



Commissioned Essays

Preface

Age & Opportunity is Ireland's national development agency promoting quality of life for everyone aged 50 – 100 and beyond. One of its flagship events is the Bealtaine festival, Ireland's national festival celebrating the arts and creativity as we age. Bealtaine was founded in 1995 and is one of Ireland's largest festivals, taking place each May across the country.

One of the key aims of Bealtaine is to platform artwork and experiences, which inspire, reflect on, showcase and celebrate all of the permutations and complexities of older life. As part of this, one of the festival goals is to create new opportunities for artists in the second half of their career so that they can create a significant piece of work as part of a national festival.

Tar isteach (This Irish language phrase translates as 'Come In'), 2019-2020 led out by Ground Up artists collective, was the third in a Bealtaine/ local authority pilot commission series designed to support artists (and audiences) to create new work in response to Bealtaine, in different regions of the country. For this commission, Clare, Galway City and Roscommon County Councils were the local authority partners and their hinterlands the focus of the commission. The Irish Museum of Modern Art was a fourth partner who provided a supported residency with the commission.

By linking with different local authorities around Ireland, Age & Opportunity aimed to create opportunities for national Bealtaine audiences/participants to experience high quality art in their locality, as well as to ensure that artists had access to greater financial and community resources in developing work for the festival. As such, local engagement was key to the success of the commissions and has been central to the development of Tar Isteach in the three counties.

The starting point for Tar Isteach was based on the festival theme at the time: hospitality, hosting and welcome (with the festival tagline, *Be Our Guest*), although the intention was for the theme to go further than a simple festival welcome. Hospitality as a concept was selected in response to the rise in politically and culturally transformative events around the world centring around migration, im-migration and the displacement of cultures. The theme was particularly influenced by Jacques Derrida's philosophical work on the *Ethics of Hospitality*, which was used as a conceptual frame for festival events.

Using this theme, we sought to inspire as well as uncover the philosophical underpinning of the (apparently) benign principle of hospitality, a principle as central to Ireland as all cultures and relentlessly perpetuated through identity narratives around (Irish) generosity and welcome. We wanted to look at the conflicting understandings, or disavowals of hospitality driving the geo-political and philosophical crisis of nation states in relation to their reception or rejection of displaced strangers, in this case relating to Ireland.



Derrida's *Ethics of Hospitality* posited hospitality as paradoxical in relation to how curiosity towards the new or strange co-exists with fear of 'the other' and the necessary rejection of 'the other' in choosing who to include or not include (cultures, societies, migrants). These paradoxes also spoke to the superior position of the host who is *able*, or has the means or agency to welcome. Ground Up (Maeve Collins, Monica de Bath and Julie Griffiths) used this concept to develop Tar Isteach and in partnering with 'New Irish' residents and citizens in Galway (Salthill), Clare (Lisdoonvarna) and Roscommon (Ballaghaderreen). Using the principle of welcome, shared experiences and inevitably critique in their meetings, workshops and interactions, Ground Up created an ambitious but highly nuanced project which gently explored the precarious and alternate reality of the participants, underpinned by the shared humanity of connection.

Although the Covid-19 pandemic has led to the cancellation and pivoting of aspects of Tar Isteach, the critical substance of the work is already complete, relationships have been formed and knowledge generated.

The Tar Isteach publication aims to bring together this knowledge, provide: insight into the artists and participants collaborative process; documentation of the shared encounters that were Tar Isteach; reflections on the lived experience of Direct Provision (Vukasin Nedeljkovic); thoughts on migration and identity (Moran Been-noon) as well as consideration of Derrida's thoughts on Hospitality (Joanne Laws). In conjunction with project partners Galway City, Clare and Roscommon County Councils Bealtaine Festival / Age & Opportunity is proud to have supported this body of work by Ground Up Artists Meave Collins, Monica de Bath and Julie Griffiths.

Dr. Tara Byrne
Artistic Director
Bealtaine Festival / Age & Opportunity

November, 2020



Direct Provision Diary

Excerpt, 2007-2009

My window is divided in half. There are yellow marks at both sides of the window. The mark on the left side of the window is bigger and wider than the mark on the right side of the window. I can't see anything through the window in my room in the Centre. The yellow marks are obstructing my view. The yellow marks are on the outside of the window. I can't clean the yellow marks. I don't look through my window. You can only see two big yellow marks if you look through the window in my room.

I look through my stained window. There are fields in the distance. They seem too far away. I can't see the greenness of the fields. It rains almost every day. The fields are becoming greener every minute. I want to see the fields with my tired, sleepless eyes. I am afraid to leave room 24. I can't smell the fields. I am not able to smell the wildlife. It is just around the corner. There are walls and barriers on the way. I can leave the Centre to see the fields and smell the wildlife; but I am afraid that, if I leave the Centre, I won't be able to come into my room again.

Direct Provision as a Camp

Direct provision scheme was introduced in Ireland in November 1999. There were over 160 Centres located across the country; some of the buildings include Convents, Army Barracks, former Hotels, Holiday Homes, etc. Most of the Centres are situated outside of the cities on the periphery of this society. That decision significantly reduced integration with the local population leaving asylum seekers community to dwell in a ghettoized environment.

When the Irish State initiated the Direct Provision Scheme, it deliberately constructed a space where institutional racism could be readily instantiated, explicitly through, for example, the threat of transfer to a different accommodation Centre to deportations. Despite the significant similarities and structures in institutional abuses in previous Irish Carceral Institutions and Direct Provision or Emergency Accommodation Centres – a relatively new anomaly created by the State of Ireland, we may possibly conclude that there is one extra element that is added to traumas of being an asylum seeker and that is a state of deportability and the constant fear of being deported. After an implementation of Single Application Procedure in 2015, the deportations and forcible removals of 'fallen' asylum seekers have increased significantly and only today we can see the absolute devastation of our policies.

In an interview one of the residents from Direct Provision Centre in Dublin shares his experience of witnessing the brutality of deportations.

Last week, from 03:00 in the morning, to 04:00, seven people come. They got the key from the security; we don't know how they got the key. They come, my friend was sleeping, they open



his door, he was sleeping, and they wake him up, and they took him, deported him. Imagine the shock, you wake up, seven people, big and strong. Like the worst terrorists, the way they arrest the worst terrorists, and you are surrounded by seven big guy. He couldn't take many things, that was even shocking for people witnessing that. Some told them that, he will never forget that image he has, that image will always remain in his mind, for the rest of his life, and many people were traumatized until now.

That shock will remain for a long time, and you, you're waiting, you don't know who will be the next and when. The trauma, that's I don't know if there are any kind of torture, worse than that. You go to sign every month, many times, many people I knew, went to sign, they never come back.

In this sense, Direct Provision Centres are "the absence of everything . . . the place where the bottom has dropped out of everything, an atmospheric density, a plenitude of the void, or the murmur of silence" (Levinas 46).

I have been visiting various Direct Provision Centres in Ireland since the beginning of Pandemic and what I have witnessed is a total failure of the Irish State to look after vulnerable and marginalised members of the community. Some of the international protection applicants from Africa who may have experienced similar kind of RNA type of virus like Ebola destroying and disseminating the villages of rural Africa, at the time, have witnessed the devastation before. Others were in total shock and fear and horror of getting the virus as their roommate, for instance, lives only 40 cm distance from you. They breathe the same air. They share the same room. The recommended social distancing of at least 2 meters was not been achievable in Direct Provision where residents already lived in cramped, unhygienic and overcrowded conditions.

The lack of care for people in Direct Provision made me think about methods of extermination and I use this word deliberately since for example the formation of Nazi Camps. We have 'developed' and 'evolved' over the last while as a society and we have different methods of torture but isn't the goal almost the same? To eradicate sick, disabled, vulnerable, undesirable.

Post Direct Provision Diary, 2010 - 2020

I collapsed. Breakdown. Again.

Aras Attracta residential home. In Swinford. Single bed in a small room. Chair. The white towel that says - Hospital. The window looks into the small garden. Outside is a smoking den. Covered with cigarette butts. It's very cold.



I wish to go for a walk. I was not allowed. Only in the company of nurses. I haven't done anything wrong. It started to snow. We walked together. I stopped often. To breath. To write few words with my finger. Into the snow.

Television. Irish soap operas. News. Sport. Then at 6 pm I hear the bells. Loud noises. The nurse says - this is not for you - it is only for us Irish. Angelus prayer. My friend drives me to take photographs of Emergency Accommodation Centres for asylum seekers. Dispersed across this island. Corona pandemic times. Dark continuous apocalyptic times.

Works Consulted: Derrida Jacques, 'Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression', *Diacritics* 25: 2 (1995), 57.
Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Time and the Other and Additional Essays*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1987. Print.

Vukašin Nedeljković, 2020

Vukašin Nedeljković is a visual artist and researcher. He initiated the multidisciplinary project, Asylum Archive, to collaborate with asylum seekers, artists, academics, civil society activists and immigration lawyers, amongst others, with a view to creating an interactive documentary cross-platform online resource, critically foregrounding accounts of exile, displacement, trauma and memory. www.asylumarchive.com



Drawing, Folding, Stitching - creating the social seam

“While there is the potential to acquire the conceptual components of national identity, it is very difficult if not impossible to relive your childhood, change your physicality, transform your linguistic self and reinvent your family.”¹

Migration and relocation are very physical acts and involve a person leaving where they were born and raised and moving to another country. Somehow, most of us view the processes following migration, namely integration or assimilation, as totally psychological. TAR ISTEACH | COME IN is a visual demonstration of the social seam between ‘New Irish’ and Native Irish as it is explored by the artists Julie Griffiths, Maeve Collins, and Monica de Bath, as part of Bealtaine Festival 2020 Commission. The artists produced a series of encounters with groups where the participants confronted the idea of hospitality in the context of their life as newcomers in Ireland, and through this process the physicality of post-migration life shone through.

That’s very much a focus for me, where the edges of things are, who is in and who is out, who has permission and who doesn’t have permission.

Julie Griffith worked with a group of refugees and asylum seekers in the Emergency Reception & Orientation Centre in Ballaghaderreen, Co. Roscommon to produce a series of engagements with local community residents during COVID-19 restrictions. Before the restrictions, the group was working on different methods of cultural events where the centre residents would be hosts to the local community members. The idea of hosting remained the focus of the activity, adding a certain agency to newcomers’ role in society, which is an aspect of hospitality that should be considered more often: welcoming is something only those who belong can do. Griffith paired participants from the two groups so that each pair has the same age and gender, and the centre residents were the ones initiating the communication in the form of posting cards, placing them as de facto hosts of this long-distance conversation. This project was not aimed at the creation of a success story of becoming. The process of being an individual from one culture who lives in another is a complicated one and this project presented an opportunity for agency without expecting the catharsis of success or failure. Rather, it recognised that while starting a conversation with another person in your region seems like a simple action, the physicality of post-migration life, including, access to resources and social activities in times of crisis, draws clear boundaries to our ability to stay true to our customs.

In Lisdoonvarna, County Clare, Maeve Collins brought together groups of new mothers, both local and residents of the Direct Provision Centre. There are different types of support new parents rely

1 Hanauer, David Ian. “Non-Place Identity: Britain’s Response to Migration in the Age of Supermodernity.” Identity, Belonging and Migration, edited by GERARD DELANTY et al., Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2008, p. 205



on: learning from the knowledge of previous generations of their family and community, sharing the day-to-day responsibilities or child-minding, and offering support to the mother during the

postpartum period. The proverbial village that it takes to welcome a new born into this world can become a palpable void in a post-migration context, without the community setting we trust and feel comfortable relying on. This is particularly the case for mothers who are asylum seekers or refugees, and lack this loving, trusted network if they want to breastfeed, a difficult decision that often requires medical as well as generational support. Collins' aim was to offer a social bond that would, at least physically, fill that space by creating a breastfeeding group. The difficulties in creating a consistent collective were built into the women's status, not controlling their own timeline or location, which made it close to impossible to construct a safe space that later allows for participation as part of social assimilation.

I think there is a great sense of vitality in our group, especially in the beginning, when we were sharing and encountering different cultures crossing over, and totally forgetting where we were (in order) to meet each other in that space.

Collins also organised community encounters focused on domestic spaces, deliberating on the role of the kitchen as an important point of congregation in the homes of newcomers, or in the case of some of the participants who live in Direct Provision Centres, the meaning of not having a kitchen in a home, once again seeing how a physical condition bears down on post-migration life. Collins organised workshops for bread-making, basket weaving, and other crafts where materials were provided but the knowledge, much like in the case of the breastfeeding groups, was shared by the participants. The encounters granted the participants an agency through their expertise that their status, as it is defined by the state, denied them.

Monica de Bath connected with residents and volunteers who worked a garden won from waste ground within the Eglinton Direct Provision Accommodation Centre in Galway. She collaborated with resident families and a volunteer horticulturalist in support of developing the garden as a poetic space. Working within the garden as a community, either gardening or drawing in an outdoors space was designed as a discussion-through-practice of the physicality of life in a new place. The aim was to facilitate the residents in developing a toolkit for sharing their experiences with each other.

*Each person is involved in working on their own thing. It allows them time to breath...
Having control of what's in front of you, there's something political in that.*

Working the soil gave a non-ephemeral representation of the agency possible through community collaboration. Beyond the physicality of the access to land, the activity as well as the accompanying drawing comment on matters of climate and biodiversity in the context of contemporary migration practices. Crop growing often relies on traditional practices and knowledge of the land and the weather. This collaborative skills sharing between native and newcomer communities is crucial to allow for the development of a healthy community in post-migration situations, with active roles given to the groups as they become participating residents and later citizens.



TAR ISTEACH | COME IN facilitates and promotes projects that, with time, can bear fruit for our entire community as the welcoming and developing migrants' cultural practices will grow to be considered a mainstream practice in contemporary Ireland.

Monica de Bath

For artist Monica de Bath the existence of the poetic in places, relationships, and objects, is a fundamental aspect of her practice. For Tar Isteach, de Bath focused on facilitating the creation of a poetic space in an outdoors community garden. Her idea was for the work in the garden, be it gardening, making art, or simply being outside together, to act as an instigator for reimagining conversation. de Bath learned about the make-up of the community of residents in Eglinton through encounters, and noticed that many of the families at the Direct Provision Centre are quite young, and that often the older members of the expanded family remained in another country. This led to two important realisations: skill sharing, which would have happened within expanded families between generations, needed to be re-defined according to this new situation; young families who migrate often rely on the children to lead their engagement with the world outside the family unit.

I think it's going to link into bigger things and to look into the way creatives) support people from different cultures actually being the artists collaborators in creative projects like this.

The artist set out to create the possibility for a place and time to spend time together as a community in a relatively equalising situation. Drawing, painting, gardening and minding the garden, or playing together, were activities that allowed the residents to decompress and practice a fertile relationship with their new land.

With COVID-19 restrictions, attending group meetings in the garden stopped and de Bath started online drawing sessions with the families and facilitating discussions about creating an outdoor drawing facility in the garden.

Julie Griffith

Julie Griffith works with residents of the Emergency Reception & Orientation Centre and with a group from the Men's Shed, both in Ballaghaderreen, County Roscommon. As part of her engagement with these groups, she makes sure to step into their interactions with awareness to questions of permission, agency, and access, and her treatment of this include a critical view on her own creative engagements in terms of gender, ethnicity, and age. Griffith is interested in the understanding the structures and systems of othering through her art practice. It is important for her to learn where the limits of society are placed before acting, to be aware of her position when engaging with those in society who have less agency. This has a direct impact on how her interactions are built.

Searching for the edges of things, who is "the other?" Am I "the other" as the artist entering their space? Do I become part of the institution?



Considering that it is typically women who tend to engage in collaborative creative practice, the artist selected the Men's Shed in order to support the development of male collaborative creativity, and as COVID-19 restrictions made it more challenging to gain access to the residents, Griffith developed various alternative methods that use language and craft skills as channels for more remote collaboration. Among these are a book of words and phrases about the idea of hospitality collected from the residents in their first languages, that are intended to be stitched together into a quilt.

Maeve Collins

A significant aspect of artist Maeve Collins' engagement with the group at the Lisdoonvarna Direct Provision Centre involved learning how the residents of the centre live through similar family life experiences to her own. Together with a group of mothers to new born babies, like herself, she examined the means of support accessible to them in terms of mentorship, resources, and equipment. Notably, she witnessed the gap in knowledge regarding breastfeeding, without intergenerational support within the community, and with no access to consultants at the Direct Provision Centre, most resident mothers had no other option than the use of formula.

Art is a proposal of the thing and then it is the thing. For me there was only one kitchen in direct provision, there's a lot of no kitchens. Also, there's not a way that you'd have a kitchen in Direct Provision. We were proposing to have a kitchen... making culture in the kitchen because there wasn't a kitchen.

In her interaction, Collins approaches the common awkwardness in the situation of being a stranger who steps into a community setting with complete openness. The question of who is the host and who is "the other" in the collaboration is one explicitly discussed as part of the interaction in detail. This approach, together with the artist's own experiences informing the engagement, opened up the relationship to allow for personal links and friendships to be created within the group and with the artist.

Moran Been-noon, Sept 2020

Moran Been-noon is a Dublin-based visual artist, independent curator, and art writer. Her writing has featured in such publications as Circa Magazine, The Sunday Times Ireland, and Visual Artists Ireland News Sheet. As an artist she predominantly makes moving image installations, with a subject matter focus on political identity and post-migration living. She is the in-house curator at the Belfast Print Workshop, and the current Curator-in-Residence at Glór, Ennis, Co. Clare. <https://mobespaces.wordpress.com>



Art & Hospitality: Towards a Poetic Space

*The warm, calm nest
In which a bird sings
Recalls the songs, the charms,
The pure threshold
Of my old home.*

— Jean Caubère, *Le Nid Tiède*, 1955²

From the mid-1990s onward, French philosopher, Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), wrote extensively on the ethics of hospitality, critically addressing the rising hostility of European governments towards immigrants.³ Derrida suggests that on the one hand, there is the law of ‘unconditional hospitality’ that ordains the unlimited reception of ‘the other’ – whether an immigrant, stranger or unexpected visitor – through the provision of hospitality without restrictions or expectations. On the other hand, there are the laws of ‘conditional hospitality’, which, while establishing a right to hospitality, simultaneously involve the imposition of political, juridical or moral conditions – for example, the restrictions controlling the foreigner’s right of entry and stay. Without the conditional laws, Derrida notes, the law of unconditional hospitality would become abstract, ineffective or even utopian. If the concept of hospitality contains inherent paradoxes and inequalities, then true or unconditional hospitality may be somewhat of an enigma. The responsible action, therefore, must involve continuously

²Notes:

Jean Caubère, ‘Le Nid Tiède’, *Déserts* (Paris: Debresse, 1955) p25.

³ See for example: Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, trans. R. Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Jacques Derrida, ‘Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility’, in *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*, ed. R. Kearney, M. Dooley (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 65-83; Jacques Derrida (2000), ‘Hospitality’, *Angelaki*, 5 (3), pp. 3-18; Jacques Derrida, ‘The Principle of Hospitality’, in *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005), pp. 66-69; Jacques Derrida ‘Hospitality’, in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York, London: Routledge, 2002) pp. 358-420.



negotiating between these two opposing positions, allowing hospitality to exist within lived experience – to be given by the ‘host’ to the ‘guest’, and then shared between them, in a process of reciprocal exchange.

It is within these conflicting understandings and disavowals of hospitality – particularly those that define Ireland’s current responses to the European migrant crisis – that Age & Opportunity’s Bealtaine Festival 2018-2020 was situated, using the slogan ‘Be Our Guest’ to explore implicit and philosophical notions of hosting, welcome and generosity. The Bealtaine Festival commission for 2020 – delivered in partnership with Galway City Council, Clare County Council and Roscommon County Council – is a participatory project, titled ‘Tar Isteach’, which translates as ‘Come In’. The project comprised three distinct but interconnected strands, developed in separate locations by artists Maeve Collins, Monica de Bath and Julie Griffiths. All three artists are members of the Ground Up Artists’ Collective – a support initiative for individual, collaborative and socially-engaged art practices, with a particular focus on rural ecologies. With the commission brief pointing towards ‘people on the margins’ (including ‘new Irish residents and citizens’), the artists opted to work with refugees and asylum seekers, currently housed in Direct Provision centres in Salthill (Galway City), Lisdoonvarna (County Clare) and in EROC⁴ services in Ballaghaderreen (County Roscommon). The methodologies for ‘Tar Isteach / Come In’ were informed by a developmental residency at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, and a roundtable discussion in October 2019, which was hosted by IMMA and led by the artists, with support from human rights activists, as well as representatives of the migrant community, the Department of Justice, Bealtaine Age and Opportunity, and Create. Over a 12-month period, each artist facilitated a range of hospitable and communal activities associated with domesticity and nurturing, such as gardening, breadmaking, weaving and sewing, aimed at generating dialogue and exchange. While considered ‘guests’, Direct Provision residents might also wish to host – to initiate, rather than to merely participate. As noted by Julie Griffiths, for active citizenship, the right to host is crucial.

⁴ EROC – Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre.



Be Our Guest: On Dwelling

In his seminal paper, ‘Building, Dwelling Thinking’, German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, examines the tenuous relationship between dwelling, housing, domesticity and architecture, suggesting that not all buildings are designed for dwelling.⁵ According to Heidegger, we must ask ourselves what it means to dwell, and whether a building, in itself, allows for dwelling. Tracing the etymological origins of the term ‘to build’, Heidegger proposed an evolution from the old German verb group, ‘bauen’, meaning ‘to be’. For Heidegger, building, is not merely the problem of providing shelter; it is an existential concern, relating to our essence of “being in the world”⁶.

Few would argue that the architecture of EROC or Direct Provision centres is conducive to meaningful forms of dwelling. The three centres involved in the ‘Tar Isteach’ project are all former hotels – the Eglinton Hotel in Salthill, Abbeyfield Hotel in Ballaghaderreen and King Thomond Hotel in Lisdoonvarna. As described by French anthropologist, Marc Augé, hotels typically fall under the designation of ‘non-places’ – spaces of anonymity, transience and loneliness.⁷ Though designated spaces of ‘capitalist hospitality’, hotels are not generally designed for domesticity or homemaking; for example, there are no designated kitchens for residents to cook their own meals. Alongside Direct Provision centres, hotels and B&Bs are also being widely used by the Irish state as emergency accommodation, to house growing numbers of homeless families, caused by a broken housing system. If the question of dwelling must ultimately be interrogated through an architectural setting, then circumstances become

⁵ Martin Heidegger, ‘Bauen Wohnen Denken (Building, Dwelling, Thinking)’ [paper first delivered at the post-war architectural conference, ‘Mensch und Raum (Man and Space)’, on 5 August 1951, Darmstadt, Germany], published in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Marc Augé, *Non-Places, Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Trans. John Howe (London: VERSO, 1995).



much more complex, when we consider the encroaching realities of globalisation, privatisation, displacement and forced migration.

With access to centres brokered by The Bridge in Galway⁸, and by artists in Clare and Roscommon, the artists had opportunities to cross the thresholds of buildings whose residents are troublingly hidden in plain sight in many Irish towns. Regional hostility has been widely reported in the media, articulating local resistance to Direct Provision centres – increasingly perceived by the public as an inhumane system, and a stark continuation of Ireland’s troubled history of institutional incarceration. The artists noted various barriers to participation, including asylum seekers who may be traumatised by their past experiences, those who have young children to look after, residents who felt their English was insufficient, or those who have previously experienced discrimination. Among the residents who did participate, exchanges with the artists were often sporadic, interrupted or even discontinued, due to their precarious status. Asylum seekers live under the continuous threat of deportation or being moved to other centres. As articulated by one of the artists, what value does a project on hospitality hold, when someone needs a letter for a judge?

This position of powerlessness was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹ Within congregated settings, many residents were unable to carry out social distancing and felt safer staying in their rooms for the duration of lockdown. Where possible, the artists tried to engage the residents remotely during this time, with conversations and interactions taking place via online platforms. During the summer months, fortnightly Zoom meetings, facilitated by an activist and long-term volunteer, brought together the expertise of Eglinton gardening

⁸ The Bridge project seeks to promote the effective delivery of reception and integration supports (including advocacy and capacity building interventions) to asylum seekers and third country nationals living in Galway City and County.

⁹ *‘Powerless’: Experiences of Direct Provision During the Covid-19 Pandemic*, Irish Refugee Council, August 2020.



residents, members of staff, volunteer horticulturalists,¹⁰ a resident musician and visual artists.¹¹ This listening and discussion space supported a sense of connectedness, while offering a forum for presentations relating to the harvesting of vegetables, fruit and seeds, as well as music and visual artefacts.¹² In addition, Monica posted pencils and sketchbooks to Eglinton residents, encouraging them to share their drawings via WhatsApp, while Julie utilised the platform for exchanging digital photographs. She invited EROC residents and local Irish citizens to take one photograph per day, to coincide with either the Islamic Salat midday prayer, or the Irish Angelus at 6pm, with the aim of simply ‘observing’ at the time of these religious observances. This project highlights the ways in which different cultures can find ways to coexist in any given place. During lockdown, Julie also initiated a postcard-writing exchange between residents and people in the community, offering a slower pace of encounter for paired participants of a similar age and gender.

Revolutions in Kitchen Culture

As stated by Maeve Collins, in Irish culture, the kitchen is often considered the heart of the home. To not include these ‘heart-spaces’ in Direct Provision and EROC centres, could be perceived as a distinctly inhospitable act. Not only does this deny residents the autonomy of cooking for their families, but it also disallows traditional recipes and cooking methods from their homelands. During the round table event at IMMA in 2019, Maeve and Julie baked bread with members of the migrant community in the museum’s kitchen, as part of their collaborative practice, *Fold and Rise* – a breadmaking workshop initiated in 2015, focusing on collective

¹⁰ These included a Zimbabwean horticulturist and former resident, as well as representatives of ‘The Living Garden’ and ‘Let’s Get Galway Growing’ projects.

¹¹ ‘Tar Isteach’ visual artist and Aoife Natsumi Frehan, an artist delivering astronomy workshops at Galway Arts Centre (supported by the NYCI STEAM Artist-in-Residence programme and the Science Foundation of Ireland).

¹² A tangible outcome has been a series of photographic prints from across the three centres, set to music by a resident musician and gardener. Prints have been gifted to participants, with large posters exhibited in public areas at some centres.



labour and food production. This event at IMMA also built on the legacy of *A Fair Land* (12-28 August 2016), which saw Grizedale Arts¹³ reimagine IMMA's 17th-century courtyard as a project village, articulating systems for living based on simple resources, while offering visitors opportunities to eat, make, think or trade.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Julie Griffiths was planning a Syrian baking day to celebrate the Muslim festival of Eid in May, that would involve accessing kitchens in the houses surrounding the EROC centre in Ballaghaderreen. In this way, food becomes a vehicle to create moments of encounter at different scales: at a granular one-to-one scale (through meetings and conversations with individuals); at a collective scale (through the development of workshop and hosting spaces); and at the spectacular scale of the festival (aimed at creating highly visible community celebrations). To this end, Maeve described the 1:1 scale of artistic practice as using “the world as its own map”. In Clare, a borrowed kitchen space – appropriately called The Sanctuary – became its own map, as participants explored real-life connections between art, hospitality and ‘kitchen culture’. The kitchen was conceptualised by the group as a space of ‘multiple freedoms’. Discussions about food lent a sense of informality and generated rich insights into family life, including cultural influences and social rituals relating to food. Whether aspiring to make the thinnest pastry or commiserating about the inauthenticity of certain imported goods, food seemed to transport everyone to a better time and place; absent family members were imagined as the aroma of ancestor’s kitchens filled the air. With local Irish people also invited to participate, the group enacted brief moments of ‘unconditional hospitality’, by exchanging food and its cultural associations. Despite the participants coming from different ethnicities and religions, they found many commonalities through their conversations around food, suggesting that small revolutions can happen in kitchens.

¹³ Grizedale Arts is an arts organisation based in the English Lake District. An acclaimed and influential model for a new kind of art institution, Grizedale Arts operates under the philosophy that art and artists can affect change and benefit wider culture and society.



Gardening & Language

Just as communal cooking can generate a sense of autonomy, so too gardening can further enhance feelings of purpose and belonging. The capacity to grow food is not widely offered to residents in Direct Provision centres; however, in 2014, a patch of waste ground behind the Eglinton Hotel was reclaimed by residents and long-term volunteers and planted with vegetables, fruit and flowers. The Eglinton Community Garden now provides an important outlet for residents who want to work outdoors; a rota system was put in place, with fresh produce regularly given to the chef to use in daily menus. Educational links have been developed with NUI Galway, as well as other gardening communities. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Monica worked with Eglinton’s gardening families, facilitating outdoor drawing games and painting workshops, alongside regular gardening tasks. She recognised the therapeutic benefits of gardening, particularly for those residents who were traumatised from fleeing warzones, or those who are experiencing mental health issues, as a result of long-term confinement.¹⁴ Audrey Hepburn once stated that “to plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow”; an act of hope, gardening is also an inherently creative process, which offers infinite scope for learning. Occasionally such endeavours also reveal prior expertise, such as the young horticulturist from Zimbabwe, who now wants to have her qualifications recognised in Ireland.

Where language barriers may have been perceived as a potential obstacle to participation, such difficulties were minimised early on, through the hands-on processes of making and doing. In fact, language as a marker of difference ended up being a defining feature of several projects. Drawing on her background in textile design, Julie Griffiths celebrated the diverse languages spoken within County Roscommon, through the communal creation of a quilt with members of the EROC Centre in Ballaghaderreen. Assorted fabrics containing ‘traces of hospitality’ – such as fragments of tablecloths, runners and tea towels – were embroidered with phrases of greeting and welcome from different countries. Stimulating memories of warmth, security and

¹⁴ At the start of the ‘Tar Isteach’ project, Monica de Bath made investigatory drawings within the walled garden of the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, which once housed a vegetable garden and apothecary of medicinal herbs, to heal the soldiers, wounded in various colonial wars.



comfort, quilts are “inexorably linked with the feminine.”¹⁵ Quilting also has a long history of activism, through the momentum of countless community craft movements and radical sewing projects across the globe. Particularly symbolic for Julie were associations with the Irish legend of Saint Brigid’s Cloak, with the ever-extending fabric staking a claim to ‘place’ – a narrative resonating with Ireland’s colonial history, characterised by the dispossession of land and the native language.

Poetic Spaces: Artist as Host

During her project at Eglinton Community Garden, Monica posed the rhetorical question: Can a poetic space support the wellbeing of some families living in Direct Provision? In describing horticulture as a ‘poetic space’, the artist is alluding to the meditative and transcendent qualities of being physically and cognitively absorbed in a creative activity, over which one has a degree of autonomy and control. There is also a strong communal dimension, which recognises the transformative effects of sharing, working and being with others. Across the various interconnected strands of the ‘Tar Isteach’ project, the main role of the artists was to create the right conditions for hospitality to unfold – whether blossoming in the communal labour of gardening; threaded through the conversations that emerge whilst sewing; or kneaded into the discussions that arise while baking bread.

In recent years, the ‘artist as host’ has become an increasingly common curatorial proposition within contemporary art, pitched in opposition to a perceived collapse of hospitality or ‘openness to the other’ in Western politics.¹⁶ Given the challenge that Derrida issued to

¹⁵ Sue Pritchard, ‘Introduction and Negotiating space: fabric and the feminine 1945-2010’, in Sue Pritchard (ed.) *Quilts, 1700-2010: Hidden Histories and Untold Stories* (London: V&A Publishing, 2010).

¹⁶ See for example: ‘Feast: Radical Hospitality in Contemporary Art’, The Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago (16 February – 10 June 2012); Charles Esche, ‘Practicing Hospitality’, panel discussion at the symposium ‘Of Hospitality’, Smart Museum of Art, Chicago, 5 May 2012 [vimeo.com/42269151]; Tania Brugera ‘The Museum of Arte Util’, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (December 2013 to March 2014).



European governments, shortly before his death – a challenge that they have miserably failed to fulfil – the institutional lens of hospitality aims to release dormant resources and values, while bringing new forces to bear. Such aspirations tend to draw on the cultural agency of artists, who are tasked with brokering or reclaiming social relations, where other state systems or policies fall short. As demonstrated by the ‘Tar Isteach’ project, in enabling these kinds of hospitable gestures, the artists displayed a commitment to kindness, generosity and active listening, in developing relationships based on trust, inclusion and freedom of expression. All three artists felt it was important to empower refugees and asylum seekers to become more visible (rather than blending in, or being hidden) and to ask the questions: Who gets to speak? Who can use their voice? In positioning themselves ‘apart from, not part of’ the Direct Provision system, the artists highlighted the critical urgency of the current situation for those seeking asylum in Ireland, while also articulating the kind of dissensus and critique necessary for dreaming, community-building and the formulation of alternative realities.

Joanna Laws, October 2020

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Clare: Hospitality as Kitchen Culture

A gentle act of political art making

In Irish terms the kitchen is often considered the heart of the home. Not including these heart spaces, as a fundamental part of the building where we host refugees waiting to be processed, could be conceived as a considerable form of inhospitality.

I felt like an outsider on the 23 September 2019 as I sat with my placard and a huge chocolate cake in King Thomand Direct Provision Centre lobby with the intention of inviting people to come join me on a project about hospitality. I explained: how difficult it had been for me to cross the threshold to enter into their home without an invitation; I had sent a poster earlier that seemed ineffective now; how I had been inspired to write a proposal based on a meeting I had with a group from the centre who were selling their goods at a farmers market. I was grateful to Romina who had given me her teabag as it was nicer than the teabag being offered in the lobby. Working in real life: the cultures we found or created in the following weeks of meeting became the project in Clare, they can be considered artistic and political.

It was decided by the original group of 5 participants, residents of The King Thomand Hotel, Lisdoonvarnagh, to enact or preform moments of 'unconditional hospitality'. We would do this by sharing, entering into, and trying on each-other's culture in a kitchen space that was somewhere in the community. Irish people and less than new Irish people would also be invited to attend to each other as a way around barriers that the system can create for connecting with Irish culture. It was felt a gentle approach was needed to counterbalance a general sense of hostility towards others coming into rural areas, as reported in the media, around the country at the time. Indeed the King Thomand Hotel itself, went ahead as a direct provision centre with only five percent of locals being in favour of it at an initial town meeting. That Lisdoonvanagh is famous for its hospitality made this an interesting starting point for our work together. By endeavouring to understand each other through this exchange and sharing of ourselves, it was thought we could delve into hospitality as a personal, aesthetic and political experience.

The kitchen we eventually found to use was called The Sanctuary. It is the sanctuary that can be found by taking refuge in an 'others' culture that materialised in this project through a series of small happenings that could be easily overlooked as being obscure, in the face of so many calls to end direct provision and the increasing numbers of people forced to share small spaces. Derrida's unconditional hospitality may be impossible when we think about direct provision. This act could be conceived as an expression of the possibility that it could and it would be good if it did happen.



Artistic practice in a 1:1 scale uses “the world as its own map”. In this particular practice the kitchen space became its own map as we worked in real life with artistic culture and kitchen culture. Locating a kitchen space to work in proposed one modest solution to the issue that there was only one tiny kitchen for 150 residents in the King Thomand Direct Provision Centre.

This act was moreover a proposal for a kitchen space as a space representative of multiple changing levels and degrees of freedom, self- awareness, subjectivity and agency. In our first gathering's we conceptualised the kitchen as a space as opposed to a place. For many in the group this project stopped there - as a conception - as they were moved on through the direct provision system. First meetings in Direct Provision meant that talk of food was rich with social context, it lent itself to a feeling of informality and insights into individual's family lives, historical contexts and social mores. Recipes and methods for working were interrogated for their cultural influences. Certain ingredients were swapped out form neighbouring countries dishes to create their own take. Aspirations to make the thinnest pastry, commiserations that the imported goods were not really the real thing, incredulity at the cost of items in the only two local shops on the meagre allowance. The aromas of ancestor kitchens were in the air at these meetings, food transported us all to better times and places with absent family being imagined.

As people were moved on from the centre so too the project. The project was now becoming like sand carried in a sieve by a majority of Irish and less than new Irish people. Irish hand weaving and spinning was carded through with the making of Byrek from Albania and seasonal German baking. Two international pieces were created: one a weave and the other a pizza. A maternity leave and the arrival of COVID further fragmented the project and the conversations became more remote and the threads more fragile.

What continued were strings of friendship, like the beads of Zeiruk's Somali bracelets, knots of anxiety as risk of deportment were threaded through with a place to just be normal, away from the prison like feel to not being able to work without permission, or move freely to live where you want to live. What value does a project on hospitality hold when someone needs a letter for a judge? Will people be able to get their artwork back if they have left?

Moments of unconditional hospitality arising with the impossibility of hospitality. Breastfeeding as a personal form of hospitality, how to carry knowledge from breastfeeding supportive cultures to Ireland and how to continue without that support in a less supportive culture? Feeding your baby yourself. Can we make an extra pair of hands? Structural solidarity found in groups, art projects and on webpages as a way to re-place innate tacit knowledge passed on in ways you don't have to think about. Up against it. Make a work - write a letter. In awe of Bukola nursing her baby.



Hospitality of the self - a YouTube channel made on how to love yourself. Entering the element of myself - a painting of swimming in the sea. The cliffs of Moher - trying on the heritage of others, of where I am now placed. Unconditional hospitality as possibility... meeting yourself in the process. A weave made from sheep's wool from a farm your ancestors left years ago, Irish displacement - coming full circle. A painting of a loaf - room at the table - revolutions happening at the table. 'For love to come', one person said, 'all you have to do is offer welcome'.

Maeve Collins – Ground Up Artists Collective, Tar Isteach Commission Artist 2020

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