Critical Discourses of Social Practice
PGCFAV1002

MODULE DESCRIPTOR

ECTS credits[1]	5	Programme	MAMFA in Art and Social Action CFA
NQF level	9	School	School of Visual Culture
Stage	1	Module Co-ordinator	Dr Emma Mahony
Trimester	2	Module Team	Dr Emma Mahony, NCAD colleagues
Contact	Dr Emma Mahony: mahonye@staff.ncad.ie		
Responsibility	The NCAD Academic Council and the School of Fine Art Board have responsibility for this module.		

1. Introduction

This module interrogates the critical discourses and ideological coordinates that have shaped the field of social practice since it came to prominence in the 1990s, while also taking account of its many historical precedents. It will draw on examples of social practice across the disciplines of art, design, urbanism and activism and cover a wide geography.

Taught in lecture and seminar format, it provides a framework for the examination of key concepts in social practice, including: 'publics', 'participation', 'collaboration', 'cooperation', 'conviviality', 'co-creation', 'assemblism', 'dissensus', 'agonism', 'autonomy', 'utility', 'aesthetics', 'ethics', 'exodus', and 'culture-led regeneration/ gentrification'. It considers the various contradictions that shape the field including how the terminology of 'social engagement' is often aligned with 'social enterprise', pointing to how the field is continuously at risk of being instrumentalised by forces that are at odds with its original emancipatory goals. Taking this engaged-autonomous position as a starting point, it asks challenging questions such as: What, if anything, can be done? What position of resistance should we adopt? And how – as Gregory Sholette asks – might we 'rethink the institution, as well as the academy, and also even the art world itself'?

By putting a series of case studies under the scrutiny of key concepts and theoretical models, students on this module will develop a critical understanding of key practices in social practice. And by tracing key critical impulses in the field, students will be aided to position their own socially-orientated practices within an historical, ideological, and critical framework. They will undertake an assignment which is designed to support that task.

The aims of this module are to:

- Provide a historical and conceptual framework as a context for contemporary practice.

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[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 theory in ways that are relevant and useful to their practice.

2.   What will I learn?

Learning Outcomes

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

1. Understand the recent historical development of social practice and the debates that it has engendered

2. Deploy key concepts and critical tools in the analysis of socially practice

3. Undertake research into practices and discourses concerning social practice and make informed judgments about the merits of different approaches to social practice

Module content

The module will combine lectures and seminars led by the Art and Social Action staff team from the School of Visual Culture.

Indicative content

Key Debates in Social Practice

This first class introduces students to the history of social practice, examining how it connects with an earlier tradition of avant-garde perspectives on art's potential for emancipatory change and is associated with an impulse to democratise both art production and society. It will then examine the key debates that emanated from the re-emergence of this form of practice in the 1990s and 2000s under the rubrics of 'relational aesthetics' (Bourriaud, 1998); 'dialogical aesthetics' (Kester, 2004); 'participation' (Bishop 2004, 2006); and 'collaboration' (Lind, 2007).

Key Terms and Dichotomies in Social Practice

The second class will examine some of the key terms of reference that feature in the literature on social practice, such as 'publics', 'participation', and 'collaboration'. It will also debate some of the key dichotomies that emerge in the field including: 'ethics versus aesthetics', 'consensus versus dissensus', 'conviviality versus agonism', 'autonomy versus heteronomy', and 'engagement versus exodus'.

Social Practice After 2011

This class will consider how the field of social practice has evolved in light of key world events including The Arab Spring, the Occupy Movement, the rise of Fascism, the Migrant Crisis, Black Lives Matter, Standing Rock, and the Covid-19 Pandemic. Through a focus on a geographically diverse range of case studies it will explore how the concepts of 'assembly' (Butler, 2015) and 'assemblism' (Staal, 2017), 'interdependence' (Szreder 2020), 'commoning' and 'radical care' are being mobilised by socially-engaged practitioners to face down an emergent authoritarian world order.

PGCFAV1002 Critical Discourses of Social Practice   *Module Descriptor*
Approved by Academic Council: 15 Nov 23   *Page 2 of 6*
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Indicative Bibliography

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- Burrough, X. and Walgren, J. (2022), Art as Social Practice: Technologies for Change. New York and London: Routledge.

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- Charnley, K. (2021), Sociopolitical Aesthetics: Art, Crisis and Neoliberalism. London, New York, Oxford, New Delhi and Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic.

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- Dodd, M. (2019), Spatial Practices: Modes of Action and Engagement with the City. New York and London: Routledge.

- Federici, S. (2011), Re-chanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons. Oakland: PM Press.

- Finkelpearl, T. (2013), What We Made: Conservations on Art and Social Cooperation. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Garrido Castellano, Carlos (2019), Beyond Representation in Contemporary Caribbean Art: Space, Politics, and the Public Sphere. New Brunswick, New Jersey, London: Rutgers University Press.

- Jackson, S. (2011), Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics. New York and London: Routledge.

PGCFAV1002 Critical Discourses of Social Practice   *Module Descriptor*
Approved by Academic Council: 15 Nov 23   *Page 3 of 6*
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- Kester, G. (2011), The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

- Kester, G. (2004), Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art, Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Ladkin, S., R. McKay and E. Bojensen (2017), Against Value in the Arts and Education. London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

- Lind, M. (2007), 'The Collaborative Turn', in Brian Kuan Wood (ed.) Maria Lind, Selected Writing, New York: Sternberg Press.

- McKee, Yates (2016), Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition. London and New York: Verso.

- Mouffe, C. (2013), Agonistics Thinking the World Politically. London/New York: Verso, pp.85-105.

- Sholette, Gregory (2022), The Art of Activism and the Activism of Art. London: Lund Humphries.

- Sholette G, and Bass, C. (2018), Art as Social Action. New York: Allworth Press.

- Staal, J. (2017), 'Assemblism', e-flux journal, issue #80, March.

- Szreder, K. (2021), The ABC of the Projectariat: Living and Working in a Precarious Art World. Manchester: Manchester University Press and the Whitworth, University of Manchester.

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

PGCFAV1002 Critical Discourses of Social Practice   *Module Descriptor*
Approved by Academic Council: 15 Nov 23   *Page 4 of 6*
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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 2,500-3,000 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	100	End of module
Total	**100%**	

Assessment tool	Learning outcomes assessed
Essay	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 the assessment in trimester 2, but students will not be able to qualify for the award on completion of this programme until the learning outcomes of this module, and all other required modules have been met.

9. When and where is this module offered?

This module will be offered in trimester 2 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**

PGCFAV1002 Critical Discourses of Social Practice   *Module Descriptor*
Approved by Academic Council: 15 Nov 23   *Page 6 of 6*
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