

Spatial Politics - Spatial Practice

PGCFAV1001

MODULE DESCRIPTOR

ECTS credits¹	5	Programme	MAMFA Art and Social Action
NQF level	9	School	School of Visual Culture
Stage	1	Module Co-ordinator	Dr Emma Mahony
Trimester	1	Module Team	Dr Emma Mahony and NCAD colleagues
Contact	Dr Emma Mahony: mahonye@staff.ncad.ie		
Responsibility	NCAD Academic Council and the School of Visual Culture Board have responsibility for this module.		

1. Introduction

Drawing on the disciplines of critical theory, philosophy, sociology, ecology, art, design, architecture and postmodern geography, this module considers key aspects of the spatial politics of place-based urban practices. 'Place' will be approached as a site of conflicting interests, needs and publics, and as being populated by human and non-human actors. Key issues and ideologies that shape the hegemonic social order will be interrogated in this context including human rights, class, neoliberalism, precarity, racism, direct provision, surveillance capitalism and right-wing populism.

Forms of spatial practice – taken to include works of socially-engaged art, design, architecture, urbanism and street art, as well as acts of iconoclasm, protest and activism – will be considered in the context of urgent issues that play out in the contemporary city. These issues variously include the privatisation of public space through 'place-making' and 'culture-led gentrification', which has led to the displacement of low-income and diverse communities; the enforcement of oppressive forms of civic behaviour through hostile architecture; and the environmental inequities that have been come to the fore as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns.

Questions such as – how spatial practices can affect public exchange and enable more empathetic and inclusive ways of living together – will be examined through an analysis of practices that variously encompass activism, commoning, environmentalism and radical care.

Students will be encouraged to reflect on the challenges of positioning and activating their practice within the public realm. They will be supported to develop the tools required to interrogate the (cultural, legal, social, historical) politics of specific public spaces locally and nationally.

The aims of this module are to:

- Expose students to current debates about the politics of space as well as the role played by artists and art practice in debates.

¹ European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, where 60 ECTS credits equate to the workload of a full-time academic year

- Support students to develop their own critical vocabulary and understanding of spatial politics in ways that are relevant and useful to their practice.

2. What will I learn?

Largely taught through lectures and seminars, this module will also make use of site visits as current case studies.

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this module students will be able to:

1. Understand current critical thinking in a diverse range of academic disciplines concerning space and place.
2. Understand the key actors shaping the development of spaces in Ireland today, particularly in the urban context of Dublin.
3. Apply these concepts and understanding to the analysis of key locations selected by the student.
4. Propose an event or action which casts a critical perspective on a key location selected by the student.

Module content

The module will combine lectures and seminars led by the Art and Social Action staff team from the School of Visual Culture. Guest speakers may include architects, representatives of organisations commissioning public-art, etc.

Indicative content

Precarity, Class and the Creative Worker

The lecture examines the role of the creative worker against the backdrop of theories of class and precarious labour. Beginning with an examination of the changing composition of labour over the past 100 years, it will interrogate topics such as ‘immaterial and biopolitical production’, ‘the concierge economy’, ‘the precariat’, ‘the entreprecariat’, ‘the artist as neoliberal subject’, ‘dark matter’ and ‘employability education’. It concludes by asking what the alternatives to the precarious labour market are and examines concepts such as ‘regulation’, ‘mutual aid’, ‘solidarity’, ‘co-ops’, ‘refusal of work’, ‘exodus’ and ‘out-autonomy’.

Culture and Neoliberalism

This class examines how the cultural landscape has adapted its values in line with a neoliberal market logic imposed on it by the state. While economic contraction and the concurrent demise of the welfare state is the political rationale given to explain this development, it is equally the result of strategic political and cultural policy that supports the gradual privatisation and corporatisation of a cultural landscape that was formerly subsidised by the state. This lecture will examine how cultural institutions have adopted corporate ideals, modelled themselves on theme parks and programmed event-exhibitions driven by financial imperatives.

From Cultural Value to Social Wealth

In place of the neoliberal norm of 'cultural value', this class interrogates the concept of 'social wealth', a radical form of wealth that is based not on profit making but on connecting the needs and capacities of social individuals and which is created neither by the market, nor by the state, but by radical experiments in producing the commons. Drawing on examples of a number of so-called 'art institutions of the common', 'universities of the common' and commons-based art and activist practices that have emerged in recent years (including Irish examples like Callan Workhouse Studios and Common Ground), it will explore how these forms of social wealth are being produced, harnessed, and made transferable.

Commoning and Feminism

This lecture makes the proposition that in order to survive the ecological and societal disaster that faces humanity, we must find new ways, or rediscover old ways, of living and being together. This overarching issue of our 'interdependence' on each other, on other non-humans and on the planet underscores the practice of commoning. This lecture will introduce students to the key theorists of commons including Peter Linebaugh, David Bollier, George Caffentzis, Hardt and Negri, Thomas De Groot, Sophie Bloeman and Stavros Stavrides. It will then focus on feminist theorist of the commons Silvia Federici, who looks at the political project of the commons through the lens of feminism making the observation that women suffer disproportionately from capitalist accumulation, and have historically been the ones who have depended the most of on access to communal natural resources. It will interrogate Federici's contention that women should therefore take the lead in the commoning of reproduction if it is to become a coherent political project that can offer a viable alternative to capitalism.

Contested Monuments and their Empty Plinths

Contested monuments and statues that variously glorify imperialism, communism and colonialism are rapidly disappearing from the public realm. Whether they were blown-up by militant groups, torn down in an angry frenzy by mobs of protestors, or removed by official decree, these monuments typically leave something behind in the public realm: their empty pedestals and sites. This class explores the theme 'absence' and asks 'What role can these empty plinths and sites play in fomenting discussion about historical injustices? The students will be invited to consider how these empty plinths and vacant sites can be reactivated or reclaimed in a way that ameliorates contemporary divisions in society.

Indicative Bibliography

- Boetcher, D. N. (2020), 'Iconoclasm and response on Dublin's Sackville/ O'Connell Street, 1759–2003', *City*, 8 July
- Bollier, D. and Helfrich, S. (eds.) (2019), *Free, Fair and Alive: The Insurgent Power of the Commons*. Gabriola Island, Canada: New Society Publishers
- Boyle, M., Kitchin, R. and O'Callaghan, C. (2014), 'Post-politics, crisis, and Ireland's 'ghost estates'', *Political Geography*. #42, pp.121-133
- Bresnihan, P. and Byrne, M. (2014), 'Escape in the City, Everyday Practices of Commoning and the Production of Urban Space in Dublin'. *The Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography*, vol 47, issue 1,

- Burch-Brown, J. (2020), 'Should Slavery's Statues be Preserved? On Transitional Justice and Contested Heritage', *Journal of Applied Philosophy*.
<https://bristol.academia.edu/JoannaBurchBrown>
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- Chatzidakis, Andreas; Hakim, Jamie; Littler, Jo; Rottenberg, Catherine; and Segal, LynnSascia Bailer, Magdalena Kallenberger, Maicyra Leão and Teles e Silva (2021), Re-assembling Motherhood(s): On Radical Care and Collective Art as Feminist Practices. *Maternal Fantasies*. Onomatopoe 216
- Clavin, A., Moore-Cherry, N. and Mills. G. (2021), 'Mapping Green Dublin: Co-Creating a Greener Future With Local Communities', *Urban Planning*, 6 (4), pp.96-109,
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- Dockx, N. and Gielen, P. (eds.) (2018), *Commonism: A New Aesthetics of the Real*. Amsterdam: Valiz.
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- Frank, S. and Ristic, M. (2020), 'Urban fallism', *City*, 24:3-4, pp. 552-564
- Lorusso, S. (2019), *Entreprenariat: Everyone is an entrepreneur. Nobody is safe*. Eindhoven: Onomatopoe 170
- Lynch, K. (2022), *Care and Capitalism: Why Affective Equality Matters for Social Justice*. Cambridge: Polity Press
- Mahony, E. (2021), 'Empty plinths: The significance of absence', *Art & the Public Sphere*, 10:1
- Mahony, E. (2017) 'Opening spaces of resistance in the corporatized cultural institution: Liberate Tate and the Art Not Oil coalition', *Museum & Society*, 15:2, July, pp. 127-41
- Precarious Workers Brigade (2017), *Training for Exploitation? Politicising employability and reclaiming education*. London, Leipzig and Los Angeles: Journal of Aesthetics and Protest.
- Zuboff, S. (2019), *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. London: Profile Books
- Soh, Bonaventure and Ndikung, Bejeng (2021), *The Delusions of Care*. Archive Books
- Standing, G. (2021), *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class (Special Covid-19 Edition)*. London and New York: IB Taurus
- Stevenson, Nick (2023), *Class: Key Ideas*. Oxon / New York: Routledge

- Stavrides, S. (2022), 'Reinventing Community Through Commoning', The Commoner, September, <https://thecommoner.org/reinventing-community-through-commoning/>
- Stavrides, S. (2021), 'The Potentialities of Space Commoning: The Capacity to Act and Think Through Space', Exploring Commonism. Manchester: Manchester University Press,
- Urban Commons Research Collective (2022), *Urban Commons Handbook*, Barcelona: dprbarcelona.

3. How will I learn?

Learning tool	Hours
Lectures and seminars	20
Specified Learning Activities	40
Autonomous Student Learning	60
Total Workload	100

4. What learning supports are provided?

Like all modules which form part of the Art and Social Action MA, this course will be supported by a Virtual Learning Environment. The site will feature module-related bibliographies, links to key organisations and practices, as well as policy documents. Students will have the opportunity to use this VLE to share resources and engage in other forms of peer exchange.

5. Am I eligible to take this module?

Module Requisites and Incompatibles

Pre-requisites	None
Co-requisites	None
Incompatibles	None
Prior learning	Where a student can demonstrate that they have achieved at least 80% of the learning outcomes of this module, by academic certified achievement, or through quantifiable and documented experience, they can apply to the School for that prior learning to be recognised. Applications must be received prior to the commencement of delivery of the module.
Recommended	None

6. How will I be assessed?

The assessment task will take the form of a 2500-3000 word essay in which students explore a case study of their own choosing. Full guidance will be provided. Alternative forms of submission may be possible, by negotiation.

Assessment tool	% of final grade	Timing
Essay or Presentation	100	End of module

Total	100%
Assessment tool	Learning outcomes assessed
Essay or Presentation	All learning outcomes

7. Feedback, results and grading

Students will receive written feedback following the submission and assessment of the essay. It will be graded using the [NCAD Grade Descriptors](#).

8. What happens if I fail?

Resit Opportunities

Opportunities will be provided during or at the end of Trimester 2 to students who do not complete all assessments in trimester 1, but students will not be able to qualify for the award on completion of this programme until the learning outcomes of this module have been met.

9. When and where is this module offered?

This module will be offered in a hybrid format, allowing on site and off site learning.

10. How will I have the chance to evaluate the module?

It is important to NCAD that students inform the development of teaching and learning at NCAD. We encourage all students to communicate their concerns and their observations about their study to members of staff so that any changes can be made in a timely manner.

About two-thirds of the way through the year, a student forum will be convened to gather students' comments about their study and the delivery of the programme. In addition, at the end of Trimester 2, students have the opportunity to complete an online evaluation of their study and experience at NCAD. These evaluation events are important to current and future students, to ensure we can enhance the delivery of programmes at NCAD.

In addition, you are invited to discuss your experience on the module with your lecturers at any point during the year. You can also relay your comments to the class student representative who will communicate your comments to the staff.

**For further details on the content of your module and teaching arrangements,
consult your Programme or Module Handbook**