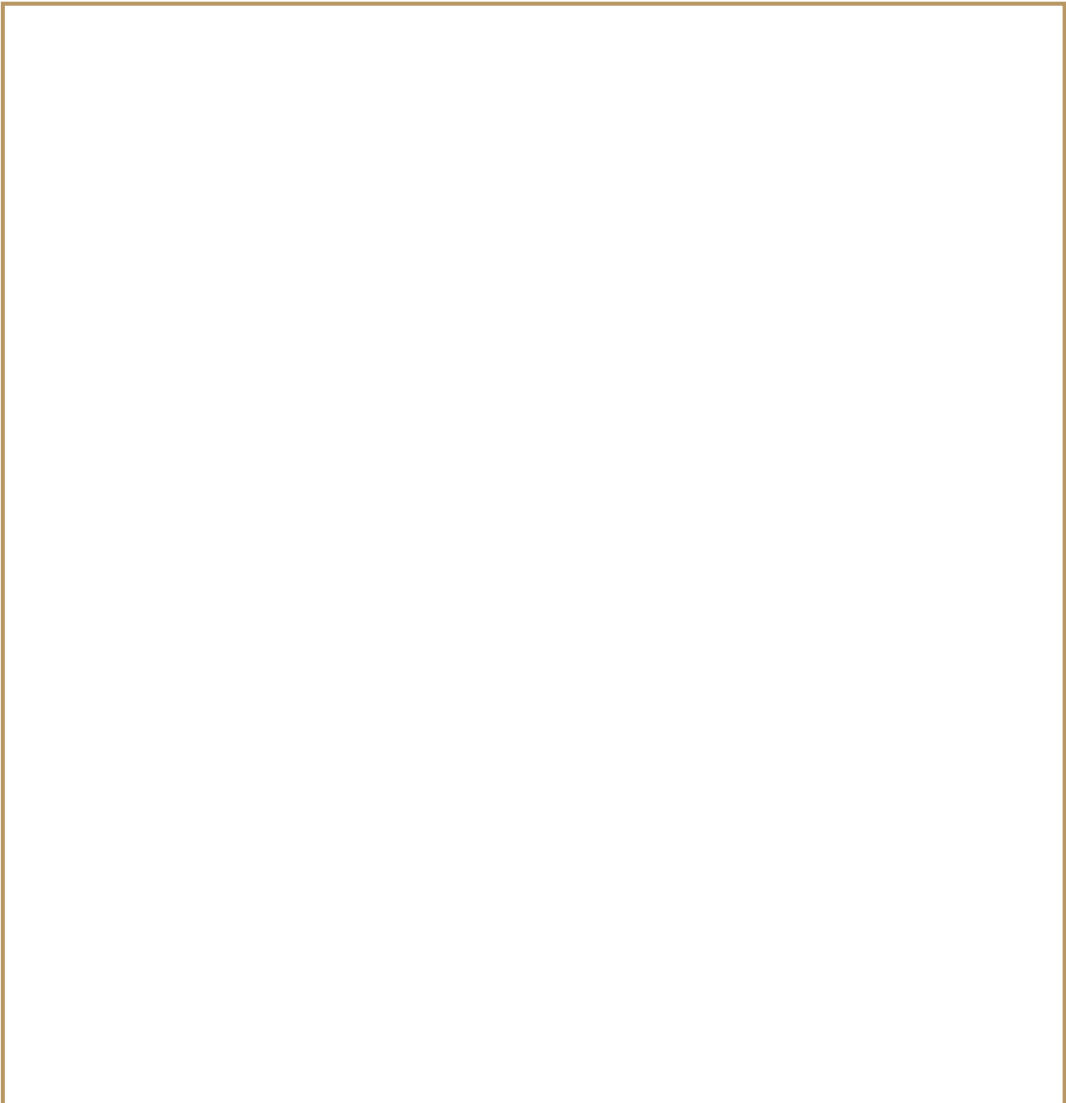
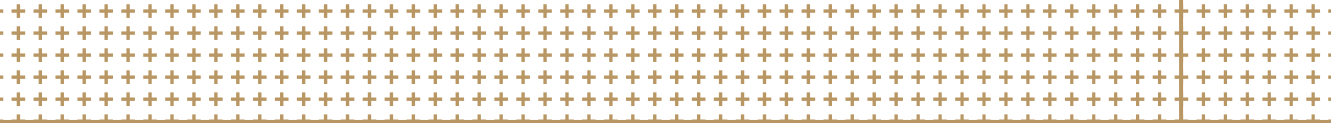




Field Notes II

Summer School on
Cultural Diversity and
Collaborative Practice

July 2019



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create national development
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COUNTERPOINTS.

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Foreword

Dr. Ailbhe Murphy

Director, Create

Don't go back to normal, normal was a crisis. This slogan is scrawled in red spray paint on a footbridge in my local park. It captures a sentiment that many people have expressed since the pandemic first took hold: a recognition that maybe life and society as we knew it pre Covid 19 is not something we should automatically return to. It prompts us to recognise the deep inequalities that the virus has laid bare, the incessant pace of life and the need for a renewed appreciation of the natural world, and how swiftly it seems to recalibrate when we let it be. So too has the enforced time either with or apart from family, brought into sharp relief the importance of our human bonds. At the time of writing, being able to gather with friends, to be in close companionship, to simply hang out with other people both familiar and new, seems like another time altogether. We still seem a long way away from that level of physical proximity. Like many countries Ireland is now embarking on a fragile and highly contingent journey towards a recalibration of its own economic, cultural and behavioural norms.

In the light of where we are now, we look back in wonder at the gathering of artists, facilitators, teachers, people both familiar and new, over five days at Killary Lodge in the summer of 2019. This publication sets out to give readers a sense of the main conceptual preoccupations of and the depth of engagement and learning between those attending that second iteration of the Artist in the Community Scheme Summer School on Cultural Diversity and Collaborative Practice. Delivered with UK-based Counterpoints Arts, the Summer School is a significant opportunity for artists to engage in a unique horizontal learning experience that explores



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We hope that this work will contribute to an understanding of cultural diversity in collaborative arts that goes beyond questions of ethnicity alone.

the intersection between cultural diversity and social and political issues in the contemporary world. The Summer School aligns with Create's current five-year strategy as we set out to pilot collaborative learning platforms with a focus on diversity as well as the digital to support greater engagement in and understanding of collaborative practice.

The Artist in the Community (AIC) Scheme is a devolved scheme, which Create manages for the Arts Council of Ireland. In keeping with the Council's 2019 Equality Human Rights and Diversity Policy the AIC Scheme has seen an additional investment specifically for cultural diversity. The Cultural Diversity Strand has to date yielded significant developments in collaborative practice via projects, residencies, artist mentoring and most significantly the Summer School. The scheme has one overarching goal: to facilitate the participation of artists of minority ethnic and/or migrant backgrounds in the active shaping of the cultural landscape of Ireland. For Create, there is a further measure of success. We hope that this work will contribute to an understanding of cultural diversity in collaborative arts that goes beyond questions of ethnicity alone.

Given that life and work now has to be conducted under the new and much altered reality of physical distancing, we are considering the optimal format for the third iteration of the Summer School. Being in real space and real time may not be possible to the same degree. As Create and Counterpoints Arts consider those necessary infrastructural adjustments for the next iteration of the Summer School we've been reflecting on its core principles. What are the essential elements to be preserved and what must change?



These preoccupations clearly extend beyond the Summer School. As we all adjust to degrees of flux, Create recognises that our work cannot happen without artists, community members, civil society organisations, activists and other agents of change who work to realise a more just world. Even though this global pandemic has required us to keep somewhat apart, we remain committed to principles of cooperation, negotiation and collaboration. We believe in work that aligns strong artistic sensibilities and vision with a willingness to experiment, take risks together and share learning. Even apart, we can still be a part of creating something new, something that transcends and even forecloses a *return to normal*.



Duality and Hybridism

Jijo Sebastian

Film maker, Summer School Participant and
AIC Scheme Project Realisation Award Recipient

We were 23 people of all kinds and colours in a big house. The night sky was clear. The bed was too soft. My mind was racing through my tensed body trying to make sense of the day. So many wonderful people. The emotional regulation required to wade through the different cultures, genders, generations and personality types and to get to each and every one of these beautiful, artistic, academic, and activist minds was challenging. Beyond the information and theories, what I really wanted to know was the inside of these people.

Knowing happens when our boundaries blur. What we share is a cosmic order and when we know each other we come by a knowledge we always contained but would have never known by ourselves. Together we generate knowledge and the knowledge perpetuates us.

It was the third day in the summer school and under my watchful eye Evgeny *never snored*.

We are many in this world and we live in each other. It is only in a matter of degree that we differ, not kind. We contain all colors. 'We contain multitudes' don't we?

I couldn't sleep.

The imaginative, romantic, whimsical, emotional Celt and the stoic, rational, hard working Anglo-Saxon. The same duals everywhere.

Like inside and outside.

Just like we contain many we are contained in many. Just like we control many we are controlled by many.

I noticed it first in my legs. They had relaxed and disappeared. It travelled on to my heart and slowly it dawned on me: this is where



I belong, with these colourless, codeless people; these angels inhabiting this interstitial heaven where we insatiably consume each other to grow bigger, wiser and hungrier.

I have become a true hybrid!

What I have been travelling from and what I have been travelling to, have started to feel the same. I sank in the bed and slowly started to melt in the darkness. I wanted to fly up in the sky and hug the whole house. I wanted to wake Evgeny up and tell him that I had finally arrived. All the Hollywood action heroes I watched and read to escape the pain from abandonment when I was sent to a boarding school at the age of five had messed up my sensitive soul. I had grown an armour around me to appear cool like my heroes. The meditation and the shadow work I did suddenly worked. I fell in place. I reached the stillness in my movement. Empty spaces invade me. Doubts die. Questions drown. The answer is so bright I can't see.

Evgeny do you hear me?

Evgeny is a Marxist and will hear only what he wants to hear. Evgeny is an activist and wants to change the world. Evgeny is a fighter.

I just wanted to talk to somebody.

For too long I ate myself to become Rambo. Cool, tough and callous. Couldn't understand why sometimes my eyes teared up or why I rolled into a ball and went under the table, shutting the door on visitors. And I always felt at every wily turn, that what I missed was travelling along with me. I only needed to stretch my arms, touch it, feel it and become it. But suddenly I missed my arms. Handicapped and helpless I waited. Now I could hear them,



see them faintly deep within. The anima, the yin, the east, the feminine.

Next day as usual as part of the efforts to unravel the intricacies of the western mind, I was trying to pick up shades of enlightenment values splattered on women in the west. That standoffishness, like a cloak refusing visibility and often inducing a subconscious colonial mentality in me. More in the west European than the easterner, more in the north European than the southerner, very much in the English or German but not so much in the Irish or French, again very visible in the Protestants but not so much in the Catholics. Is this the skin of the global west? Individualistic, rationalistic, egalitarian, self reliant, competitive, and materialistic masculine/anima/yang of the world? In comparison to the collectivistic, hierarchical, emotional, spiritual, interdependent, cooperative, feminine/animus/yin global east?

Then somebody occidental behaved like an Indian woman at the fire and I melted again. I wanted to hug.

We are liminal people. We are people who left home and never reached but fell in love with the camp in between. Some of us have fallen between the stools – like Rushdie says – plural and partial, the nowhere people with soft corners and spongy skin. Never to reach is the way, for at our destination the seeking stops and we grow fangs and learn to discriminate, deduce, and fight. We are fluid, mixed, always in flux people. We are half French, half Lebanese, Malaysian Punjabi in Belfast, Australian in Africa, tree hugger from the kingdom of Cork who loves Germany, Transylvanian salsa teacher, Italian English linguist, Pakistani on the run, Traveller with a grounded soul, Portuguese in UK, American in

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Venice, Iranian in Dublin, Irish in London, Polish in Ireland, a Russian who belongs everywhere and the ladies from the multicultural village called Create.

We happen every moment, unpredictably. Like there is no forest in a tree or desert in sand we are not in the event. Neither are we in reason, emotion, or in their conflict. Like the wind we thrive on chances. We form, act, and rest at random.

We live in Ian McGilchrist's 'in-betweenness', Deleuze and Guattari's 'Rhizome', Suzi Gablik's 'Radical relationality', Dan Seigal's definition of mind, John Vervekae's 'Participatory knowing' and Elizabeth Grosz's 'place around identities'. We live between land and water. To know ourselves we should become. To become we should engage in our infinite dynamism.

On the way in, I stopped the car to look at the mountains, mysterious and calm they lie one after the other. Am I anxious? Killary Lodge is only a few kilometers away. What am I going to learn at this school? Will I get a chance to explain the truth of my practice? My innate need to express and connect and hence my love of collaborative art and never for the politics of it? Assuming it is going to be an academic-artist group they will look away. Without politics, without being arty enough for a gallery space what is the relevance? They will ask, as usual. My tastes were never arty enough for a gallery space. In fact, ending up in a gallery is considered a failure in marginal international art house cinema – my comfort zone. And my collaborators with their Bollywood aesthetics has pushed our work even farther away from any sort of gallery. Then why am I here? Do I deserve this school? Or am I here because of the colour of my skin?



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I grew up confused, between the disciplined corridors of a Jesuit boarding school and the drunken alleyways of my village Manjapra. We Manjaprites are known for our love of the bottle. My father drank a lot, and I am still drunk. My soul belongs to Manjapra and I will definitely return to it when I sober up, I said when I left at 21 for the Middle East. We had a temper problem too, but were open, friendly people like the first Celts discovered in central Europe. Neighbouring villages had many stories about us as well. They say we smashed up the very first car which came to the village taking it for a giant beetle. Yes, we are passionate, impulsive people who live life fiercely.

These days my heart pumps faster watching Ireland play matches and a movie on the Famine made me cry.

'Connectedness is a biological imperative' says Steven Porges. Evolution baked it into us because we survived better in groups.

Roots will grow of us unaware. Our limbs will surprise us one day with a different skin. We will be black one day and white another; female today and male tomorrow. Diverse as we are we seek similarity in everything.

We swam the sea, walked the mountains, watched the fjord sunset and sat around the fire singing songs in every language we knew. We dreamed up projects, discussed practices, listened to speakers, ate and drank together and talked late into the night until we became colourless, genderless and ageless. We teased, tamed, and seduced conclusions. Like spirits we lived immaterial, sleeping on theories and ideas.

We are creators and fighters.

In us process meets product, content meets form, abstraction



meets reality, social meets personal, truth meets beauty and evolves into something, which surpasses all the dichotomies. We are the stamp of the global on the local, a yet to be concluded infinitely uncertain entity which connects and disconnects to the core at the same time.

Is the world ready for this new species? Ready to shift from a binary thinking to the systemic interconnectedness, specialised to integrated, demarcated to fluid, controlling, guarded, competitive to vulnerable? Is the current divisive identity politics and turmoil around the world the last one of its kind? Are we prepared to embrace the unpredictability, the fluidity, the non duality, the hybrid? Meet the opposite inside us and outside us and reconcile in compassion and love? Sustain the dynamic poise between infinite chaos and infinite order until we reach synthesis? Are we the harbingers of the species meant to create a civilization that is 'anti-rivalrous, anti-fragile and auto propagating'?

I listened, learned, and talked endlessly trying to know more, trying to connect. Hugged everybody on the last day, cleaned the room, made the bed, walked out into the wilderness behind the house. I stood on firm ground, among dense green vegetation, tall still trees.

Nothing centers me like nature. If I truly belong anywhere I belong to the jungle, I thought.

Here I am miles and miles away from where I belonged, claiming new land.

All the people who came to this island, from the megalithic Gaels through the Vikings, the Anglo-Norman, the Spanish, the English and all the 161 different nationalities who live here now,



might have stood at this same spot in the history of this island. Am I the first one?

Did the trees smile? Did the earth move under my feet?

I had that melting feeling again. For a moment I was standing among rubber trees behind my house at Manjapra, on earth my forefathers toiled. The ground and the green around me felt the same. If I travel far enough into history will I find an ancestor who belonged here?

Since some time now, Manjapra had started to fade slightly.

Why can't I belong everywhere like Evgeny? Is belonging everywhere an excuse to truly belong nowhere, manifesting the intimacy problem of the modern world?

I did not leave the summer school with convictions. Instead I amassed more questions, thriving on paradoxes. Realised movement inside me and connections outside me. In five days I grew up more than I did in a year. Felt like I belonged. Memory, history, body, and trauma spoke. I heard them in embodied cognition. The people, the mental exercises, the forlorn setting with mountains and water staring at us played their parts.

We are in the code not in the material. There are people and calculations which fit into each other. What it takes to move is exactly what we should spend to reach our material. We should rest as we move, and surely we shall arrive. How can we be lost when 'we' are the search?

“ ”

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Creativity, Language, Change

Dr. Francesca La Morgia

Linguist, Director of Mother Tongues, Summer School Participant

The Create Summer School was an event that came at a very significant time in my life, and it significantly impacted my personal and professional development.

When I think back on those days I perceive a sense of expanded space and time. Expanded space because every conversation took us to worlds that we had not explored before and because we were in a location that seemed to have no boundaries other than hills and mountains and which created a unique space for reflection. Expanded time because we had the opportunity to be present, listen, talk and think for a long period of time, without distractions and outside of our usual routines and commitments. Even getting there was a journey in itself, and it gave me a sense of leaving things behind to travel without family and friends, to meet people I had not met before.

I am a linguist who has pursued an academic career. The study of language may not always be creative, but language in itself is the most creative medium we all have to express ourselves. When I say express I don't mean simply to speak or sign, but also reveal something about ourselves. Our accent can give away our address, the type of mistake we make in a second language can allow people to guess what our first language is; we can make people smile or cry depending on how we say the phrase "go away". I started my academic career studying very detailed aspects of how children learn to use word order, but as time went on I became more and more interested in the social aspect that impacts language development in bilingual children. I can now see clearly that children are more likely to speak their parents' language if they are engaged in meaningful activities that make the language real and relevant to



them. If children are taught their "home language" only in their home or at weekend schools they can feel that this part of their identity is not relevant in the "real world" but only in some "private" places.

This is what motivated my desire to create the *Mother Tongues Festival* in 2018. I wanted to imagine an arts festival that was deeply multilingual, to show off skills that often children hide. Initially I didn't have a long term plan and didn't foresee the change that this would bring to my life. My precarious work at the university and the uncertainty of the next pay-cheque have in fact been a blessing, because for the first time I had to think about my professional choices, and question whether my academic work could be married to my more creative endeavours. I always felt that I needed to pursue linguistics rather than art, and that all the creative projects I was excited about were merely pastimes. For a long time I failed to see that the two worlds could come together.

The Summer School on Cultural Diversity and Collaborative Practice opened my eyes in the most unexpected way. On the third day I met the French-Norwegian artist Caroline Bergvall, who had been invited to give a presentation about her work. It is hard to describe what went through my head as she was speaking, and maybe that is what art is meant to do to you!

When Caroline spoke about her exhibitions and performances it was a revelation. Her work marries the two worlds of linguistics and creative expression, the patterns that make language such a perfect machine, and the emotions that make it so profound. What I loved most about her work was the accuracy in the research and the technical aspect of studying and literally exhibiting 'the complexities of language' in a new way. Language is sound, but it



is also embodies structure, pattern and history. Language is used to communicate, but it also an intrinsic part of us, something we get judged on, something that distinguishes humans from one another, as there are no two people who speak in exactly the same way.

Being a linguist and working regularly with bilingual children, I know how important every aspect of language is, and this is what keeps me motivated and enthusiastic about my area of work. Seeing Caroline's work endorsed my own passions, and left me with a sense of having found a creative voice that has reconciled the worlds of art and academic research, showing me how these two can come together in an uncompromising way. This encounter has also left me with a sense of empowerment and a will to experiment. As someone who is new to the arts world, I often question whether I am in the position of challenging the status quo or trying out a new idea that might fail.

The conversations, the learning, the experiences shared in the Summer School gave me a renewed strength in my belief that my work can have an important impact because it is relevant to the communities that matter to me. I have learned that it is my duty to take risks to fulfil the core values of my work. I feel that the Summer School, through conversations, exchanges, and exposing some of the real challenges of collaborative practice, has allowed me to give myself the time to reconcile the two worlds of language analysis and art that I had previously seen as two clashing parts of my identity.

I can now see the change in the way I am approaching the new programme for the *Mother Tongues Festival*, in which for the first time I have co-created an artistic project with a photographer. The project "What's your name?" offers people the chance to sit for a

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portrait and talk about their first name, write it down both in the original language and in the International Phonetic Alphabet, and show the true pronunciation. Myself and photographer Enzo Testa spoke about this project on a beach two weeks after the end of the Summer School. He said that he was fascinated with the beauty of the diversity of people who had attended the festival the previous year, and wanted to shoot portraits of Tallaght residents. I wanted to go deeper and address an issue that is often overlooked, which is the mispronunciation of names, which often leads people to use fake names or nicknames. Only now can I see how this project has been truly inspired by the conversations, exchanges and provocations that were offered throughout the Summer School, and how it was possible to execute, because I came out of the school with a new awareness of the social value of the work presented at the *Mother Tongues Festival*.

Since the Summer School the conversations with Caroline Bergvall have continued, and so have the relationships with Anca Danila, summer school participant, and Evgeny Shtorn, Cultural Diversity Researcher with Create, with whom I now curate the *See Through Café*, an intercultural conversation around art, creativity and community. There is no doubt that the Summer School has made a profound impact on my professional career, but it has also helped me to step back and consider how I want to collaborate with others, what it means to engage with a group or a community and how my own work with the *Mother Tongues Festival* has the potential to create positive change. As I write this, Enzo Testa is packing his camera, and I am ready to see the fruits of my first collaborative project.

When was the Last Time You Felt Someone Had Your Back?

Isabel Lima

Artist, Researcher and Summer School Facilitator



This is a spoken text. I am talking to you; you are reading sounds.

As the car stretches the last few miles towards our lodge the road starts winding around the hills, the mountains, and we start to glimpse the fjord. Sitting on the front passenger seat I observe the unravelling landscape. I swear, for a moment I thought the mountains were breathing, were beings, were alive... and we connected. From one body, one being to another we were connecting. The feelings I brought with me to this landscape were merging and transforming into something else, I was re-centring myself in a relation with the unknown, an unknown place and unknown people.

We are still plagued and burdened with the idea that artists are somewhat different, born just so, geniuses for whom time runs at the speed of a different tune. We are often approached as if we belong to an ethereal, otherworldly place. In the same way that 'man' becomes the descriptor of all those who *matter* (usually white, male, western), of the supposed *universal mankind*, so does 'artist' become the blank descriptor for the avant-garde *genius*. We as artists know this isn't the case. Every person is a unique being always in struggle and artists are no different. We as artists have made the difficult decision to persist in this field of practice and we do so from a standpoint of 'negative materiality', that of others and ours. We do so knowingly and at our own peril since support systems are almost non-existent. And this is where the Summer School on Cultural Diversity and Collaborative Practice comes in.

- 1 Dussel, E. (2011). From Critical Theory to the Philosophy of Liberation: Some Themes for Dialogue, *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 1(2)

The Philosophy of Liberation² movements adopted the notion of 'materiality' from the first Frankfurt School. It consists "of an affirmation of living corporeality ... as in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, which is vulnerable and has desires (Freud) and needs food, clothing and shelter (Feuerbach)."³ Very simply put, it acknowledges that critical theory will always be insufficient if not immersed within different corporeal realities. Furthermore, it sets out from the standpoint of the *material victim* and the negative effects of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy. In a multitude of ways, socially engaged art practices share this standpoint. All of us gathered in the Summer School have that in common. We are not interested in working with others to adapt, adjust or fit into the status quo. We want the right to be visible, to dignity, to justice, to exist within our individual *worlds of sense*⁴ and form relations stemming from where our worlds intersect.

Working collaboratively entails a relational process of exchange between people. This does not mean that relations are equal at all points in the process of exchange. What it means is that there is a commitment to working together and undergo a continual shifting process where roles change; power is fluid; and vulnerability, respect and mutual responsibility are fundamental. Through this process we (artists and communities) undergo collective transformation. We have a plethora of critical writing and toolkits regarding collaborative practices, processes, considerations of ethical conduct, and power. I am, however, particularly interested in the notion of care within our collective practices and our individual reasons to pursue collaboration. Chrissie Tiller⁵ drawing a comparison between Care and the Arts hits the nail on the head.

- 2 Mendieta, E. (2016). *Philosophy of Liberation, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2016 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.)
- 3 Dussel, E (2011), *ibid*, 17.
- 4 Lugones, M. (2003) *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions*. Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield.
- 5 Tiller, C. (2020) *Care as a Radical Act*. <https://www.heartofglass.org.uk/thoughts-and-news/thought/care-as-a-radical-act>



She states, “Both often viewed as a one-way contract between provider and recipient whose beneficiaries, or audiences, have been largely characterised as being without agency, without power and without capacity for reciprocity. Those who deliver the work frequently feel equally powerless; unrecognised by a system that has de-valued their skills and neglected to take care of their own well-being and need to flourish.”

If our practice is based on a relational process, an exchange between beings, why is it that ‘what support do artists need?’ is rarely brought forward into this equation when discussing or critiquing collaborative practices? When I think of the question *When was the last time you felt someone had your back?*, I think of Create and Counterpoints Arts’ Summer School. Two art organizations who have artists’ backs, who’ve created a space for togetherness, learning, unlearning, thinking, reflection, transformation and joy. A space for any artist regardless of medium, age, experience, ethnicity or stage in their practice, but who share an ethos of justice, diversity and rights. As artists we become so consumed by the work we develop and the people we work with that we become starved of moments of pause, of standstill, of relating to our peers and of looking above the water. The Summer School is an invaluable structure where we are afforded the time to look above the water. Not only is our living corporeality acknowledged and met in the form of a stipend, food, and shelter but it is also a space where our vulnerabilities, desires, knowledges and behaviours are exposed, shared and questioned from a position of care. For that week we existed in a ‘bubble’ where we were cared for, we were cared for by one another; by

“”

[A] space where our vulnerabilities, desires, knowledges and behaviours are exposed, shared and questioned from a position of care.

those two arts organizations; by the people behind the scenes who were relentless in their support, energy and commitment.

One of the most striking moments of that week, personally, was the MÁK Foundation exercise. Collectively we were invited to step out of the many real constraints of collaborative projects such as seeking funding, short-term support, etc, to imagine what kind of work we would potentially develop if money was no object and support for artists was continual and long-term. As artists we are used to developing huge projects for very little money and within very short time scales, but this *modus operandi* becomes very damaging. The MÁK exercise raised the fundamental question of when funders and arts organizations will truly begin to trust artists and communities by providing them with long-term support instead of following the neoliberal logic of the next big new thing? Where are these organisations, what could these philanthropic models look like? Both Create and Counterpoints Arts are attuned to these considerations, but most importantly they have in place strategies for continual support for artists. The Summer School is one punctum of many in their process. I feel immensely privileged to have been part of the Summer School and very comforted to know that artists have people who have their backs.

... and looking back, I was so tentative, nervous and insecure when we started. That week brought me more comfort that I can ever describe; the generosity, patience, willingness, commitment and steely determination of all of those who entered the unknown individually, but in the end left as an ensemble.

Re-Imagining Landscapes of Hope and Social Change

The following text formed the basis of a fictional funding exercise in which Summer School participants, working in groups, collaborated on project ideas with few of the usual time and budget constraints experienced by artists engaged in collaborative or socially engaged practice.

The MÁK Foundation wishes to fund an artist-led, inter-disciplinary project working in a series of communities of place and/or interest. MÁK is specifically interested to support collaborative and socially engaged projects that work with and alongside communities and neighbourhoods as equal participants and co-producers.

Who is MÁK?

We are a progressive foundation formed in response to our current and urgent times. MÁK aims to support projects that are proactively engaging with decreasing democracy around the world and increasing divisions emerging between local communities, together with challenges being made to the very concept and core principles of human rights.

MÁK believes in the fundamental potential of the arts to effect social change and in the central role that arts-led projects can play in urban and rural transformation. Cross-sector collaborations will therefore play a central part of this project, and we encourage applicants to think boldly and audaciously about how they might form creative coalitions and build new relationships between diverse partners and agencies.

We also challenge applicants to think and re-think the notion of 'community' – and ask you to please take sufficient time to fully consider how you are using this term 'community' in relation to your project and why?



The budget limit for this 24-month project is 200,000 Euro. Applicants are required to submit a rationale and detailed outline of their collaborative, cross-sector methodology and approach. We want to see some of the following:

- Why you have come together as a team and what is the explicit need?
- What is the 'social change' you wish to explore and with whom?
- What is your methodology and why? Give us a sense of why you think your way of working promises new ways of working?
- A time-line with milestones and agreed outputs.
- A strategy that covers any 'changes', which might occur along the way.

Applicants are expected to incorporate the values and principles of 'cultural diversity and collaborative arts' as a core principle of the work, and MÁK expects to see these principles enacted in all public calls associated with the project.

For example, have you allocated sufficient funds in your budget to pay your participants – is your budget viable in relation to principles of economic equality (a core value underpinning the MÁK foundation).

MÁK is open to all art forms (visual art, Live Art and performance, film, photography, writing, public programming) but a key stipulation and challenge will be the cultivation of a sense of ownership of the project by the community/neighbourhood; and that the project will leave some form of enduring legacy.

Outputs can be varied but should respond and reflect on the 'needs' and 'desires' of the community/neighbourhood. They can result in new infrastructures, the formation of new civic groups, public programmes, social change campaigns, educational interventions, etc.

A Meeting Point

Leanne McDonagh

Artist, Educator, Summer School Participant

Driving through the hills of Connemara, a place that I have not yet wandered, I begin to think of times long gone but most certainly not forgotten. I think of when we roamed from camp to camp, happy and carefree, at one with the land, and with each other. The green rugged hills bringing back memories that I will treasure forever. Strange however this feeling of home and this connection to the land as I have never stepped foot on Connemara soil. Contemplating as I drive, driving slower than I have ever driven before. I consider where is “home” and what makes me feel so connected to this beautiful place. As I do so I feel my body and mind shift from the hectic schedule that is my every day and slip into a relaxed state – the very state of mind that allows me to create my favourite kind of art. The week ahead is going to be good.

The location is as beautiful as its surroundings, the architecture married with the surrounding landscape. My favourite piece without a doubt has to be the two campfires, carefully contemplated to look natural in appearance and positioning. I almost expected to find some churns a trailer or even a wagon in the next nook or cranny that I explored. Not so far from this concept however I discover a tepee, it's not a wagon but it is a symbol of nomadism none the less. I truly felt at home and I had only just arrived!

The week was not like any other. The days were packed with presentations and conversations that continued long into the evenings over dinner, desert and beverages. The topics of “home”, “borders” and “belonging” arose a lot. I became friends with the most amazing bunch of diverse individuals – many had

TRANSIENT STE — the hook!

(100) sites political statements →

creating a model but it has a 2nd element

where the employees all run the campsite →

educational & training aspect -

Schools

etbs

Traveller

organisations

arts & cultural groups

The main entertainment would be...

shape & around a campfire

each night at the same time

Philanthropy?

match funding?

European Social Fund

never met a Traveller before, but were genuinely intrigued to hear and learn more about the Travelling community. I will never forget being told early in the week by another participant, that he couldn't contemplate how I could feel like an outsider in my own country when all he could see when he looked at me was my Irishness. It became apparent to me that if I wished to hide my identity for the want of an easier life, I could. While others who may want to, could not. I explained to him that I choose not to do so because I am very aware of the inequalities that exist for Travellers in Irish society today

On the third night after connections and friendships had been forged, we drifted towards the campfire and there we proceeded to engage in music, dance, laughter and merriment. I sat in awe as I experienced a little bit of everyone's culture, and I reflected on how much my community has lost! The acts performed on that evening brought me back to my childhood, to the place where I remember most of my happiness, most of my freedom, and I thought to myself this is where the heart of Traveller culture lies!

The following morning, we were instructed to form groups so that we could begin collaborating on a project. In our chosen teams we would create a proposal for the MÁK Foundation for an award worth 200,000 euro. A completely fabricated incentive but a very earnest project all the same.

First task – choosing collaborators – and in that moment, I locked eyes with Alice, both of us naturally drawn to each other. We both spotted Jane making a bee-line for us. Before there was any mention of what the project might be all three of us knew that we were compatible and willing to work together. Intuitively knowing

that we wanted to work with the Travelling community, we began brainstorming ideas. During this time, I was very conscious that I was the only Traveller in the group. I did not want to over direct or control the project in any way. Hence, I initially held back from suggesting what form it might take but I was also intrigued to hear more about the ideas that Alice and Jane had, and they had many.

Our proposal was inspired by our previous experience at the campfire and focused on a campfire as a meeting point for the celebration of various cultures and the sharing of knowledge. We worked well together but inevitably there were stressful points. Breaks were needed, many of them. A quick nibble, a stroll, a cigarette or a hot beverage, whatever shape or form it took, and we took several. It was necessary for our sanity.

Over our evening meal everyone seemed to be buzzing with a combination of excitement and exhaustion. There was also a very strong vibe of competitiveness that bounced from one end of the room to the next. All only sharing the bare minimum of their proposal as well as the trials and tribulations of the day that had just passed. The in-depth proposals were being kept safeguarded until the morning's presentations.

In the morning we had chosen to present last. Before I began to introduce our proposal Alice and Jane quietly stepped outside to where they had ignited the embers of freshly found kindling upon the fire pit. As I instructed everyone to gather, they were invited to add to the fire. All the while Alice filled the air with a beautiful rendition of Pecker Dunne's "Tinker's Lullaby" on her violin.

I brought their memories back to the previous Wednesday night, where we had all shared and enjoyed each other's company



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**Our proposal
... focused on
a campfire
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cultures and
the sharing of
knowledge.**



– the inspiration for our proposal. We then proposed to them the concept of developing a campsite in the midlands. Specifically, at a point where Roscommon, Westmeath and Offaly meet. We choose this location for two reasons: one – it seemed a central point for the whole of Ireland and two (pragmatically) – while we bordered three different counties, we could possibly approach three different county councils for funding and support.

The campsite would offer training and employment to members of the Travelling community but would also be open to the wider public. Hence, we could additionally seek funding and support from both the Department of Education and the Department of Employment. Through our proposal we acknowledged the need for a space where Travellers and settled people could engage and interact together. A place where myths could be dispelled, stereotypes broken, and friendships made. We believed that our campsite would enable these interactions to happen as everyone would gather around the campfire each evening for the night's entertainment.

We also played with the notion of a travelling pop up campsite like in the past when Travellers could move from camp to camp, but logistically we thought it would be best to tie ourselves to the one location in order for the pilot to be successful. In time the project would develop and grow, and could be replicated in different locations throughout the country. By doing so we would be making a political statement in retaliation to the fact that the government has not delivered on its promises in relation to the implementation of “transient sites” and Traveller specific accommodation in decades. We covered everything from funding, be it seed funding,



match funding or additional funding, to budgets, to collaborators and sustainability. We also discussed how the project could have a major impact for all involved socially as well as politically – it was important to us to present a project with social and artistic aspects as well as economic and political ones.

As we waited for the judges to consider each of the presentations we all hesitantly began to acknowledge the week was coming to an end and as the winners were announced the bus pulled up outside. Turns out all the highs and lows of the previous day's work had worked in our favour and my collaboration with both Alice and Jane came out on top. We had all become so fond of each other in such a short space of time that we were reluctant to leave. But the hard act of saying goodbye was softened by the fact that we all knew it wasn't really goodbye or the end of anything, it was only the beginning.

Advocating a Rights-Based Approach in Socially Engaged Arts Practice

Mary Ann DeVlieg

Arts Consultant, Trainer and Summer School Facilitator

This article describes my work over the last ten years with 'at-risk artists' (those who face serious persecution in their home countries) and the 'rights-based' approach that I believe socially engaged artists follow, whether consciously or unconsciously. I don't believe that linking arts practice to human rights diminishes or instrumentalises the intrinsic nature of art but rather that human rights are intrinsic to certain types of arts practice. International institutions such as the United Nations and national cooperation and development agencies, speak of 'rights-based' approaches (described in the second part of this article). Looking at rights from a socially-engaged arts perspective, in fact, feels quite familiar.

For the last decade I have been a case worker for artists who, through their art work or practice 'speak truth to power'. That power may be in a political party's programme, a religious or social group's rules, monopolies on public opinion or manipulations of facts. In response, those wishing to silence the artist have threatened or attacked them. Each persecuted artist's story unfolds differently; some end better than others, but solidarity and support from others can make a huge difference. When I first was asked to assist Abdul Hakim Hashemi Hamidi, he was the Director of an arts centre that gave classes in filmmaking to women and girls. One of the former teachers in his centre, an actress and theatre director who had to flee death threats to herself and her family due to her theatre work, had connected us. Abdul Hakim was told by his driver that he was the target for the next assassination due to his work supporting women's free artistic expression. He had to get to safety immediately but it was not easy to find a



country that would offer him a visa; and besides, how would he live? After much trial and error, and putting him on waiting lists for 'safe haven' artists residencies in Europe, funding was found to support his participation in a course on human rights in the UK. From there, he was accepted to continue his studies and offered a residency and scholarship in Paris. He is now determined to fight for the rights of his people politically.

Another case involved a comedian in Pakistan whose several television sitcoms were extremely popular and whose entire extended family depended on working with him as supporting technicians. The Taliban did not appreciate his humour: he was kidnapped and tortured, told to grow a beard and never perform again. He became a refugee in a neighbouring country where neither he nor his family speak the language. After months of advocacy and networking, we, his case workers, were able at least to accelerate the very long process of obtaining official 'refugee' status. That permitted him and his family to have a place to live and to medical assistance, but he is still unable to work as an actor, comedian or scriptwriter, and feels completely isolated. On the other hand, we have the story of Khaled Harara, a rapper and hip-hop artist who was based in the Gaza Strip. Training young Gazans to think independently and to write and express themselves, his workshops and his artistic group were banned and he was put in prison several times. Khaled was welcomed into a safe haven artists residency, continued to study music as well as cultural management, has released his own music and created a non-profit organisation that gives music workshops to refugees in Gaza and elsewhere.

Sometimes the persecution comes from an action that seems innocuous – in Myanmar, a café owner was sentenced to two-and-a-half years' imprisonment and hard labour for insulting Buddhism by using an image of Buddha wearing headphones in a post on Facebook, something that most of us might merely chuckle over. Another seemingly innocent case involved a group of youth workers organising stand-up comedy evenings for young people supporting the desire of their generation for peace, in a country wracked by civil war. One of the warring factions framed the youth workers, branding them as terrorists and kidnapping them. One of the workers, following many, many months of unsuccessful attempts was eventually invited for a 'safe haven' arts residency in the West. He has been training as an actor and works with participatory arts projects bridging migrants with their host communities.

A woman singing in public; a novel including an LGBTQI relationship; a critical review of a visual arts exhibition; a photographer seen taking photographs of soldiers on the 'wrong' side; a young bisexual woman curating performance art... these are all real cases of artists becoming targets for severe and violent repression. In some cases, the artists set out to provoke, perhaps by singing or rapping about illegal behaviour by their government. However, in most cases they were doing what all artists do: creating or interpreting an artistic work.

I work hand in hand with human rights NGOs – we guide the persecuted artist to international emergency support made available for the protection and defence of human rights defenders. We argue that, whether or not the artist sees themselves as a

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In Myanmar, a café owner was sentenced to two-and-a-half years' imprisonment ... for ... using an image of Buddha wearing headphones in a post on Facebook.

human rights defender, they are in fact exercising their right to free expression, upholding democratic ideals, expressing the rights of minorities or calling for social justice, and while doing so, addressing a public. Isn't this type of work the daily stuff of the socially engaged arts practitioner? In most cases, we 'temporarily relocate' the artists to a country where they will be safe, sometimes also providing legal, medical, psycho-social or other care. For artists, this is usually in an artists' residency or, less frequently, through a university scholarship. There is currently much self-interrogation of this system in terms of brain drain, losing one's artistic audience, the degree of professional artistic support in the host country and so on, but, let's be frank: the lives of these artists, above all, are of utmost importance, and with proper support they can continue their work as artists.

The word censorship can cover a vast range of illegal persecution from relatively minor to seriously grave – cutting words or scenes from a text; threats of violence made to the artist or to their loved ones; loss of union membership or other ways to prohibit the artist from earning a living; physical brutality; arrest and imprisonment; torture and death. Under international law, the state is tasked to uphold the human, civic, social, economic and other rights agreed by the United Nations members, yet the most frequent perpetrator of violations is in fact the state and its representatives. Other perpetrators include military or civil militant factions, religious or community groups and, increasingly, commercial enterprises. To avoid responsibility, states may not sign the legal international instruments, they may not have ratified them in their own national legal system yet, or they may simply ignore

them with impunity. In the Global North, we are used to artists being provocative, and the legal right of free expression is understood to include *artistic* expression, yet this is not the case in many states. In the West, too, artistic expression is becoming increasingly endangered.

The United Nations has approved a number of legally binding instruments such as Conventions, Treaties and Covenants (as well as guidance documents such as Declarations) regarding human rights – cultural, social, economic, civil, political, religious, women's, children's, workers', migrants' rights and so on. Once countries sign a UN legally-binding text, they must enter it into their own legal systems and then these international, universal laws take precedence over national legislation.

Rather than consider the United Nations a distant, elite, out-of-touch institution, I have come to see it as a sympathetic, understanding, support for the work I, and artists, do. Especially the Special Rapporteurs, who are unpaid people 'on the ground', volunteering to lend their expertise on specific themes and become watchdogs on behalf of civil society to the UN member states.

The former (and first) Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights, Farida Shaheed, produced the first UN Special Report on the Right to Freedom of Artistic Expression and Creation. In it, she established art's universality, writing, "art constitutes an important vehicle for each person, individually and in community with others, as well as groups of people, to develop and express their humanity, worldview and meanings assigned to their existence and development." Shaheed also validated the provocative nature of art, saying, "artists may entertain people,



but they also contribute to social debates, sometimes bringing counter-discourses and potential counterweights to existing power centres", adding, "artistic expressions and creations are an integral part of cultural life, which entails contrasting meanings and revisiting culturally inherited ideas and concepts."¹

While this text admittedly focuses on arts and culture and their associated rights, even by looking through a specific human rights lens we can recognise the work of the socially engaged artist. This is especially clear when the rights include, for example, speaking or singing in one's own language; preserving one's traditional customs; being able to earn a decent living and having access to the fruits of one's labour; accessing education; coming together in public gatherings (particularly important to those engaged in collaborative artwork); being able to access support for what can help to achieve one's potential, and generally not being discriminated against. Rights are not only about freedom to express!

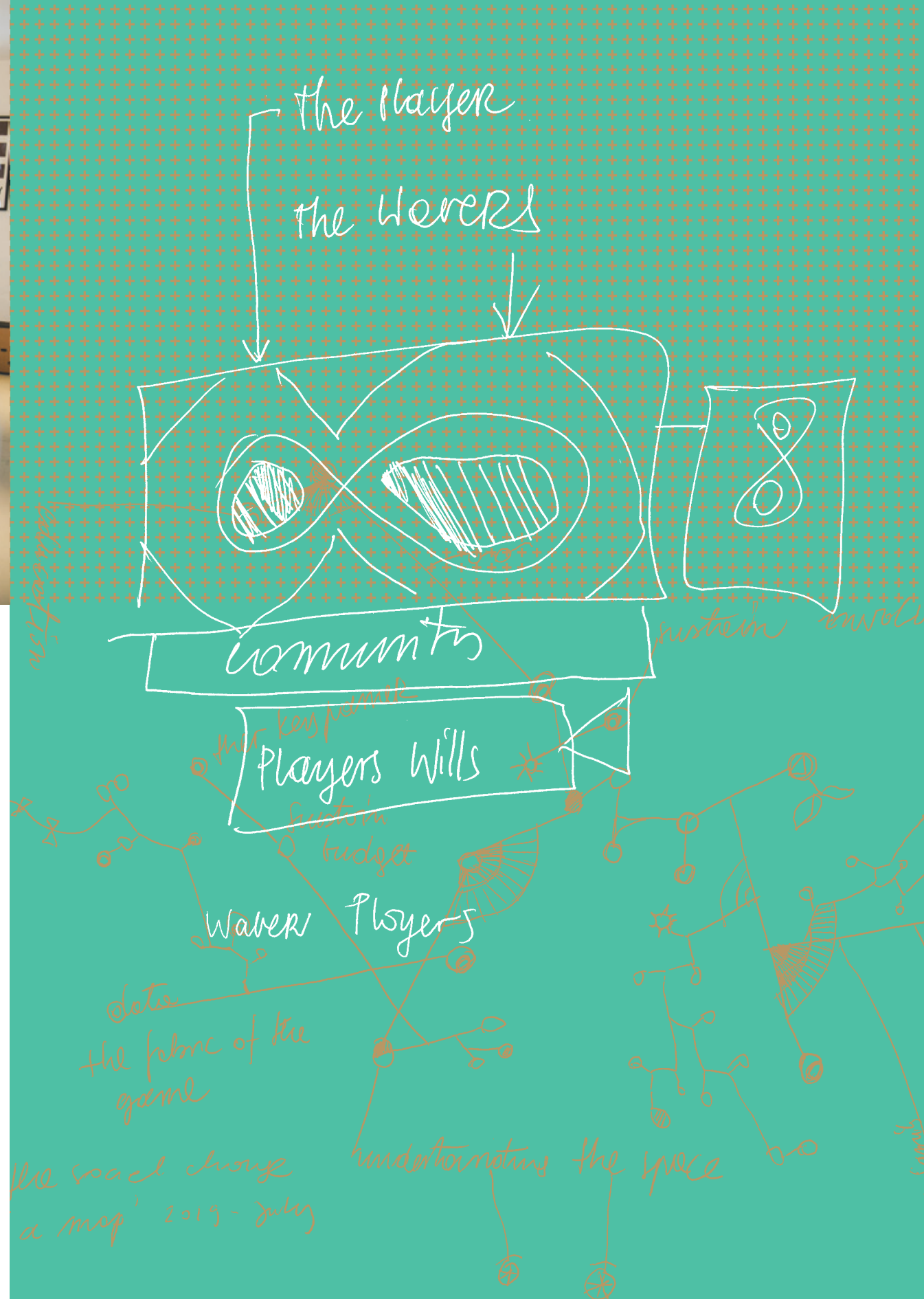
The artists I have had the honour to work with are all represented in these rights-oriented descriptions, and have all been targeted for repression by those who would profit in some way by silencing them. In the short examples given above, the woman was singing traditional wedding songs and was killed; the arts critic supported artists who questioned the community's status quo, was banned from writing and being published, lost all sources of his income and is now a refugee and not yet psychologically ready to write again; the performance art curator was exploring work around gender fluidity; she was kidnapped and raped but with support and as part of an arts collective is now performing and curating again. These artists were exercising their rights as well as

¹ UN Human Rights Council (2013) Shaheed, F., *The right to freedom of artistic expression and creativity: Report of the Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights*, Geneva: A/HRC/23/34.



the rights of others similar to them. They were doing it expressively, creatively, artistically.

In this period of fractured public opinion and existential fear I believe that the arts sector – especially including socially engaged practice – would do well to remind ourselves that there is an essential value in adopting, and indeed ‘owning’ our value as facilitators of free thought. That is, while acknowledging the power and beauty of the arts in taking a distance from worldly affairs, in order to better reflect it back to us, we should be outspoken and at times deliberate in the performance of rights-based approaches. And, if we truly value the contribution we help to bring about in people’s lives, it’s time to ensure our publics are informed, understand and appreciate the importance of rights in their own daily cultural (that is, intellectual, physical and spiritual) lives. Not to mention the danger of letting these rights slip away.



Relationship, Power, Privilege

Bernadette Divilly

Dancer, Summer School Alumna and Visiting Artist 2019

Bernadette Divilly is a dancer and choreographer whose professional work has included health education and somatic psychotherapy. She was a participant of the inaugural (2018) Summer School on Cultural Diversity and Collaborative Practice, and returned to the 2019 Summer School as a visiting artist. Bernadette met with Keelin Murray, Communications and Publishing Manager with Create, to discuss her experience of the two Summer Schools and the impact on her artistic practice. This is an edited transcript of their conversation, which touched on relationships, power, privilege, and time.

Bernadette: The first hurdle in making my application for the Summer School was really looking at “what’s my diversity as a white settled Irish woman”? And I’m very conscious of this body I have, my experiences and the dual perceptions that I bring to any conversation on cultural diversity. Cultural diversity is visible through movement, spatial organization and tone. And I have to say I’ve been very blessed because I’ve had influences that help to question my white privilege.

On the bus journey to the Summer School, Chinedum and I shared a seat, and within a few minutes I knew “I am in the right place”. We went where the political and personal meet – a conversation about our skin tones, colours and lived experiences and ages. “Can I ask you a personal question” became our chorus. We spoke personally about origins, relationships, how intimate relationships are really influenced by power dynamics and culture. I thought “ok, I am on the right bus”.

And then when we arrived Khaled, Mary Ann, and both Áines were out and Áine said “welcome to my home” – and I remember



that, because it is so kind to be welcomed. Create had created a container where there was welcome, there was interest. We had an opportunity to get into a deeper creative collaboration focused on relationships to our cultural diversities.

Arriving to that first Summer School, it was like I came home. Food and sleeping arrangements were minded with sensitivity. We got to present our work to each other. Our cultural differences were valued. The atmosphere was alchemic.

After dinner on our first evening I asked if anyone would come for a walk and soon some of us were in a field walking among the sheep. I’m really interested in what’s in the landscape at many multiple levels and I remember us being out in the field walking with the sheep and letting loose the hysterical laughing that comes from people releasing tension. It was lovely to be held in the nature of the place during our shared ramble and just release the excess charge.

And for me again that was one of those profound moments of realisation that it’s very stressful to work with our cultural diversity. There can be deep unsafety there, and there’s long histories in the body of racism and white privilege – it’s not just in the words, it’s in our bodies.

Keelin: I’m struck by the two timeframes at play here – on the bus yourself and Chinedum were immediately speaking about the differences between you and bridging those, but by contrast the deeper aspects of examining cultural differences need more time, perhaps time over and above what was offered by the Summer School.



Bernadette: Absolutely. The things that separate us are the things that make it very difficult, even if you come up with a project idea, to follow through. Development of creative collaborations requires time, support and space. Survival comes into this very quickly. Who has what support, agency and what systems of power are we working with. My arts practice is about people, place and presence, through movement based embodiment. Studying Dance Psychotherapy in the USA I got to grapple deeply with my own cultural diversity through movement. The MÁK project brought my two preoccupations together – the art of relationship and the art of cultural connection.

“Waves Under the Bridge” was a project created for my home city Galway by my small (MÁK) mock-funding project group, Hina, Kizito and Tomasz. We did well together. Artistic ideas were flowing and skills in our team were impressive. Following the 2018 Summer School I started working on an arts application for Art Council’s Art Participation funding. As a long term settled person, you know I come originally from County Galway, I have contacts and connections. I got a lot of support from lots of people but it just simply wasn’t manifesting, and I didn’t get funding. Manifesting the artistic aspects into a feasible project using this team wasn’t simple. Survival issues came into it quickly and also the time pressure of deadlines and sheer time required to line up all support systems and produce a project. What was simple in the summer school became way more complex.

Keelin: Can I ask you to discuss more the term you used – survival issues?

Bernadette: Survival issues are connected to safety and stability and the opportunity to create home. Stressors such as whether artists can stay in Ireland, and under what conditions, are present. Payment of artists who are seeking international protection is difficult if not impossible. There is the ongoing daily task of managing a whole plethora of relationships where safety has to be figured out.

When we sat at the table during the Summer School to create our project “Waves Under The Bridge”, we were all sitting in equal space at one level. Except the difference was that I was the only person at that table who came from Ireland. This gave me local power in terms of knowledge of place. Other people had other power that was really interesting. Recognition of what different sources of power we bring to creative artistic collaborations is necessary. We were doing that. Again it takes time. Creative agency and expression is a competitive business and applications for funding take time and local knowledge of the field.

Keelin: It certainly seems to be the case that it’s not a level playing field and that’s precisely why Create have developed the cultural diversity strand of the AIC Scheme, creating more opportunities for artists from culturally diverse backgrounds. But people perhaps aren’t aware of how difficult it can be for artists from different backgrounds, for example, coming to Ireland.

Bernadette: And the kind of pressure as well that puts people under, especially those surviving Direct Provision conditions.

Homelessness is a real threat for those with few community contacts to support them. Also the immediate impact of trauma for those resilient enough to manage to migrate for safety and survival. The grief and worry for families left in conflict.

In collaborative work, there can be moments of deep generosity but when you get into the durational process of creating work, then you are in a deeply relational field that has a long history of cultural colonisations, cultural appropriations the politics of gender and sexuality. It takes stamina, strength and a lot of commitment and actually a lot of love. Somewhere or somehow you've got to know that it's really worth it. And I want to say as a white person, with certain white privileges, sometimes in really deep relationships when it gets really hard going and I have the privilege to walk away, I want to walk away. Sometimes I do but I always come back.

Keelin: You mentioned earlier the feeling of being the eldest in the family, being an alumna of the inaugural summer school. Can you speak to that?

Bernadette: I was invited to come to the 2019 Summer School and speak of my experiences the previous year. I arrived in the middle of the week, the heat was up in terms of the process, you could feel people were working hard, they were creating together, they were thinking about projects.

First generation, second generation, third generation of the Summer School – we are a sibling community. I had some meaningful conversations with several people about the



projects they were interested in, and of course private & public homing, housing, came up again – I felt again that this is the kind of environment I want to work in. Movement awareness and sensitivity to body language can be useful here. I have had some contact with participants since.

The summer schools develop connections – to create together and weather conflict. Moments of unsafety need acknowledgement. Cultural conversations where the impact of intergenerational trauma is worked with creatively will allow us to evolve new kinships. The gift of the Summer Schools was an opportunity to be together with a focus on our arts practice and to share influences. There's a lovely recognition in a book by Mary Catherine Bateson "That sometimes family can become strangers and strangers can become family". And I think it has applications for the Summer School. Time, and repetition creates a container for meaningful work. There's already a container with knowledge that's gone into making The Summer School on Cultural Diversity and Collaborative Practice.

Keelin: Another thing that we have discussed is your awareness that oppressed people have to read bodies. How does this tie into your work?

Bernadette: People read recognition and rejection quickly through body language, tone gaze and the flow and rhythm of breath. We move to maintain safety or to avoid danger. I have been tracking this in my own body psyche and in relationships for over 30 years – it's kind of humbling.



So I tend towards looking with what bell hooks calls the white gaze at people whose skin is darker than mine. It was a bit of a shock to realize this could be a symptom of my privilege and sense of entitlement. Now I must habitually examine my gaze – what am I looking for? I am socially influenced to give more or less value to people and other sentient beings.

Knowledge of the power and privileges in the body, and how to transcend that with clarity is a core principle within my practice. My dance work is about slowing down enough to be present to what is in the moment and to enable a response that is alive and clear. We need to make conscious habitual patterns that will keep us connected. As artists we are relational human beings. We have membership in many communities that influence us. Bringing this influence into our collaborations generates new states of being together.

I am 62 years old and still waking up to how I am relating through movement. Life is movement. What a luxury when that movement allows for adequate rest and stillness as opposed to relentless pressure to move on. My arts practice is built around generating structures for contemplation and action that supports waves of connection.

Let's come back to the durational nature of the work – art making focused on our cultural diversities is creative and political work. I loved when I saw the durational and relational nature of collaborative art discussed in *Connect Create Change* [Create's Strategy document for 2020 – 2025]. It's a vision for the future – and I think it's going to be a lot of work to make that really happen. But it's essential to give it the time and resources.



Stepping Lightly and Alongside into the Future

Dr. Áine O'Brien

Curator of Learning and Research and
Co-Founder, Counterpoints Arts



Historically pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.

Arundhati Roy, 'The Pandemic is a Portal'¹

It's impossible to not feel more than a twinge of yearning for last year's Summer School on Cultural Diversity and Collaborative Practice at Killary Lodge in County Galway. Remembering the ease of gathering for the bones of a week and the casual closeness, which, in hindsight, was probably taken for granted by us all. Since 'being together' over time is the simple driver of the Summer School, enabling artists from a diversity of cultural backgrounds, mixed skills and career tracks to learn alongside and with each other.

How might we re-imagine the nuances of 'social life' and socially engaged, collaborative art in an age of physical distancing – given that it's an art form with 'connectedness' in its very DNA? How might we understand the politics of cultural difference – one of the central tenets of the Summer School – despite current anxieties about being with 'others'?

These are challenging questions but not, as Arundhati Roy suggests, insurmountable. We have choices. We can either walk

through the portal that Covid 19 has instigated with our old ways wearily intact or we can 'walk through lightly' to 'imagine another world'. The concept of the 'portal' offers a startlingly simple metaphor for change, since it evokes questions of agency and how we might consciously decide and learn to do things differently. A tall order, to be sure, but isn't this a basic premise of socially engaged art – to transform the social or at minimum unsettle it?

The process of collective re-imagining has been the pedagogical ingredient of the Summer School from the very start, to travel with others to a place of both learning and unlearning. What is now new is how we might explore what Covid-19 has revealed in relation to the social rather than merely patch over the ideological cracks. How might we learn to 'walk through lightly with little luggage'?

Can the Summer School be that 'portal', that space of in-between, gradually steering us from one way of thinking, feeling and practicing into another? A space in which to pause, take stock and reflect on how we might live better together? Roy warns against merely longing for a nostalgic return to what once was, since 'nothing could be worse than a return to normality'.

Intersecting Worlds: Local, Global, the Liminal

Though many of the contributions in this publication were written long before the dramatic impact of Covid 19, we see the seeds of anticipatory inquiry in the words of Summer School participants themselves. Jijo Sebastian's quirky and thoughtful reflection is

¹ Roy, A. (3 April, 2020) *The Pandemic is a Portal*, *Financial Times*, London, United Kingdom

prescient in light of Roy's provocation. His desire for a radically 'other' way of thinking about identity formation and living in the world is met in his description of fellow travellers at the Summer School:

We are the stamp of the global on the local, a yet to be concluded infinitely uncertain entity which connects and disconnects to the core at the same time.... Is the world ready for this new species?

The cultural richness of the Summer School cannot be narrowly reduced to diversity statistics and data. These are important metrics but not the ultimate marker of how we best learn and unlearn together. Sebastian playfully describes this Summer School dynamic:

We are liminal people. We are people who left home and never reached but fell in love with the camp in between ... Never to reach is the way, for at our destination the seeking stops and we grow fangs and learn to discriminate, deduce, and fight. We are fluid, mixed, always in flux people.... We live between land and water. To know ourselves we should become. To become we should engage in our infinite dynamism.

For Isabel Lima, one of the visiting facilitators, the Summer School is a platform for radical connection and solidarity in an otherwise divisive world. Working collaboratively is not plain sailing, writes Lima. It is wracked with tensions and pitfalls; yet the

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The cultural richness of the Summer School cannot be narrowly reduced to diversity statistics and data.

potential of doing so outweighs everything else, since it involves a speculative act and leap into the unknown.

Working collaboratively entails a relational process of exchange between people. This does not mean that relations are equal at all points in the process of exchange. What it means is that there is a commitment to working together and to undergo a continual shifting process where roles change; power is fluid; and vulnerability, respect and mutual responsibility are fundamental.... All of us gathered in the Summer School ... are not interested in working with others to adapt, adjust or fit into the status quo. We want the right to be visible, to dignity, to justice, to exist within our individual worlds of sense and form relations stemming from where our worlds intersect.

Lima's 'relational process of exchange' is echoed in Leanne McDonagh's naming of the site-specific markers in and around the Summer School venue of Killary Lodge, which serve as a catalyst for feelings of connectedness to the surrounding landscape – unfamiliar yet familiar – with some triggering deep-seated memories and associations. McDonagh describes this push and pull of the place and her negotiation of being part of a learning group yet nonetheless testing the boundaries of mutual empathy in the light of her own identity:

The topics of 'home', 'borders' and 'belonging' arose a lot.... I will never forget being told early in the week by another participant, that he couldn't contemplate how I could feel like

an outsider in my own country when all he could see when he looked at me was my Irishness. It became apparent to me that if I wished to hide my identity for the want of an easier life, I could. While others who may want to, could not. I explained to him that I choose not to do so because I am very aware of the inequalities that exist for Travellers in Irish society today.

The Idea of Community and Connectedness: Embodied Rights

Humans share the air with one another and with animals; they share the surfaces of the world. They touch what others have touched and they touch one another. These reciprocal and material modes of sharing describe a crucial dimension of our vulnerability, intertwinements and our embodied social life.

**Judith Butler, 'Mourning is a Political Act
Amid the Pandemic and its Disparities'²**

Despite current decrees of physical distancing and self-isolation, the Covid-19 virus has powerfully revealed our interdependency in a wider world. As Judith Butler describes, it has made our vulnerability and connectedness palpable, material and indisputable. For families who have lost loved ones and have had to mourn in private and at a distance, vulnerability cannot adequately be put into words. Yet Butler holds out for a sense

² Butler, J (30 April 2020) *Mourning Is a Political Act Amid the Pandemic and Its Disparities*. *Truthout*.



of hope and connection though a politics of collective mourning: 'What someone suffers is not one's own suffering, but the loss that the stranger endures traverses the personal loss one feels, potentially connecting strangers in grief.'

Connectedness, the relational, empathy, process, exchange, communication, community, collaboration and embodiment are some of the interchangeable key words of the Summer School, in that they define how learning and unlearning is experienced and how collaborative practice is continuously interrogated. Curator Mary Jane Jacob, draws upon American philosopher John Dewey's description of what it means to build a community through communication and connection:

It is through communication we can create community, Dewey thought. Communication is the way to build democracy. As a social idea, as well as a political system of government, democracy is "incarnated in human relationships," causing it to be "not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the idea of community life itself."

Mary Jane Jacob, *Dewey for Artists*³

When we lose that sense of 'connectedness', writes Jacobs, we are in danger of losing our humanity, and the role of some artists is to bring into being a 'potential community'.

Linguist and festival curator, Francesca La Morgia, explores this vital intersection between spoken language

³ Jacob, M. A (2018). *Dewey for Artists*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press



(communication) and cultural connectedness, especially for bilingual children who are the bearers and carriers (carers) of multiple cultural worlds; yet often 'encouraged' to 'become monolingual'. The importance of the 'social' in facilitating children's ability and willingness to speak multiple languages is paramount for La Morgia, as is the notion of the 'potential community' re-imagined through linguistic diversity and freedom of expression.

Responding to the visiting artist Caroline Bergvall's presentation at the Summer School, La Morgia writes:

[Caroline's] work marries the two worlds of linguistics and creative expression, the patterns that make language such a perfect machine, and the emotions that make it so profound. What I loved most about her work was the accuracy in the research and the technical aspect of studying and literally exhibiting 'the complexities of language' in a new way... Language is used to communicate, but it is also an intrinsic part of us, something we get judged on, something that distinguishes humans from one another, as there are no two people who speak in exactly the same way.

Freedom of expression and speech is about the right to speak in your 'mother tongue' but also to artistically provoke, as visiting facilitator Mary Ann DeVlieg puts it, to be free to contest, critique or perform everyday creative acts. De Vlieg encourages socially engaged artists to strategically claim their place as facilitators of 'free thought':

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Freedom of expression and speech is about the right to speak in your 'mother tongue' but also to artistically provoke.

4 Finklepearl, T. (2013) *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Cooperation*. Durham: Duke University Press

That is, while acknowledging the power and beauty of the arts in taking a distance from worldly affairs, in order to better reflect it back to us, we should be outspoken and at times deliberate in the performance of rights-based approaches.

DeVlieg argues for increased vigilance in relation to the legal right of freedom of expression – perhaps taken for granted by artists in the Global North yet increasingly under threat globally.

Social Cooperation and Collaboration

At times the learning and unlearning finds grounding in the exchanges between artists and facilitators at the Summer School and in the small, cumulative acts of reciprocity among participants themselves.

At the center of the Summer School's pedagogy over the past two years has been the 'cooperative' challenge where we ask participants to work on a project together. The MÁK (reproduced on p24–25.) is a wholly fictional entity yet designed to open a space for the deliberative (in-house) enactment of cooperation. 'Social cooperation' as Tom Finklepearl suggests, 'implies that people have worked together on a project' in contrast with one solely shaped by collaboration where artists might unwittingly reap the community rewards and claim (in retrospect) a final stake as 'initiator or orchestrator'.⁴ Social cooperation is a demanding process, since it entails equal participation with a community – not easy to pull off even with tried and tested intentions.

Bernadette Divilly, a participant at the 2018 Summer School and a visiting artist in 2019, vividly describes the vexed fault lines of cooperation and the everyday power dynamics and complexities beyond the intentional community of the Summer School. For Divilly, cooperative work takes time, often-revealing stark inequalities and intricate 'systems of [local] power':

The MÁK project brought my two preoccupations together – the art of relationship and the art of cultural connection. “Waves Under the Bridge” was a project created for my home city Galway by my small (MÁK) mock-funding project group, Hina, Kizito and Tomasz. We did well together. Artistic ideas were flowing and skills in our team were impressive.... What was simple in the Summer School became way more complex.... When we sat at the table during the Summer School to create our project ... we were all sitting in equal space at one level. Except the difference was that I was the only person at that table who came from Ireland. This gave me local power in terms of knowledge of place. Other people had other power that was really interesting. Recognition of what different sources of power we bring to creative artistic collaborations is necessary. We were doing that. Again it takes time.

Divilly raises critical issues in relation to belonging and the shifting sands of 'equality' or the confluence of 'rights' that are repeatedly rehearsed in and across socially engaged art. As we make our way through Covid 19 and anticipate what lies ahead, we cannot fail to see the glaring inequalities that the pandemic has



laid bare. Inequalities that have been historically and firmly rooted across health, home, work and race but are now revealed with an unprecedented brutal clarity.

Connected Actors

The state of society depends at every moment on the associations between many actors, most of whom do not have human forms. This is true of microbes – as we have known since Pasteur – but also of the Internet, the law, the organization of hospitals, the logistics of the state, as well as the climate.

Bruno Latour, 'Is this a Dress Rehearsal?'⁵

Referencing the pandemic, Latour's title alludes to what we might expect to emerge in the near future; how we might re-configure that narrowing term 'society'. 'The state of society', he suggests, is a deeply woven web of associated, at times unlikely, but fundamentally, connected actors.

Arguably, the field of social practice is highly attuned to respond to this current crisis and to Latour's image of the 'state of society'. Socially engaged artists are often deft at, as Lima puts it, 'implementing a relational process of exchange between people'. Why so? Mainly, since their projects are located within and across communities, such as housing associations and residents in diverse neighbourhoods, negotiating with city and town councils

5 Latour, B. (2020). *Is this a Dress Rehearsal? Critical Inquiry: A Journal of Art, Culture and Politics*. Chicago. Chicago University Press.



and health agencies, education and civic sectors together with building relationships with funders and sponsors. Theirs is an art form of which connectedness, empathy and generosity is a crucial component as is navigating the 'associations between many actors', posited by Latour.

These are surely valuable skills to harness and align during this present conjuncture and as we move forward. To think and act horizontally across infrastructures with the understanding that 'connectedness' is not about the privilege of the local and the few but can and should be enacted between diverse communities, social and non-human actors and civic and governmental sectors across multiple, geographical borders.

For the past two years Create and Counterpoints Arts have co-produced a distinctive learning platform in the form of the Summer School. A collaboration enabling two differently situated organisations to work in cross-border solidarity. As we stretch our capabilities and imaginations, to greet the third iteration of the 2020 Summer School – whether virtual or otherwise – I am confident that we will continue to build a dynamic curriculum and ecosystem, in which linguistic and cultural diversity can be negotiated through the field of socially engaged art and through everyday practices of contact and exchange.

We would be wise to heed the words of Roy, Latour and others who challenge us to radically re-think and re-imagine society and the 'social' as an intricate and complex matrix of associations, human and non-human. As this publication goes to print, we have witnessed the seismic and transformative influence of the Black

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Theirs is an art form of which connectedness, empathy and generosity is a crucial component.

Lives Matter movement, an interconnected movement that has tenaciously spent the last seven years working to bring about structural change in relation to race, equality and civil and human rights. It is imperative that its dramatic global impact does not belie the deeper history and legacy of colonialism from which it stems. As we embrace the unpredictability of where the 'pandemic portal' might eventually lead us, we commit to a rigorous interrogation of the past, to the present-future in which we responsibly and carefully cultivate 'newness' as an integral component of our reconfigured conception of the 'social'.

Appendix I

Participant Biographies

Alice McDowell is a freelance documentary filmmaker working both locally and internationally on the subject of minority rights. Intertwining observation, collaboration and storytelling, Alice has created films with different cultural and community groups, including Mother & Baby home survivors, Muslim feminists, LGBTI activists, asylum seekers and the Traveller community. Alice is originally from Australia and is now based in Galway.

Anca Danila was born in Romania, and frequently travels between Romania and her home in Dublin. Through her work she demonstrates her interest in psychology, anthropology and contemporary sociology; and explores transitions between geographical zones and cultural identities.

Beata Piekarska-Daly is a Polish born visual artist, working in Dublin since 2008. She is an environmental artist interested in working with arts centers and local communities. Her works are based on collaboration and engagement with different audiences through visual and practical research based mostly on environment and cultural heritage.

Declan O’ Mahony is an artist and environmental activist, living and working in Cork. He has worked on the Source to Sea project, an extensive campaign to protect an inland river forest delta in southern Ireland, and created a feature documentary entitled RIVER RUNNER (2014).

Francesca La Morgia, originally from Italy, has been involved in a range of community projects primarily with migrant families in Ireland and in the UK. In 2017, she created Mother Tongues, a non-profit organization that aims to support migrant families in raising children with two or more languages. Francesca is the curator of the Mother Tongues Festival, the only festival in Ireland that focuses on multilingualism.

Jijo Sebastian is an Indian immigrant filmmaker living in Ireland with his family for the past twelve years. In general, his practice can be described as the filmmaker curating her/his own response to the subjective experiences she/he has with the people she/he interacts with, in the collaboration process.

Léa Blanchard is from a French/ Irish background, living in Dublin. She graduated with a BA in Visual Arts from IADT and is currently completing an MA in Cultural Policy and Arts Management in UCD. She is Create’s 2019/2020 Associate Fellow, Research and Programme.

Leanne McDonagh is a visual artist from the Travelling community. She has worked as an artist and art teacher for the past 7 years and more recently as the Traveller Education Coordinator with Cork Institute of Technology.

Lisa Crowne is a socially engaged artist and curator. She holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Community Arts Education from NCAD and a BA Hons in Textile Design from GMIT. Her main work is with A4 Sounds, a nonprofit socially-engaged arts organisation based in Dublin. Their politics are feminist, antiracist, anticapitalist, and LGBTQ+ inclusive.

Nasrin Golden is an Iranian visual artist currently residing in Dublin. Her work, employing various artforms, opens a dialogue about femininity and masculinity from the perspective of a female immigrant artist.

Nathalie El Baba was born in Beirut, Lebanon, and moved to England with her family during the civil war. Nathalie has been based in Ireland since 1990, living and working as an artist and art facilitator in Co. Clare. Her artworks are responsive, and seek to connect with and convey social, physical and emotional landscapes.

Rajinder Singh was born in Ipoh, Malaysia and lives in Dublin. His paintings and installations as well as photography, video and performance work explore ideas around the vulnerable body and its pain, interrogating the economies of power that deny it space and shape. His practice explores the ways the human body unfolds around various topographic and symbolic borders.

Waheed Mohiuddin, originally from Pakistan is a university lecturer, a fiction writer, researcher, and a motivational speaker, living in direct provision since 2015. Waheed is a former recipient of the AIC Scheme Research and Development award, having developed a series of workshops on short story writing for those living in direct provision, and has developed a documentary entitled “The Excluded”, about the lives of Ex-Muslims in Ireland.

Appendix II

Facilitator/ Guest Artist Biographies

Áine Crowley is Programme Manager, Arts and Engagement with Create. Áine advances Create's work to support artists and communities of interest and/or place to realise high-quality collaborative arts practice, through ongoing professional development support, project opportunities and the development of cross-sectoral alliances and partnerships. Áine coordinates the Artist in the Community Scheme, providing project and proposal advice and support, information and guidance to applicants. Áine has worked with Voluntary Arts Ireland as Development Officer, and with dlr County Council Arts Office as Youth Arts Development Worker. Áine worked in Mayfield Arts, Cork for eight years where she collaborated with a diverse range of communities including Cúig – Creativity Unlimited an Integrated Group. Áine holds a BA Fine Art Printmaking from Limerick School of Art and Design.

Dr Áine O'Brien is Curator of Learning and Research and Co-Founder (Co-Director 2012–2020) of Counterpoints Arts, London.

Áine has worked across the arts, education and activism for over 30 years in the US, Ireland and the UK. Áine set up CTMP (Centre for Transcultural Research and Media Practice)

in 2005, housing one of the first doctoral programmes aligning migration research with the creative arts. She created FOMACS (Forum on Migration and Communications) in 2007, developing creative arts and cross-sector public projects focusing on migration and social justice.

Her productions to date (spanning documentary film, print, exhibition and curation) explore global storylines linking migration with human rights and social change.

Áine currently leads Counterpoints Arts' Learning Lab programme, developing national and international learning/creative production partnerships. She co-curates the collective, cross-arts programme 'Who are We' at Tate Exchange, Tate Modern. She is a Trustee of Refugee Rights Europe and Highlight Arts. Forthcoming publications include: *Art, Migration and the Production of Radical Democratic Citizenship* (Co-edited with Dr Agnes Czajka, The Open University) with Rowman and Littlefield International under Frontiers of the Political: Doing International Politics Series, 2020.

Bernadette Divilly is a choreographer and dancer who has a love for the wild. Her professional work has included health education and somatic psychotherapy. Her dancing career spans almost four decades and is focused on lifecycles, health and wellbeing through movement awareness. She is influenced by and connected to an international community of innovative dancer & artists who engage with improvisation, explorations of mutuality and the politics of the body and land. Based in Galway, her home landscape and culture is the West of Ireland, a place deeply embedded in her bones.

Caroline Bergvall is a poet and sound artist who works across artforms, media, languages, histories. Her award-winning pieces alternate between books, performances, sound installations and prints. She frequently works with other artists, musicians, and scholars, and shows internationally. The recipient of many international commissions, she is a noted exponent of writing and performance methods adapted to contemporary audiovisual and contextual situations, as well as multilingual identities and translocal exchange. Caroline's projects alternate between books and printed matter, collaborative performances, site-specific

installations and soundworks. Her work frequently develops through exploring material traces, literary documents, historical languages, hidden or forgotten knowledges. Her sparse textual, spatial and audio works often expose hidden or difficult historical/political events.

Evgeny Shtorn is an LGBT-activist and researcher from St. Petersburg. In 2018, he was forced to leave Russia, and in 2019 was granted international protection in the Republic of Ireland. He currently works with Create as Cultural Diversity Researcher, and co-facilitates the project 'Something From There' in the National Gallery of Ireland. His writings have been published in academic journals, anthologies and new media in Russia, Spain, Germany, and Ireland. As an activist Shtorn has been involved in human rights and LGBT advocacy for almost two decades. He founded the grassroots initiative Queer Diaspora Ireland in support of victims of gender-based violence and LGBT people in direct provision. In 2020 Shtorn received the GALA Person of the Year award by the National LGBT Federation of Ireland.

Isabel Lima is an artist and researcher based in the UK since 2001. Lima develops socially engaged works, which question

the sense of belonging, identity, place and culture. Her own family history of displacement is the catalyst for her research. In her practice Lima develops collaborative and/or participatory works with different groups of people, namely refugees and asylum seekers. The outcomes of her projects usually take the form of video, performance, publication and installation.

Isabel is interested in probing the contradiction between the theoretical framework of postcolonialism and the structures governing our society today, looking at ways of mapping and rendering visible the current refugee crisis in Europe and investigating the role and responsibilities of the artist as a mediator and image producer when engaging audiences with the issues of ethics, risk and precariousness.

Jane O'Rourke is Create's Office Manager, responsible for administrative and operational support for Create projects and events, including the Summer School. She holds a certificate in crafts from Grennan Mill Craft School, a HND in Design from Blackrock Institute of Further Education and a BSc in Education and Training from Dublin City University.

Mary Ann DeVlieg is an internationally experienced consultant, facilitator and trainer with a background in the arts, arts mobility and policy. She evaluates international cultural collaboration projects and policies for the European Commission and charitable foundations. Since 2010 she has been working to protect and defend the rights of artists-at-risk; she founded the EU working group, Arts-Rights-Justice, co-founded Artsfex, advises and trains artists and arts organisations on protection and defence. At freeDimensional (2013 – 2015), she led strategic organisational development, and is a co-founder of the Arts-Rights-Justice Academy at the University of Hildesheim. She is a case consultant for at-risk artists and a frequent speaker and conference moderator. Mary Ann has been an active political lobbyist on behalf of the arts and in 2006 was awarded the EU Individual Prize for services to artists' mobility.

Appendix III

Reading List

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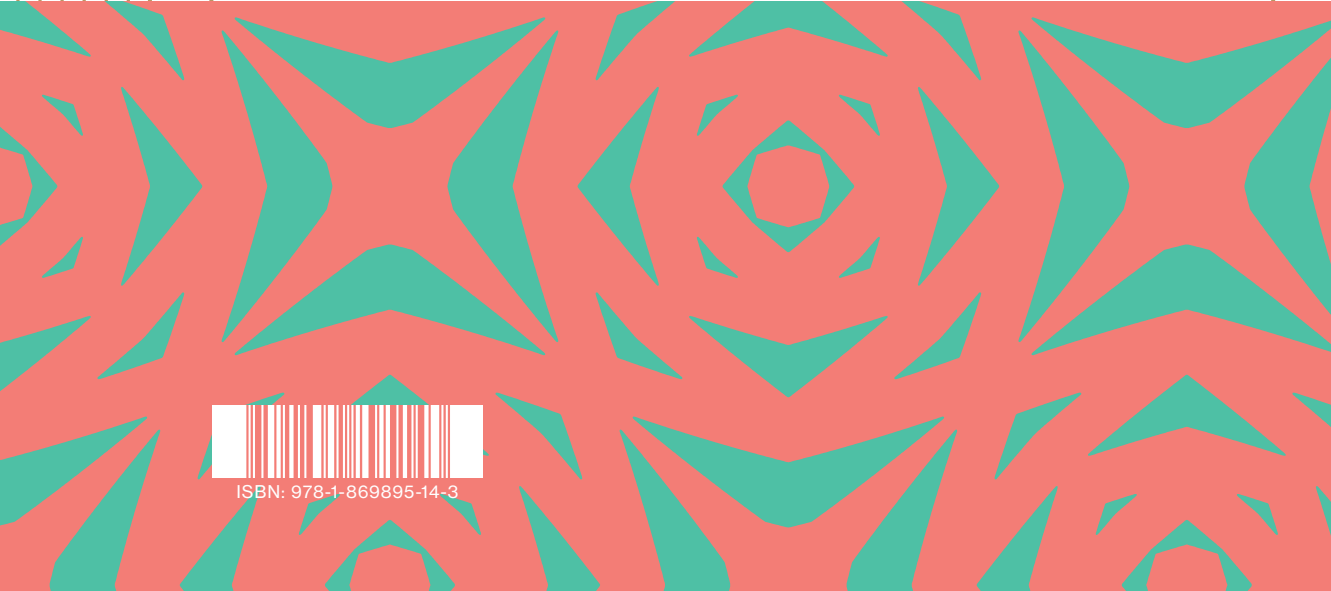
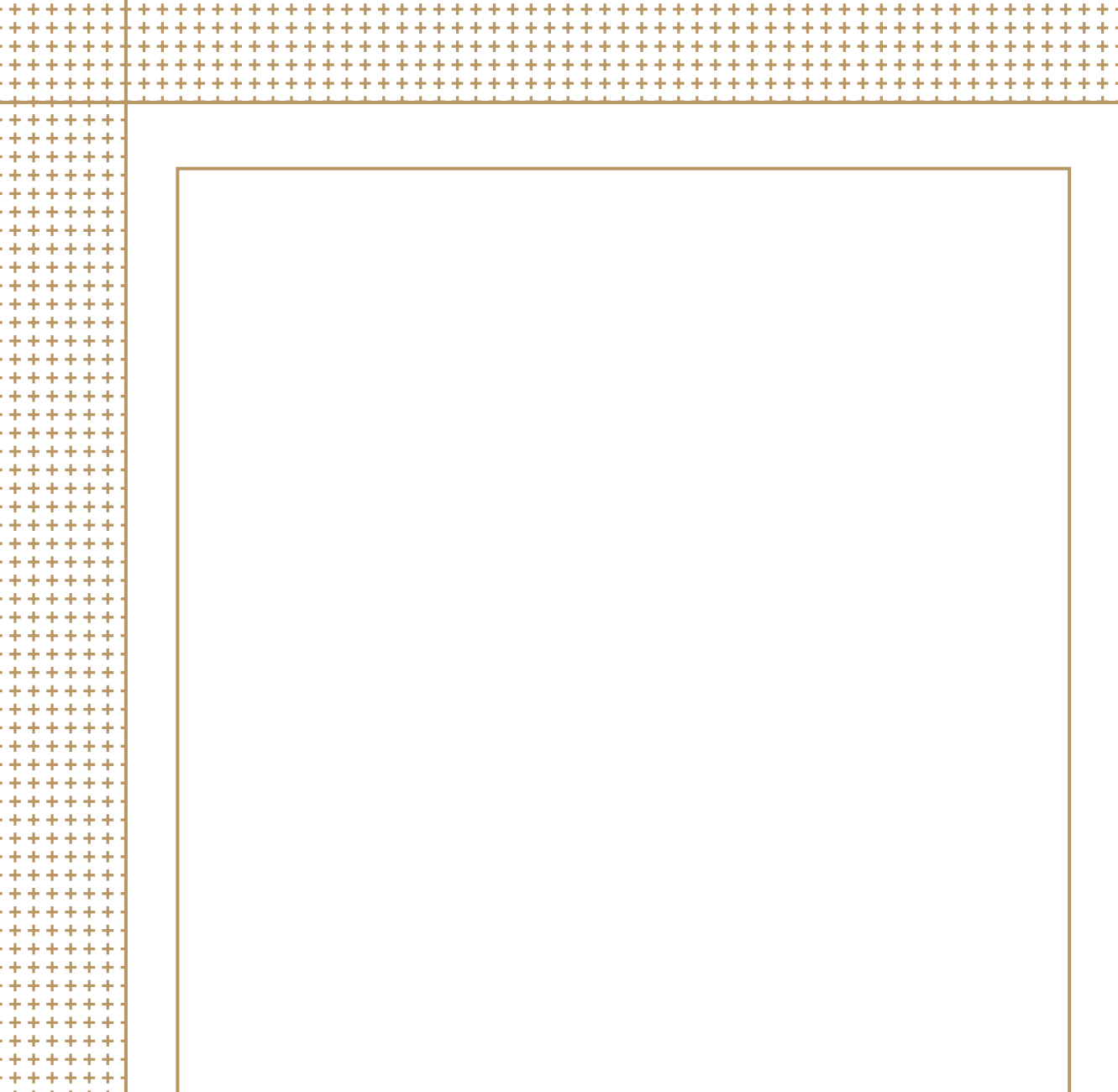
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