

Best read in tandem with online slideshow;

https://prezi.com/fz9pz2xg5vs8/edit/#4_160379868

Website: <http://freespacelimerick.wixsite.com/fieldjournal>

Clarina Park in Limerick [Slide 1, play video] is a former housing estate of 49 houses, situated within a designated Regeneration area in Limerick city. In 2008, the newly launched *Limerick Regeneration Master Plan* (LCCC, 2008) proposed the demolition of 2450 houses in socially disadvantaged areas of the city and the construction of 4790 new homes. In 2016, eight years into the regeneration process, 1039 houses in regeneration areas across the city had been demolished but only 110 had been built (Rabbits and Walsh, 2016).

By a quirk of Google Maps, Clarina Park as it was in 2009, 3 years prior to demolition, can still be explored as a virtual landscape. The last houses in Clarina Park were demolished in 2012, ostensibly to make way for new development, but six years later significant development has failed to materialise. Homelessness in Limerick, as elsewhere in Ireland, is at an all-time high (Focus Ireland, 2018), while house and house rental prices outside of Dublin are on average 46% higher than they were following the property crash of 2008 (Lyons, 2018). Logic would suggest that the replacement of demolished social housing is both urgent and prudent, given the high financial and social cost of short-term remedies to the crisis of homelessness.

Of course Google Street is not a neutral mode of representation, it is a corporate adaptation of a military surveillance technology with all that implies. It fixes this place as a kind of pathologised spectacle (Power et al, 2013: 10). However, I am showing these images because they capture a process of degeneration which is the focus of an artistic research action, *Contested Site #4*, that I am co-producing with Cathal McCarthy, an activist living in the designated regeneration area of Ballinacurra Weston where Clarina Park is located. Having spent ten years cataloguing, analysing, critiquing and challenging the realities of regeneration on the ground, Cathal views the levelling of Clarina Park as a form of 'land clearance', dispersing working class populations in order to unlock the exchange value of lands close to the city centre. Cathal perceives a strategy at work that he calls 'intimidation by proxy', consisting of a number of predictable steps:

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

This has given rise to a poster work [Slide 2], one of the artistic productions emerging from this research action, the purpose of which is to unravel and to visualise the inherent contradictions and conflicting logics of regeneration that are manifested in the Clarina Park site. The meaning and the function of housing has been

altered by the role that real estate now plays as a carrier of practices of financialisation, to which Aalbers and Fernandez have given the title, 'real-estate/financial complex' (2017). This reflects an ideologically driven transformation of social relations which is evident across many of the institutions shaping the social fabric.

Land clearance and displacement of populations are historically associated with the Enclosures movement. Marx identified enclosure as an early strategy of primitive accumulation, but contemporary theorists like Harvey and De Angelis argue that enclosure is an ongoing strategy within capitalism in its quest for new forms to commodify. Stuart Hodkinson [Slide 3] describes enclosure as 'an extra-economic act of separation, privatisation and dispossession embodied in physical and legal mechanisms . . . orchestrated by nation-states . . . and other political actors able to exercise physical and legal control over resources in order to privatise them for some and dispossess others' (Hodkinson, 2012: 508).

The series of research actions that I call *Contested Sites*, as I have mentioned, attempt to unravel and to give a visual form to the logics that underpin the social and spatial violence of enclosure [Slide 4]. Each *Contested Site* action begins with a walk and a conversation. [Slide 5] #4 began with a walk around the perimeter of Clarina Park, during which Cathal explained the significance of various points on our route. [Slide 6 – 8] Mostly those significant points consist of absences; spatial absences that mark the sites of houses, community facilities or community endeavours that have been removed as part of the process of regeneration; social absences include displaced families that Cathal knows by name, a reduction in the number of children living locally, with degenerating consequences for the local school, and the de-tenanting signified by the empty shells of burnt out houses.

Blomley's class-based analysis of enclosure recognises the ways in which residents of poorer neighbourhoods, by virtue of use, appropriation and collective habitation, generate forms of urban commons that amount to the social wealth of that community (Blomley, 2008: 320). De Angelis is specific about the neoliberal strategy of undermining this social wealth. [Slide 9] The act of displacement and dispersal he argues 'forcibly separate[s] people from whatever access to social wealth they have which is not mediated by competitive markets and money as capital . . . New enclosures thus are directed towards the fragmentation and destruction of "commons", that is, social spheres of life the main characteristics of which are to provide various degrees of protection from the market' (De Angelis, 2007: 145).

What emerges from the accumulation of absences that Cathal and I encounter on our walk is a picture of a working class community subjected to the policy of 'stabilisation', a term used formally by members of the Irish Government (Finneran, 2009)¹, which can be understood as a euphemism for class dilution and the imposition of capitalist social relations. [Slide 10] The 'encapturing of people, place, space and culture within the commodifying and alienating logic of capital accumulation and the competitive, marketising logic of neoliberal rationality' (Hodkinson, 2012: 509) is how Hodkinson defines capitalist subjectification, one of three acts of enclosure that he identifies along with displacement and privatisation.

By comparing the material conditions of the city at the level of lived experience, to the dominant discourses of renewal and regeneration in Limerick [Slide 11] this work attempts to do two things in particular; first to deconstruct normative representations of space that are used to shape the social imaginary of the city; secondly to work with art as a means of production of social imaginaries to generate counter discourses of space in the city.

¹ Michael Finneran, Minister of State at the Dept. for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, in response to question from Dept. Jan O; Sullivan during a Dail debate, 2009. <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2010-05-18/417/?highlight%5B0%5D=2009&highlight%5B1%5D=boards&highlight%5B2%5D=moyross>

The social imaginary refers to the set of values, institutions, laws, and symbols through which people imagine the social totality of the city; [Slide 12] the discourse of *Place Management* is a good example of an attempt to shape that. Broadly speaking place management is about improving locations; the Purple Flag is an international accreditation process directed towards 'managing the evening and night time economy'. [Slide 13] By defining the city centre in the evening as an economy the vision presented here seeks to legitimate a set of norms about who is seen as a desirable occupant of public space in the city and how they should behave. A certain kind of social order is promoted that divides people into categories, those with economic or productive power and those without. The poor, the unproductive, the unassimilated, the non-conforming – these people are excluded from the desired publics of the city represented in the dominant discourse.

[Slide 14] The ability of art to act upon the social imaginary is one of the key ways in which it intersects with radical politics. Although the kind of representation-from-below that I am describing here is fragmentary and partial, it does have an acupuncture effect in terms of its capacity to interrupt the hegemony of the entrepreneurial city as a mechanism of enclosure. In addition to the critical analytical strand of my research, a parallel strand involves enacting collective and public actions that engage in practices of commoning and address matters of common interest. These images are from a number of ongoing *Critical Cartography* events that use Open Source pictograms developed by the Argentinian mapping collective *Iconoclastas*, to facilitate publics to respond to questions such as: *Where is public space in the city? What is a threshold space? Where do communities find culture?* and so on. The collective actions that make up the event include discussing and sometimes modifying the question, deliberating on its physical implications and constructing a representation of the city from a socio-spatial perspective. The resulting maps [Slide 15] are converted into digital representations that will be presented as part of *the Laboratory of Common Interest* which I am producing during the 12-day centenary of the Limerick Soviet next year.

[Slide 16] The research action presented here is part of a larger, durational project that involves working through collaborative actions involving multiple social actors, employing cognitive mapping (Jameson 1992), aesthetic analysis and public interaction to experiment with forms of collective meaning-making and critique. The dominant public sphere, in Negt and Kluge's analysis (1993), acts as a mechanism through which to generalise particular interests. Whatever aspects of social experience are excluded from this representational apparatus are systematically negated. However, there are contradictions and gaps in this edifice of legitimation. In spite of the powerful interests that control and obscure its structures of production, Negt and Kluge argue 'the public sphere possesses use-value when social experience organizes itself within it' (Negt and Kluge, 1993: 3). In her introduction to Negt and Kluge's work, Miriam Hansen proposes that:

'The cohabitation of uneven organizational structures of publicity contains a potential for instability, for accidental collisions and opportunities, for unpredictable conjunctures and aleatory developments — conditions under which alternative formations, collective interests, may gain a momentum of their own' (Hansen, 1993: xl)

To counteract the commodifying, dehumanising and alienating effects of neoliberal enclosure, people need access to the means of production of social imaginaries. Art can and does function as a counter-public sphere through which marginal and fragmentary representations can be assembled, generating a contrary account of social experience with which to challenge the norms of privilege that manifest as spatial violence.

REFERENCES

Blomley, N., (2008), Enclosure, common right and the property of the poor, *Social Legal Studies* 17(3), pp. 311–331.

De Angelis, M., 2007, *The Beginning of History: Value Struggles and Global Capital*, London: Pluto Press.

Fernandez, R. and Aalbers, M.B., 2017, Housing and capital in the 21st century: realigning housing studies and political economy, *Housing, Theory and Society* 34: in press.

Focus Ireland, 2018, *About Homelessness*, [Online] <https://www.focusireland.ie/resource-hub/about-homelessness/> [Accessed May 2018]

Jameson, F., 1992, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic; Cinema and Space in the World System*, Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Hansen, M., 1993, Foreword, in Negt, Oscar and Kluge, Alexander, 1993 (1972), *Public Sphere and Experience; Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere (Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung. Zur Organisationsanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit)*, trans. Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, pp xi – xli.

Harvey, D., 2005, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hodkinson, S., (2012): The new urban enclosures, *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 16:5, 500-518

Iconoclastas, *Collective Mapping: Critical Tools for Reflection and Social Transformation*, [Online], www.iconoclastas.com.ar

LCCC, 2008, *Limerick Regeneration Master Plan*, Limerick, www.limerick.ie

Lyons, R., 2018, *Irish Rental Price Report Q1 2018*, DAFT [Online], <https://www.daft.ie/report/ronan-lyons-2018q1-rental> [Accessed June 10th, 2018].

Negt, O. and Kluge, A., 1993 (1972), *Public Sphere and Experience; Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere (Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung. Zur Organisationsanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit)*, trans. Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, pp xi – xli.

Power, M.J., Neville, P., Devereux, E., Haynes, A. and Barnes, C., Why bother seeing the world for real: the visual politics of Google Street View and the representation of Moyross, Limerick, Ireland in *New Media & Society* · January 2013,

Rabbits, N. and Walsh, F., 2016, Limerick Regeneration revealed: €257m spent since 2008, *Limerick Leader*, [Online], Available at <http://www.limerickleader.ie/news/home/213254/limerick-regeneration-revealed-257m-spent-since-2008.html> [Accessed July 2017].