

The Metropolitan Complex

[Originally printed as an A2
broadsheet in an edition 500 on the
occasion of the Moore Street Lending
Library, Dublin, September 2005]



Roundtable Discussion

Jesse Jones, Ken McCue, Sally Timmons, Wes Wilkie, and Sarah Pierce

On Thursday 6 October 2005, the following conversation took place in the Moore Street Lending Library in Dublin. Sarah Pierce invited the participants to have an informal discussion. There was no audience present.

Sarah Pierce Due to a recording failure during last week's conversation, I appreciate each of you coming back to try again. I propose we see this meeting today as a continuation of that discussion, rather than attempting to restage what took place. A lot was said that pertains to living in Dublin, working outside of conventional arts contexts, and facing up to compromises in terms of language, expectations, funding, space - whether our work is as artist or administrator. Sally took the time to explain that the Moore Street Lending Library itself grew out of a 'flawed' community arts process, which required the curators to negotiate process-based work alongside preselected or 'inherited' projects. Ken mentioned that it might look like we all sing from the same hymn sheet and that we should have someone here from the City Council. This might be a chance to evaluate what it is that we all supposedly agree on. So, where should we start?

Wes Wilkie We could start with what's happened so far this week. Sally mentioned misunderstanding. Who has that misunderstanding as to the nature of the project?

Sally Timmons I think we, the curators, have a misunderstanding ourselves, as the people who initiated this project, that we made certain assumptions in relation to communication and language and mediation. I think also that there's a misunderstanding on the part of the expectations of people who are located in this area, who either run businesses or are associated with the area through heritage causes, etc. There is a misunderstanding on their part as to what is the role of an information resource or reading room or place where contributions can be made to build an archive about an area. Part of our review in week two is that we're trying to consider how to communicate our role in a clearer way. In the development stages of this project we got very bogged down with theory and text and discourse - we had to go through that in order to reach a point where we could conceive and implement this project. But now that it's in existence, the language needs to change. We're learning that now while on the ground. There are different places for different types of language and vernacular. It's only when language goes into practice that you have to remind yourself of it again. One interesting situation is the involvement of Imelda Farrell, who has been really supportive of this project - she is retired, but she is associated with trading on this street. Last Saturday there was a discussion with people who were working in the immediate area and trying to run businesses, that were put out because they felt they weren't represented through the type of music that was played on the street on the day of the launch. Imelda took it upon herself the next day, along with members of the library, to go out and talk to specific individuals. A tool that she used was to tell people, you never know what might come out of this. A film or something might come out of this, an event or a social happening or a documentary. She automatically knew the

language that people would be interested in, she knew the way to motivate people to have an interest.

Sarah Pierce You mentioned expectations and perhaps there are expectations built into the language of representation that lead to a reductive understanding of community art. People end up asking, "Where am I in that," instead of asking what different ideas of representation can come out of a project like the Moore Street Lending Library.

Sally Timmons I think right now there are two camps emerging around the library. There is a slight tendency towards what I would call traditional community based practices. And then there is a striving towards the existence of an entity that's more cross-discipline, or, crossing disciplines and crossing modes of communication or activity. Really, what has been happening this week is that we are in intense discussion. I've been documenting all of the conversation between the members of the library, because of course there is no unanimous understanding of what our roles are here. Within ourselves walls are appearing, and that is really, really interesting because if we ourselves are lacking in some ways in our communicative abilities, then how must it be for others looking at us and trying to understand what our role is and what we're trying to do. I'll qualify that by saying there is great support for this project in the area. There is no doubt about that. People are latching on to us with issues that are specific - they're picking up on identity, they're picking up on racial issues, they're picking up on planning issues, heritage, and we're considering how we can be the glue or adhesive that will allow all of those specifics to be acknowledged and documented in some way.

Wes Wilkie It's interesting to see the shift from your understanding of something that on paper you are fully knowledgeable of, you understood what was going to happen, and then in practice it's like, hang on a minute, we are going to have to change. This is normal, no matter how well you prepare, there is always going to be a slight shift in the execution. It comes back to the flaws that you alluded to in the last discussion in relation to the genesis of the project. I have to ask a question in relation to the consultation process. If some of the shops, the shop-owners and the shop-workers here now engaging with you don't understand fully what it's all about, were they not part of a consultation process before the initiation of the project?

Sally Timmons A straight answer to that is no. A skirting, kind of defensive answer is that in some ways we did consult, we did do a lot of groundwork, talking about the idea, looking for a venue, saying this is where we're coming from, this is the type of thing we're doing. And that was greatly supported, but I think the error we made was that that groundwork wasn't evaluated prior to the implementation of the project. And evaluation is something that we're gaining a better understanding of now.

Wes Wilkie The engagement, the level of consultation, no matter what level you actually engaged on, was that facilitated? Was it an information exercise? Was it dialogue, what was it?

Sally Timmons Dialogue.

Wes Wilkie It was dialogue.

Sally Timmons Yes.

Wes Wilkie Using your language or theirs?

Sally Timmons Theirs.

Wes Wilkie Right.

Sally Timmons Theirs, yes. But it was dialogue so therefore, it was 'out there' as opposed to being put back down on paper to be evaluated before going back out again.

Wes Wilkie Were people aware that this was a continuous process?

Sally Timmons I suppose I can't answer that because I can't speak for other people. I mean that's the issue on the table in relation to communication and mediation. I suppose the reason I can't answer that question is because that's the issue at stake at the moment.

Wes Wilkie Okay - and this is the final part of my question - during the consultation, the discussion phase of the project, some of the themes that you have already identified in relation to Moore Street, regeneration, race, community relations, shop-owners or otherwise, came up. And yet, in order to complete the engagement there seems to be an addition of an expectation that this will see life as a documentary rather than as a lending library. The delivery of this, here, was the objective. Now there seems to be the need to add something.

Sally Timmons As justification in some way?

Wes Wilkie No, no. More as a means to further an engagement with the image of community. It's as though the project couldn't see life as a bit of archive material, but it could see life as a documentary. If that wasn't part of the original planning why has it come in now? It seems like an additional incentive to help bridge some communication gaps.

Sarah Pierce I agree. A library is very different from a documentary film in how it comes about, how it is made, and how it functions. It seems to me that as curators you made a determined decision *not* to turn this project in to a spectacle, a display, or representation of a particular community. It's quiet here. It's small. You enter through an inconspicuous blue door and walk upstairs. It isn't ideal, and yet it is totally practical and resourceful. The library is not *about* Moore Street, it is *of* Moore Street. Something that exists along with other commercial and social systems that are part of the street's culture. It is legitimate as it is. I don't think it needs value added. Just a note about changing your language depending on whom you're talking to - it would be slightly psychotic if we all walked around and talked the same way to every single person we dealt with in our daily lives. It makes sense that one conversation is concrete, another is theoretical, another is more formal. Those differences reflect the practice you are engaged in. The fact that the project is primarily social allows for negotiations flow through language. Given the nature of the library, I think it's quite reasonable to continually renegotiate your position. It's a sign of being involved, being interested, being committed to process - and not just because it sounds good.

Sally Timmons I think that's very specifically something that we've been in discussion about among ourselves, among the members of the library. There are people who have engaged with this process because they feel a specific involvement.

Wes Wilkie They're intrigued by it.

Sally Timmons Right. I should describe this afternoon, which was the second of the weekly screenings. The director of one of the films was here and a local trader was here - no, actually there were two local traders - see this is the language. When we say trader or dealer, we're talking about the Irish heritage on the street, selling fish and flowers, whereas if we say business-owner, we're talking about shop-based trade. There were two traders here today, Manan from Medina and Margaret Buckley, who has run a fish stall in this area for a long time. And then Eamonn Martin, who has been a great subscriber and contributor to this facility, who ran a butcher shop in the ground floor of this building, was also here. Then there were people who came to just see the screenings and get a look at the library space. The conversation that happened was just fantastic. People were really comfortable and open. Margaret talked about what it is that she does, what her association is with the committee she is part of, and Manan felt very open about speaking about his experiences, as somebody who is born and raised in Dublin, but still is considered to be on the periphery of heritage or a certain type of Irish culture.

Jesse Jones Was the conversation instigated by the film situation?

Sally Timmons Yes, like the notion of a catalyst. So the bridging Wes, that you spoke of earlier, seems in this space to be a way of communication or mediation. I don't necessarily mean just in an oral way, I mean it also in a kind of structural way.

Jesse Jones It's our responsibility, as practitioners, to realise that the form of an artwork can instigate certain social situations. Why was there this big argument about the type of music that was played from the ice-cream van during the launch? It's because music is particular to the situation, it becomes a catalyst for social collective moments. So whatever music is played brings people together. When we were talking about what a new phase of community art might be, rather than it being something that mediates what a community is, or presents an image of that community, we can begin by looking at a situation like this, like the Moore Street Library, where it's an actual physical space, and that relationships begin to develop in that space. Film and music events can become an important way to catalyse a relationship. Why does talking about a documentary immediately become something that people are interested in? It's partly that we are dealing with forms of art that people will engage with rather than having art pushed down their throat. People enjoy the experience of the film and the festival atmosphere of music, so it doesn't feel like art is being thrown in your face.

Wes Wilkie You are giving them a known form.

Jesse Jones Yes, but not even just a known form, I think there is something about the collective experiences of watching films and listening to music that are important in terms of what a community practice is. Before community practice was coined as a phrase, communities collectively engaged with each other by going to see films - like the Latin American way of having a conversation with the person beside you during the film. We forget that it all existed before we started calling it community art.

Wes Wilkie They are social conventions that will shift according to who you are.

Sarah Pierce Sure, but one experience shouldn't cancel out the other. A film is one thing, a library is another. They are different types of engagement.

[Ken McCue enters]

Wes Wilkie Sally, can I just ask, are you enjoying it?

Sally Timmons Yes.

Wes Wilkie Is everybody that you work with enjoying it?

Sally Timmons Yes, we are. I would possibly say that, after last night's meeting, a lot of stuff has become a lot clearer to each of the members. That's antagonistic for 24 hours, you know, when you suddenly have realisations and rethink situations. At the same time, it's enlightening and exciting and it gives energy again. I can't represent all the members, but I do think anybody that's involved with this project is genuinely and wholly involved.

Sarah Pierce I think it's great that the members have different ideas about what the library is. It's like you agree to disagree in order to move things along. There is a group in Copenhagen that calls itself TVTV. They started a television station together and even though there are different agendas at play, and different ideas of what it should be, there is consensus on what it takes to make it workable. The common purpose is to keep the station running.

Sally Timmons That's a good way of illustrating the point where we might be at the moment. There is another interesting thing about TVTV that is almost like an analogy for the position that we find ourselves in at the minute. They have spoken about the fact that their programming lies in a late night space, bang in between evangelist religious programming and pornography. I'm having phone conversations with one of the artists who is organising an event for next week. Up until this afternoon we hadn't got a venue for that event because this room is too small. I'm one minute ringing the Mosque, asking them would they possibly give us the use of their space, and then hang up the phone and say, "Great, I'll wait for your call." Because you know, he has to talk to his other guy, and the next minute I'm on the phone to TOP Chapel, which is the Christian Centre five doors down from the Mosque, and I'm asking them. I'm not telling them that I was just ringing the other guys.

Ken McCue You should maybe. Pitch one against the other.

Sally Timmons Five minutes later, I'm on the phone to the Jury's Hotel, asking them what their rates are for a function room, which are ridiculous by the way. So that's the kind of prostitution part of it.

Sarah Pierce In all those negotiations, I respect that you try to leave it open, out of sheer practicality, but also because you don't know what is going to happen. It is the claim and I think a downfall of so many projects that set up with this logic that they need to tell you what is going to happen, to tell you what your experience will be.

Jesse Jones But it's exciting as well that people are saying, "Well that doesn't represent me. And that music doesn't represent me." It shows that the stakes

are high with a situation. All of a sudden this space opens and people start to think, "Well does that music represent me or not?"

Sarah Pierce Can't we experience things that don't necessarily represent us?

Wes Wilkie But the question demonstrates an evolved sense of self and individuality, which is great.

Sally Timmons I think it was recognised after the launch when the immediate on-the-corner traders were expressing the fact that they had lost business because a crowd was around their stall. One trader had to dump strawberries on Saturday. It's a fact. That wasn't a conversation; it was more an expression of her position. For somebody to be put in a position where they can articulate their position in a very clear way is important to acknowledge.

Wes Wilkie The real entrepreneurs would look at the new crowds and say, "What could we sell these?"

Ken McCue What's that great old Jewish saying, if the sun shines, sell ice-cream, if it rains, sell umbrellas. If your commerce depends on foot traffic, you have to be flexible around the crowds.

Sally Timmons It really does happen like that in cities like New York, where it just switches over. When it rains and you're walking down Fifth Avenue, you're suddenly thinking, where did all these umbrellas come from?

Sarah Pierce When I first moved here I really missed that. You mean I have to go into a department store? For an umbrella? Where is the Koren guy on the corner who automatically hands you one for five bucks?

Sally Timmons I bet you they have amazing satellite systems that they can check directly into the weather.

Wes Wilkie But the other thing is that they don't always get rid of all the stock.

Ken McCue Yes, that's right. I come from the markets, as Wes does as well. All my ma's neighbours are dealers...

Wes Wilkie You might want to qualify the term 'dealer.'

Ken McCue Yes, what I mean by dealer is of the fruit and vegetable variation. Our house has always been like the United Nations - people coming and going all the time. A lot of the women that live beside me mam have come in and said, "What do they eat?" And we've given them some advice. Get loads of yams. Get the plantains. You look at the stalls now and they've got signs up for yams at whatever price they are.

Wes Wilkie When I came to Dublin, the only place you could find a sweet potato was in Tesco's or Marks & Spencers.

Sally Timmons Wrapped in plastic.

Ken McCue Exactly. Some of the fishmongers, who were going downhill for years, are now selling fish that they would have dumped years ago. Red snapper, that kind of thing. It's them coming to terms with the market basically.

Sally Timmons Something that came up today in the discussion after the screening is the idea of a lending library or an archive or an information resource that will hold information related to the street's

histories, but will also hold a future for a contemporary situation as well. Margaret Buckley, one of the fish mongers who was here today, was telling us that she along with Ernie Beggs, the Chair of the On Street Traders Committee, have requested to the City Council that it would be a good idea for people who run businesses, who trade on the street, to be sent abroad to research other markets and other systems that are successful internationally. There is a difference between the English Market in Cork (excuse the pun, but that's what it's called locally) and Les Puces in Paris or the Chatelais Market, or Les Halles, which went through crazy regeneration and should be used as a model of what not to do in this area, or Camden, or whatever. Eamonn pointed out there is a problem and it's a very specific problem written into the legislation in this country - and it doesn't look like it's going to be changed any day soon - that the street traders in Moore Street are limited to selling fruit and fish only.

Wes Wilkie Is that national legislation or local bylaw?

Jesse Jones It's probably a bylaw.

Ken McCue It's bylaw.

Wes Wilkie Just a point about the English Market in Cork, which is obviously a point of historical orientation, some of these bylaws are actually British bylaws which have remained on the statute books, post independence and have just been maintained. You know, you get a day in the stocks if you don't practice archery for two-and-a-half hours at the weekend, you can't sell sliced bread on a Sunday, that sort of thing. In Liverpool the local City Council has a fractious relationship with the street traders, and it goes back to an ancient bylaw at the time the city's charter was given back in 1208. So it's 800 years of tension between local authority and the street traders. It seems that a local bylaw, which would be about specifying fruit and veg, or fruit, veg and fish, is quite specific. It tells you that the power was with the meat traders and they have the shops. They didn't want anybody on the streets selling what they were selling. The clothes retailers, the rag trade was restricted to another part of the city. So there would have been some pressure brought about politically not to diversify, and that reflects a historic situation.

Sarah Pierce It's funny because the market in Meeting House Square feels limited in terms of commerce, but for different reasons. It's only open to a certain type of trade, like there is an overly conscious idea of what an outdoor market should be. During the week Meeting House Square is so empty and nebulous, no one really understands how to use it, how to be in it. Then on the weekends it's gourmet central.

Wes Wilkie In any other city that space would be used seven days a week. As a shopping experience, because it is just one day, and it's a limited day, it's all hands to the pump. It isn't particularly pleasurable. If it was open for longer during the week, you'd have more days to be in it. You'd spread it out. You wouldn't necessarily get more trade, you'd just get a better spread of it, you know, through the week.

Jesse Jones I think the City Council looks at marketplaces as contentious space because it's street trading and street people walking up and down all throughout

the day and they expect a big cleanup afterwards. They look at the marketplace as, "Wouldn't it be nicer if it was all in cement and glass shops, and we didn't have to deal with it?"

Wes Wilkie But that kills the spirit of it. It kills the enterprise of it. And actually it impacts on people with less disposable income as well. You go into a shop, what is like a 10 cent bit of produce, you'll pay 50 cent for because of overhead. It penalises, rather than enhances.

Sarah Pierce In Meeting House Square the same mark-up applies. Comparing the two markets, Moore Street and Meeting House Square, raises a class issue. I'm glad they both exist, but I'm thinking about why I end up in one as opposed to the other. Meeting House Square predicated a market on leisure time - it's Saturday. Time to get some fancy cheeses and some olives.

Ken McCue Do some tasting.

Jesse Jones It's kind of based on a French Market - which is bourgeois, it's a yuppie market.

Sally Timmons Just remember though that when we're talking about Meeting House Square, we're talking about a different jurisdiction, because that is Temple Bar Properties. It's a privately owned plot of land; it's not a public space. They have gates on that square and it does get closed to the public. You can walk down Moore Street at any time of day and you can claim that territory anytime. So it does have a different ethos.

Sarah Pierce It is a different ethos regarding what is 'public.'

Wes Wilkie What is interesting is the Farmer's Market will only sell you seasonal produce, whereas on Moore Street, on the street market, you can buy more or less anything you like from around the world. In yesteryear it would have been the other way around. The specialist produce would have been with the Farmer's Market in Temple Bar and the seasonal stuff would have been down on the street. It just sort of shifted around.

Ken McCue It has. I was talking to my mother, I said I was going to be down here and she says, "While you're down there, will you slip into Buckley's and get some pigs' tails?" They've been out of the windows, shop windows, for years. And now you see pigs' heads and all that.

Jesse Jones They're all coming back in.

Ken McCue Tripe is reappearing; they've got a Chinese butcher in there in Buckley's. There's Halal shops around the corner as well. The street reflects the people who live here. The fact that it could be, in the next few months, closed down... What a shame, what an indictment of Dublin City Council.

Sally Timmons Dublin City Council is implicated in this. That's something that I wasn't aware of before. I was placing blame on planning groups and developers. It seems that it goes back a lot further. Something that was said to me last night, because constantly people are asking me what's going on down in Moore Street, what's happening at the moment. Everybody and anyone is interested in this project for obvious reasons. Somebody made a comment to me yesterday, saying that there is an issue at stake here in relation to the municipality of the city and the fact that a lot of the people on civic panels

and in city boards in the various different departments do not live in Dublin. Or if they do live in Dublin, they're not from Dublin.

Ken McCue Yes.

Sally Timmons They therefore, do not have a sense of urban life and urban culture, and don't think of Dublin internationally.

Sarah Pierce The vision presented of Dublin as an international city is incredibly superficial. It's not about real integration. People want to reinvent civic space and the result is to redo places like Moore Street to make them look 'urbane.'

Ken McCue Manufactured.

Sarah Pierce But you can't so easily manufacture a public. Look at the city. I live in Smithfield and it is an architectural, civic, cultural disaster. It's based on a notion of planning with no regard for who is already present. I don't know if it's as particular as the people making decisions don't live here. I think that people who live in Dublin are ambivalent about how the city should look.

Jesse Jones Instead we should ask how do we want it to function.

Sarah Pierce Right. Moore Street is perhaps the most integrated space in the city. It works. You can get the meat you want to eat, the veg you want to cook, and phone cards to call home. It should be on every tourist map of Dublin.

Jesse Jones Is it not?

Wes Wilkie You'll see very few tourist attractions on the Northside in any of the tourist brochures.

Ken McCue Collins Barracks, yes. The Phoenix Park, yes. But you know, stuff like Moore Street, it's in a part of the city that we don't deal with.

Sally Timmons What I was saying earlier about Dublin City Council being implicated in all of this, was kind of the notion of an urban history in this country. It's not that old. I mean how many of us are so many generations Dublin? I can claim to be eight - but there's not that many people that can. A lot of people would have one or other parent that is from a regional part of this country. The other point that has been made by the traders - and I'm talking about the historical Irish stall traders, that category - is that they have spoken about this notion of a homogenous culture in that they rely on the business owners who run the shops on the street as much as the business owners rely on them. They feel a little bit more secure in the sense that they fought for their licences and they feel the energy or the strength to fight for them again, but they feel that these shops that are on very short term leases, if they're gone, then they've lost major clientele. They have said outright that not that many people come in from the outside. Moore Street really is a local homogenous entity that's happening in the sense of, I'll set up my fish stall, the guy who is selling phone cards is buying fish off me and the restaurant person is buying off him.

Ken McCue It creates that great intercultural dialogue as well, which is significant. So you have Russians cheek by jowl with...

Wes Wilkie The Ukrainians.

Ken McCue Ukrainians...

Wes Wilkie Cheek by jowl with Russians.

Ken McCue Exactly. Polish people meeting Chinese for the first time. Even the supermarket down the street, Lidl, is benefiting from this street. It wouldn't have set up here, except they're cute enough to know there's a lot of traffic in the street, so we'll pitch here. So you've got that happening and that's a really interesting cultural dynamic. The planners never considered this in the integrated Area Plans with HARP on my left and on my right, O'Connell Street. So for example, when I went along to the first HARP meeting I looked around for Jack Gilligan, Arts Officer, who wasn't to be found anywhere. He wasn't invited along; he wasn't invited to the first meeting. There is no sociologist at the meeting; there is no archaeologist at the meeting. It was full of engineers and traffic managers. That's what it was all about; it was all about the development led planning.

Sally Timmons On that notion of Jack Gilligan and Dublin City Council, because Wes, you were asking me about developments in the project over the last week, something that just came up about three hours ago is that the City Librarian was down this afternoon...

Ken McCue Deidre Ellis-King.

Sally Timmons I think so. She left information, saying, I'm not sure if you've considered this, but when this place closes and this archive has been built, please give me a call.

Ken McCue It's not the fact that Jack wasn't prepared to turn up, he certainly was. It was the fact that the planners didn't invite him.

Wes Wilkie Well look, the dominant culture of local authorities tends to be the planners. Planners only want to talk to architects and engineers.

Ken McCue And traffic managers.

Wes Wilkie You get engineers, planners and architects. And you tend to find the leadership in local authorities, depending on what county or what part of the country, the chief executive of the council or city manager would be one of those three normally. It's very rarely you find it's somebody else. That's a dominant view and having worked with local authority planners, you don't necessarily want that dominant view.

Sarah Pierce Ken you mentioned not having the sociologist at the table and that is an interesting proposition. Someone who can tell you what the patterns of behaviour are and how people use civic space in specific, not in general, and not in accordance with any particular community organisation. I didn't know there was a Mosque here, on Moore Street. That to me is an obvious place to start, not to just say, oh there is now a Muslim community here, but to acknowledge that a Muslim community was here already. Smithfield is a great square, but who is it for? The more they do, the more alienating it is to people living there.

Ken McCue Ironically, because we got a tip off that HARP was going to happen, the community sector was the most progressive element in that mix. We went to the bother of going over to Wales and Liverpool and going to squares like Sienna and Piazza di San Marco. Glasgow would give its right arm - and Liverpool for that matter - for

a square like Smithfield. It would be interesting to see what they would do with it.

Wes Wilkie They probably would want the arm back.

Ken McCue Well that could be. We were the ones that pushed the boat out further and further. And it was the likes of the planners going, hold on a minute, here's a community with the balance of power. We were the ones saying we need cultural planning here. We had the Ormonde Multimedia Centre, which is a big squat and we did a huge amount of experimental work there. It became almost a cultural observatory that we could expand to the rest of the area. We got it into the framework plan, but did it appear in the integrated Area Plan?

Sarah Pierce No.

Ken McCue Not at all. From '96 on, the whole thing was dismantled.

Sarah Pierce That's the big issue with regeneration. Groups without an official base get left out of the plan. The St Pappins Ladies Club in Ballymun have met for 39 years as a group, most recently in a disused flat in one of the Towers. The regeneration is doing a one-one match to rehouse community organisations, but there is no new space for St Pappins. For them regeneration means displacement.

Jesse Jones You see that's a dangerous thing - when a so called cultural project comes into an area. Out in Tallaght - I've been living there my whole life - there is very little support culturally at all. We had an Art Centre and it was situated right beside a traveller halting site that had existed for about seven generations. This was something that was a bone of contention with South Dublin County Council; they were looking for a way of getting travellers off that halting site. So they used the regeneration of the Art Centre as a wedge to get them off the land. They sold the land to a huge developer and they built apartment blocks and now there is no traveller halting site at all left in Tallaght. That is something that had existed for generations. Tallaght had always been a stopping point between Wicklow and Dublin, as a traditional traveller settling point. Now that has been completely wiped away by this kind of regeneration process. It isn't even something that would come up in a conversation with these planners. Something that is there, move it out of the way, because this is the big cultural package. The bells and whistles are part of the problem.

Wes Wilkie There's no compassion in regeneration. People are afterthoughts in these processes. Profit is king.

Sally Timmons That's perhaps a way of illustrating a prevailing notion that what is temporary or unofficial is not useful, or not worth something, to come back to cultural values for a minute. You can use certain management ways of doing things to get things done. That doesn't mean everything has to be crisp; it doesn't need to suffer from a neurosis that everything needs to be in its place.

Wes Wilkie It doesn't have to be anal.

Sarah Pierce Sally, you were saying that a lot of the businesses on Moore Street are temporary; they get their lease for a couple of months and then leave, and that's how you got this space. So being temporary is kind of a boon, but it also reflects actual restrictions on space.

Jesse Jones You've no choice but to do a temporary project.

Sarah Pierce In Rotterdam, artists squat all the time, it's actually sanctioned by the city. So temporary projects are really a vital part of what happens in the city culturally.

Wes Wilkie There is an energy about temporary projects you don't get with safer, more secure - not quite permanent necessarily - but established spaces. If there's no danger in the occupation of the space, there tends not to be the energy level you get when you're only in it for a week. It's not necessarily as crafted as it could be, but that's part of the charm of it as well.

Sarah Pierce It's different when the space is underthreat. What I am talking about though is a notion of the temporary that is not just a couple of weeks, but is about trying something for 6 months or a year and then letting it go. What could that be, what kind of project could that be?

Ken McCue Yes, quasi-permanent we used to call it.

Wes Wilkie Right, where there is no time to become institutionalised and become safe. I find that is much more interesting.

Sarah Pierce Sally, your project Via has been involved with temporary spaces, or temporary occupations.

Sally Timmons The first Via was in 2002, in an old pet shop in Camden Street and then the second one was in 2004, and it was the membership-based Dublin Photographic Centre that gave us a headquarters. They were both just points where people could pick up maps. There were many spaces, 27 both years, where business owners or proprietors gave us the use of their spaces.

Jesse Jones What was interesting about Via as well, if we're talking about temporary spaces, there is also this situation where when artists first come out of college there is this idea of the emerging artist - you're not going to get into these sanctified art spaces. You have to look for the alternative project to initiate yourself. That is where the next generation of artists will come from, these self-initiated projects because there's no alternative. It's kind of like do-it-yourself.

Sally Timmons Coming to the end of this discussion, I can see that the next sentence would be about the value of temporary spaces in relation to City Arts Centre and the Civil Arts Inquiry. But unfortunately I have to throw you all out because I have to go and catch a train...

Sarah Pierce I know, I know.

Sally Timmons I could actually leave the key with you, no problem, because once the door is locked, there are other people coming in the morning.

Sarah Pierce That would work. It would give us a chance to wrap up.

Ken McCue So the screenings went ok today? I'm sorry I couldn't make it.

Sally Timmons The screenings have gone great, they really have.

Sarah Pierce Just before you go, I'm curious whether the system of the library is working for you in terms of membership - is that framework of exchange working?

Sally Timmons Yes. I think the only issue is that we have to keep reminding ourselves that we set up a lending library, because it's so easy to just get excited and want to do all these different things. But you have to be realistic, and you can't take on everybody's issues...

Sarah Pierce And then miss your train.

Sally Timmons Right!

Jesse Jones See you later Sally.

Ken McCue It's interesting, we're borrowing on lending ideas here. The library next door, which is one of the biggest memberships in Europe by the way, the Central Library, is amazing. I was in there last night - and it was like a Tower of Babel. In the conversation room you hear all sorts of languages going on. Connecting the two libraries would be really interesting. I'm glad to know that the screenings are going on because that's what's interesting about libraries - this exchange of ideas and borrowing from the outside.

Jesse Jones The library is an interesting model for art practice. What its intentions are and what the space's intentions are, but also as the library as a public space that is in danger of private enterprise and being privatised. It's on the wish list for IBEC to get in and privatise public libraries - and charge people for membership.

Ken McCue They've been trying to for years and years.

Jesse Jones Yes. So it is one of those spaces that is rooted in ideas of knowledge, that knowledge is democratic and we should be able to all share it. It's also something that belongs to a time previous to this. Libraries? That was a thing of the past. Democracy and knowledge? No.

Ken McCue They died with Andrew Carnegie.

Wes Wilkie Or Alexandria.

Ken McCue Yes, the Romans are to blame. Let me just go back to Charlie Haughey. I think it was around '79 or '80, that the Fianna Fáil administration were closing down libraries and I said on public record that only two people in the world were closing down libraries, Pol Pot in Cambodia and Charlie Haughey. That's what was happening, they were winding down the service. Nobody supporting it. This was one of the great, as you say, one of the great changes of Haughey.

Jesse Jones The focus in much recent art practice has been on public space, like parks. A lot of artists are talking about parks and other public spaces as a collective sense of experience and libraries are part of that as well. In a sense the art community has arrived at this idea of the library as this interesting space that we can use as an intersection to begin a conversation and as a physical space as well.

Wes Wilkie Libraries are always much more than reading spaces. The nature of libraries is changing rapidly; information technology has put pay to an awful lot of old library business. You don't need to go to the library to read the newspaper if you have access to the Internet. If you have a computer at home, you can do it at home, but if not you can go into a library and use the computer terminal. Membership or readership levels, they call them readers, the customers, in Liverpool

have gone through the roof. That isn't the traditional reader who will take out a romantic novel or thriller or what have you - it's the other services that are growing rapidly. Libraries, certainly in Merseyside, and I think it's in general throughout England and Wales, were always 'libraries and arts.' Each of them has an art space or spaces that could be used for art activity. A motion was put forward by Liverpool City Council back in the early '90s to designate all libraries art centres as well.

Ken McCue Right.

Wes Wilkie It's usually spoken word or some kind of writing group. Most would be flexible to extra curricular activity, so you could book them for weekends and Sundays. As long as you can pay the caretakers. They become much more part of the community than the traditional library would be.

Sarah Pierce More than the art centre.

Wes Wilkie Totally, all the barriers to access have been removed. The other thing is you could commission an exhibition or put on an exhibition and you could organise it so the libraries would tour it for you. Drop it to one place and around the city it would go - 25 libraries, 26 libraries. And it would come back to you in a year's time or whenever. In addition to which, if you want to distribute information, there is a centre of distribution dissemination point. You take your bundle of whatever, posters, brochures down to the Central Library and they ask you where do you want this to go - this is free - you say you want it to go to the following branch libraries please.

Sarah Pierce And it goes?

Wes Wilkie Gone. It is an under exploited network, a totally under exploited resource. It's not like they were jealously guarding this, it's just that people don't think of libraries for this type of exchange.

Sarah Pierce Do you think that art centres jealously guard these exchanges, sharing information for example, mailing lists, and even programming decisions? What you are describing is a library that behaves more like an art centre, but in fact art centres aren't that open.

Wes Wilkie I agree, the economics of art centre life get in the way of being liberal. The typical art centre, say out in the country, the county art centre, has political tensions at board level, then there are staff tensions - subject to being an independent county council unit, you'll find most tensions reside within the staff. The wages are paid, but there's little money for programming. So what you see is a set of compromises, including the building. The art space is inadequate, the performance space is inadequate. But why? Because there was nobody involved in the arts, involved with the design of the building. I reckon there's an architect's warehouse somewhere...

Jesse Jones Where they have all these art centres just ready to go.

Wes Wilkie Yes, because there is no individuality to them at all.

Jesse Jones A flat-pack box.

Wes Wilkie Which option, A, B or C?

Sarah Pierce Didn't the Arts Council recently complete an analysis of art centres in Ireland?

Wes Wilkie But that's consultation without determination.

Sarah Pierce Yes. There is no actual analysis there.

Wes Wilkie It's like if they said, from now on, anybody looking for capital support from the Arts Council for an art centre build, must have an architect working in partnership with the main artists that will be using the building, visual artists or performance, whatever it might be. Make it clear that this is an arts building, not a municipal building that is multipurpose for conferences and seminars and a bit of art as well, which is what a lot of them actually are if you look at them.

Jesse Jones It's like 1% art. It could be there is a change and a shift in architectural concepts of what is valuable. It parallels what's happening here on Moore Street, where you're seeing that idea of levelling a building and replacing it with a big glass, concrete shed. More progressive architects are looking at taking spaces that already exist and developing them in a way, that they change, they become something different and they adapt to the new function and needs that are necessary now.

Wes Wilkie Unfortunately it's cheaper to build from scratch oftentimes.

Sarah Pierce Architects will always tell you that it's cheaper to build, and that is a real reflection on the profession. Sorry, we can't think creatively, we can't deal with buildings we built twenty, thirty, fifty years ago, it's too expensive.

Wes Wilkie I suppose in many ways what you see is a series of compromises. Any art centre will tell you that their programme reflects the make-up of the communities that they serve and best reflects the areas of demand in those communities. Absolute, total nonsense.

Ken McCue It doesn't happen in practice.

Wes Wilkie If for instance, you have the highest unemployment rate in your region, then you know the disposable level of income is going to be low. You're faced with a whole raft of challenges. One, getting people interested in art in the first place. Two, getting them to pay for it. Three, getting them to come to a space they wouldn't normally use on a regular basis.

Jesse Jones Do you think that for the cost of producing a really expensive building, a lot of the money could have gone into programming? An example that I was quite angry about was that my cousin used to go to guitar lessons that were only €3 in the Rec Centre in Ballymun. Now it's €7 because they got a new Rec Centre, but that doesn't mean that he has a higher income.

Wes Wilkie It's possible that they lost the subsidy. These things happen. Using that example, if it's a subsidised service, and it's in demand, you could probably justify losing money on it. The benefit to the community that you serve is greater than the few bob you would be getting in. However, if it's the case that even with subsidy, demand is low, and you look at figures, you say, okay, if we remove the subsidy it's going to bump up the price of a guitar lesson by €2. But if it's only a low level demand and that's not going to shrink any further, it's actually worth just removing the subsidy. It's difficult.

Sarah Pierce Jochen Gerz's project in Ballymun has raised issues around subsidies and how much people are willing to invest in their own environment. The project offers residents a chance to buy a tree for the neighbourhood. The cost is partly subsidised and partly covered by the resident who chooses the tree.

Jesse Jones But the trees are quite expensive on the Jochen Gerz Project. The minimum amount is €50. It is quite expensive.

Sarah Pierce It is and it isn't.

Wes Wilkie There's a subtext. I suppose it's an assumption, particularly in working class areas, that one of the barriers to you going is that you can't afford to go. That's not the case. If you put something on that people want to see, you'll get the crowd. It's the tension - well not tension - the void in some cases, between the artistic direction and programmes of art centres, and the needs or wants of the community that they serve. I keep saying, if people only want to hear guitar bands, put that on. The challenge to you is to make that a different experience than just listening to a guitar band. Do other things with it, broaden the horizon. But at the same time, giving people what they want. That has to be the challenge. Unfortunately that is not the approach that is taken.

Ken McCue If you look at a state enterprise, the Concert Hall, it's relatively cheap for concerts, but I remember working on a report about 10 years ago over there, which revealed that 1% of the population from the North Inner City attended the National Concert Hall because it's in Earlsfort Terrace for a start. The promotion was very poor.

Wes Wilkie I can think of another reason for that though, the sound is abysmal.

Sarah Pierce I've never been to the National Concert Hall.

Wes Wilkie Don't waste your money.

Ken McCue It's not expensive, that's the point I was making. It's actually relatively cheap.

Wes Wilkie That's not the barrier.

Sarah Pierce I'm interested in the point Wes is raising. We assume the barrier is money, that if people have to pay they won't, but more often there is a complaint about content that goes back to the beginning of the conversation, what we were saying about representation. It especially pertains to work that situates itself in relationship to a particular community, as though 'community' is one thing, one place. So when someone from the community doesn't like a project, the complaint is that it doesn't represent his or her position. It is one thing to be critical, to criticise arts programming or education, but to reduce our criticism to issues of representation is too facile. Representative of whom, whose interests?

Jesse Jones I think people are right to question. When an arts exhibition or an arts project comes into an area like this, people are right to ask, "What am I going to get out of it?" Clearly, you're getting out of it the fact that you are locating here and you're using the cultural capital of this area as a really interesting space, that is multicultural and is a part of old Dublin and working class Dublin. Clearly you're getting cultural kudos for your project, what am I getting out of it? It is

a right question for people to ask in many ways. It shows a level of empowerment to ordinary people, that they will turn around and say, "What is in it for me?" I can see from here that you're getting something out of it, but what am I getting out of it?

Wes Wilkie It's a perfectly valid question.

Jesse Jones Yes, it is. Working class people perceive a lot of so called cultural experiences that happen in working class areas as cultural imperialism. This is art imposed on us. It can become a 'communion' experience, as described by Jean Luc Nancy. Not community based and collective, but it's something from above. It's an idea that cultural forms don't come from below. We need to look at what people are interested in. Are they interested in music, in cinema? Just a funny story, my cousin had her debs last week - I don't know whether you know about this Sarah, but when you have your debs in Dublin everybody from your road or your estate comes into your house. Your family buys €300 worth of beer, so money isn't a problem when it comes to entertaining yourself, you know. Your family buy loads of drink and you invite in all the neighbours. There was about 150 people in my cousin's garden and her house, and this Hummer came up the road and every single person came out of the house and we were all killing each other trying to get into the Hummer. It was just a stupid car. Just this car came down the road, but it created this exciting collective experience of everybody running out of their houses to see what was happening. A car can create that kind of energy and that kind of buzz and bring people out of their houses to come together. Even though it is what we would consider to be quite a tacky thing. The Herald ran an article about it two days later, saying this car is what people use for 'traveller weddings', disparaging the aesthetic of this thing because it looks a certain way, it's enjoyed by a certain class of people, so it must be bad.

Sarah Pierce What's that about?

Jesse Jones There's a deliberate attack happening, especially in British media, British press and television, against working class culture and the aesthetics of working class culture in naming people 'chavs' and demonising people because of how they look, wearing hoodies. Especially working with community projects, it is quite a contentious space at the moment. Particularly if we're looking at it from a cultural and artistic point of view, that is quite contentious because you're looking at people whose visual sense of themselves, their visual sense of their own culture has been continuously disparaged in media and press.

Sarah Pierce People have a right to question, but is asking, "How does this represent me?" the right question?

Jesse Jones Knowing where they're coming from, it's a smart question.

D O W N L

This is Paper No. 11 in a series of discussions published by The Metropolitan Complex that circulate as free publications.

Printed on the occasion of **The Moore Street Lending Library**, curated by Sandra Grozdanic, Declan Sheehan, and Sally Timmons, 27 September - 15 October, 2005, at 55 Moore Street in Dublin.

Front cover: Moore Street, Dublin c. 2005

The Metropolitan Complex is a Dublin-based project by Sarah Pierce. It organizes around a range of activities such as exhibitions, talks and publications. These structures often open up to the personal and the incidental.

info@themetropolitancomplex.com
www.themetropolitancomplex.com

Printed through support from **The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon**.

