



FIGURES OF 8

A project interrogating the current state
of Dublin 8 by **Fatima Groups United &
Veronica Dyas**



create national development
agency for collaborative arts

Figures of Eight

Made collaboratively by
Fatima Groups United and
artist Veronica Dyas, 2023

Cover image:
Figures of Eight Performance
Photo by Jacek Snochowski

Figures of Eight was a live performance process and *moving performance* made collaboratively with Fatima Groups United and artist Veronica Dyas in 2023. The project interrogated the current state of Dublin 8 in relation to accommodation, gentrification and biodiversity, and was produced by Project Arts Centre and funded through the Arts Council's Artist in the Community Project Realisation Award managed by Create.

Fatima Groups United is the representative body of residents and projects in Fatima/Herberton, Dublin 8, since 1995. The project operates from community development principles providing key services in the areas of health & wellbeing, education, employment, arts, childcare, counselling support, information & advice, family support and advocacy. As well as being regular attenders at events and performances, Fatima Groups United and Project Arts Centre have developed an ongoing artistic relationship across projects such as PROJECT FATIMA: ALL IN (2020), Dance Uncovered and Anima Fatima with Philip Connaughton (2022) and Rhizome Green Arts Project (2021-2) with Louis Haugh. Artist Veronica Dyas worked collaboratively with members of this community over the course of six months in 2023, through a series of discussions, exploratory workshops using techniques and tools incorporating sociological research, theatre, new text, and the practice of walking.

This publication, which features an essay by the artist Veronica Dyas alongside perspectives from her collaborators, forms the first in our Sharing Practice series. This series is intended to showcase collaborative, socially engaged work in all its complexities. We look forward to using this platform to share practice via multiple media.

PHASE 1



"I do believe in building Community..."

This project began with weekly workshops, held in the F2 Centre, Dublin 8. The artist's intention for these sessions, as facilitator, was to generate conversation, performative actions and reflection around the topics under interrogation: home, community, class, gentrification, loss of space and place, biodiversity, and the lack of green spaces in Dublin 8. Each workshop was planned to include an element of live performance as a means to explore and build performance capacity within the group and individuals within. These weekly workshops generated intense conversations covering a multitude of content and created an abundance of material which informed the performance proper.

Initially, this project was called 'Anseo!' Here, referencing a community who have lived in Dublin 8 for generations, amidst the towering blocks they now find themselves squeezed between.

Here, still here, enduring through the current gentrification and the intensity of new builds, largely consisting of student accommodation, hotels and private, unaffordable apartments. These issues formed some of the dense discussions that took place weekly, unpacking the diversity of lived experiences and commonality of the individuals within the group, which was formed from an existing drama group.

As this project progressed, a tension between expectations and the style and form of this new work being developed became evident, which at times complicated the boundaries of the process of engagement. The meeting points of content and form, intention and motivations manifested as a clear need to undertake a review just before the Easter break. After discussion within the group, the three core workers from Fatima Groups United (FGU), Project Arts Centre and the artist in the community, Veronica, met together to reassess in order to establish boundaries and clarify the purpose to regroup and to re-centre the values and expectations originally intended.

Phase 1

Together they examined the conditions and framing, and how best to restructure the process and move forward within the scope of the project as originally intended. It wasn't an easy transition. But this candid conversation was an opportunity to express the experiences thus far, what was and wasn't working, the impact of the choices made in the beginning, and the expectations of what, how and why this work was being made in a collaborative context.

The Easter break gave space to process this conversation, to sit with the artistic insecurity inherent in making new work within a community setting, the dynamics between the organisations and the artist's own practice within this project.

While conversation and discussion is a vital element of working with people and on any new work, there had evolved, through miscommunication, an overemphasis on this aspect of the development phase, and a resulting block in transitioning from discussion to the envisaged and necessary practical action of physically creating a performative work. It had always been the desire and intention of this group to move from active spectators towards makers through this project.

Artist Veronica Dyas interrogated the work so far, revisiting notes, the documentation of the sessions, and sat with the discomfort of being more than half way through a creative collaborative process and feeling like it was time to begin again. It's the thing you always forget when beginning a project, it always takes longer than you imagine at the start. Building real relationships takes time. To really work collaboratively takes time, it takes presence, it takes active listening and discernment, it takes trust, and trust is earned through ongoing interaction and a process of getting to know each other.

The review meeting had been intense, but it had been honest, a real understanding of each person's intention had emerged and a firm commitment to work through and continue the project had been clear. In finding a way to begin again, the original focus of the project was key, and reflecting on the work so far through that lens gave the answers as to how to continue and revitalise the process in a coherent way that was suited to the core group.

Phase 1

John Bissett's newly published book, *"It's Not Where You Live, It's How You Live: Class and Gender Struggles in a Dublin Housing Estate"* (2023) provided a timely reminder of what was at stake in contemporary Dublin, offering a class and genders analysis of a housing estate under regeneration.

There was something both profound and familiar in the process of Bissett's qualitative research and in how he shared the journey with the people whose stories he shared, in parallel to his adept analysis of the visceral impacts of neo-liberal late stage capitalist policies on communities in Ireland.

A renewed clarity of purpose, and a refocusing on the necessary tools needed to ensure that the community members of FGU could achieve their goal to create and perform their own work, was gained. The group work shifted towards building a performance focused process through which the members could articulate their experiences and views and how to speak to the wider structural issues of the accommodation crisis in contemporary Ireland, and find performative devices through which all of this could be shared with a broader public audience.

As artist in the community, the continuation and development of the artist's own practice is equally vital.

Within the collaborative process, an active and authentic return to the tools of one's own artistic practice, after any moments of bewilderment, is the only way to find the essence of how to make the work that ensures the community's priorities are realised, in partnership with the practice of the artist. Therein lies the point of fusion in collaborative arts practice, and the art flows from there.

In this process, the practice of walking became part of the key.

PHASE 2



“We need to grow communities not culture funds”

Walking and Talking in the D8 began with the core Fatima Groups United group straight after the Easter break. Returning to the intention of this project, the group physically explored the neighbourhood. Walking from the F2, down the filled-in Canal which was then being excavated and remodelled as a park with an edible garden (which has since opened, and looks great); walking down Marrowbone Lane, past the flats where the artist spent her formative years, past her special tree, and on to the Green area at Pimlico with the spiral to remember those who died in the community, and the tree that marks the deaths from drugs; back up past the back of Guinness’ where the Hop Store is, past the space where the Traveller halting site was, now disappeared, overshadowed by a towering block of unaffordable apartments.

The group observing and documenting the changes in the area as they walked, the large high rises shooting up, the increase in tourists and how the city seems to prioritise them above the intense need for accommodation for homes within the communities, noting the old social housing flats along the way, walking and talking and sharing perspectives and becoming a group of makers together.

A new outline for the project was proposed, including the new frame and name *‘Figures of Eight’*, a reference to the symbol of infinity, the journey of walking the Dublin 8 neighbourhood with the F2 central, with reference to the lightness of the choreography and aerial step. The group talked through some of the material already created and made an initial plan for how to continue towards making a new performance collaboratively, including having a dance workshop with Cathy Coughlan based on figures of eight.



lived experiences and knowledge about the area. Community workers, artists, family, activists whose time, energy and knowledge about the area broadened the understanding of the group's experience and informed the practice. This was the breakthrough in finding the art of this process, and became a vital component in framing the performance.



Walking and Talking in the D8. Photographs by Veronica Dyas

PHASE 3



Phase 3

Community Screening and Town Hall Style Chats

*"I don't know my neighbour,
and they don't know me."*

The Community Screening of 'The Pruitt-Igoe Myth' was an idea Veronica had early on in the planning phase.

It's a documentary that speaks to what happens when a neoliberal, capitalist, profit driven approach to housing and home is taken on a structural level. 'The Pruitt-Igoe Myth' is one of the most powerful explorations of the impact of structural decisions on people who live and come from public housing, the narrative of "failure" that accompanies the decline of housing projects such as Pruitt-Igoe and the inherent class bias that fuel decisions made about places so many people call home. Feature documentary director, Chad Freidrichs granted permission to screen the film for free once there was no cost to those attending.

Inviting local residents to the screening provided a way to involve more 'local local' people. The intention was to invite the people who live around the F2 building.

The demographic of the weekly workshops was primarily people from outside the

local area of the F2, who had connections to the area through family or interest. These collaborators have been involved as a group for a number of years, particularly since the pandemic. Initial expectations in advance of beginning this process was that the group would comprise people from the immediate F2 area, from the Fatima Mansions, who have experienced the "regeneration process". This community screening was directly intended to include more people from the immediate area of the F2 in the process.

Community Worker and activist Clare O'Connor facilitated the chats after the screening. It was a really powerful night, the essence and intention of which was captured brilliantly by artist Ray Hegarty's photograph. There was discussion around the similarities between the interviews in the documentary and the stories heard repeatedly from people who come from public housing flats, the sense of home, community, and state abandonment. In depth discussion followed, about 'regeneration projects' currently ongoing in St. Michael's Estate and Dolphin House, both active processes in Dublin 8, both problematic in how the people who live there continue to be impacted.



Community Screening of the
"Pruitt-Igoe Myth". Photograph
by Ray Hegarty

Discussion about architecture, city planning and loss was extremely vital and energetic with people from/living in and/or working in Dublin 8.

Unfortunately the screening did not result in more people from directly around the F2 Centre, the 'local locals', attending. It did however create new meetings with people involved in the current regeneration processes, self-identified 'gentrifiers' from

Dublin 8 contributing, and participating in walking and talking sessions and attending the performance later on, as well as generating a sense of solidarity and commitment to active engagement and awareness around the ongoing struggles within traditionally working class communities, particularly in Dublin 8.

PHASE 4



Phase 4

Studio Week in the CUBE, Project Arts Centre 12th to 15th June 2023

“This city is not a Tourist Theme Park, but the place we call home”

Part of Project Arts Centre’s ongoing collaboration with Fatima Groups United through this project, was to provide a Studio Week in Project Cube. In June 2023, this phase of the project was realised when the community worked towards their performance through a week-long residency at the CUBE. This marked the community’s first residency off-site and a significant step in their development as artistic collaborators. Alongside the practical making of placards, and gathering additional props for the performance, this week was primarily used to solidify the performance elements, rehearse, continue to discuss and decide on what and how those elements would be presented to the audience. Further support from choreographer Cathy Coughlan was crucial in this final part of the creative process, providing key physicality which elevated the performance and allowed space for the performer’s text to be held within.

“Project Arts Centre have worked with Fatima Groups United since 2020, through collaborative projects and subsidised tickets as part of Fatima ALL IN, and through opportunities to make and present work onsite. It’s been incredible to watch this community evolve artistically, from members of the public, to a critically engaged audience and into artists themselves.

This project, led by Veronica Dyas, gave the community an opportunity to voice their experiences, effect change and think creatively about reclaiming their local area by physically occupying public space.

Veronica Dyas is a rigorous artist whose work has been supported by Project on many occasions and we were delighted to collaborate with her through the Project Potential Programme.”

**Cathy Coughlan, Head of Project Potential,
Project Arts Centre**

*“I have always found theatre in protest.
So I was interested about that”*

PHASE 5



Phase 5

Figures of Eight — *a moving performance*

“A TENT IS NOT A HOME HOUSING IS THE KEY” “NÍL AON TINTEÁN MAR DO THINTEÁN FÉIN”

The group’s performance took place in Dublin 8 on Friday 16th June 2023, with the 8 Performers beginning outside the F2 Centre. In promenade, the performers led their audience to the Fatima Luas Stop, travelling by Luas to the Drimnagh Luas Stop, performing at the bridge across the Canal, travelling back by Luas to the Rialto Luas Stop, along the filled in Canal in procession to Reuben Street adjacent to the F2, performing there before leading the audience to the grassy area in front of the F2 for the final part of the performance.

The script was written by the 8 performers in the group, based on the work that was developed in the weekly workshops/ exploratory sessions, through discussion, contentious statements and questions, interrogating Dublin 8 and the city as a whole, the dereliction, deprivation, accommodation crisis, cited as “a disaster” by Uachtarán na hÉireann Michael D. Higgins. Using personal narrative based

on lived experiences, alongside statistical and quantitative research, the text was compiled for the performance and incorporated design elements influenced by an earlier workshop with Designer Choy-Ping Clarke-Ng, as well as group member Kristina McElroy’s extensive experience as a designer and as an activist.

In performance, the use of pots and pans, ladles and wooden spoons as props for noise-making added to the milieu of performative protest. Call and response akin to that used in demonstrations, extended to singing - solo/solo/group call and response chants - written by the performers created an echo across the canal in Dublin 8, as their intentions for new policies to alleviate the congestion of gentrification and the suffering of those without homes rang out across water.

This call and response returned at the end of the performance, after each performer made their direct address speech to the gathered audience, calling for action on dereliction, a purposeful and immediate shift in housing policy, and on Dublin City Council to:



Photos of Figures of Eight Performance by Jacek Snochowski

"Open the properties, take people off the streets...

Give them somewhere to call home

Give the children a safe space

Open up all the derelict buildings, the empty offices...

Deem them safe

We'll make them liveable ourselves..."

Phase 5

In developing, writing, creating and staging this new performance work, these members of FGU became makers, became performers of their own authored work, a key aspect of the original motivation for this project. Artist Veronica Dyas' practice was both challenged and expanded as a direct result of this engagement; the process of 'Walking and

talking in the D8' has become an ongoing vital aspect of her work. The Drama Group in FGU continues to work together, now exploring their personal narratives through the lens of rites and practices that have become obsolete in contemporary Ireland, with artist Amy Redmond as facilitator of this journey.

"I think it was a chance to go from having been an audience with a very vibrant culture club to see a lot of drama, to actually create our own piece; and that it was real and authentic, and in the end, it actually spoke truth to power."

Richie Keane,
Fatima Groups United

"This project, led by Veronica Dyas, gave the community an opportunity to voice their experiences, effect change and think creatively about reclaiming their local area by physically occupying public space."

Cathy Coughlan, Head of Project Potential,
Project Arts Centre

Veronica Dyas is an Artist working primarily through new text, installation and performance. Facilitation, Action & LOVE are crucial to her practice. Veronica works with communities of identity, purpose, and/or place. She holds a B.A. (Hons.) in Drama & Theatre Studies with Sociology from Trinity College Dublin and an M.A. in Text & Performance Studies from RADA & King's College London. She makes work that investigates contemporary living, acknowledging the visceral reality of past trauma while always focused towards healing. Rooted in her own lived experience, she fuses sociological tools with her arts practice. Her underlying assumption is that we are beings of infinite potential, each, every.

Excerpts from Figures of Eight

Written by

Karen Coady

Rita Doran

Una Doyle

Tony Dunbar

Richie Keane

Sandra Kehoe

Mary Kennedy

Kristina McElroy

The performance text combined lived experience testimony, a history of housing in Ireland, a qualitative examination of the Dublin 8 area, comparative policy as an alternative to the current dysfunctional model and a vision for a new way to create a city that functions as a home for all those who live here.

EXTRACT 01

MARY

The Fox is a creature of the Irish countryside, and has by ingenuity and natural cunning adapted very well to urban life. He has become a familiar sight roaming the streets of Dublin at night. To survive today in the city of Dublin, I suppose you could say he has become street wise. People have to employ ingenuity and thought to the problems faced in today's world.

SANDRA

The new regulations were supposed to improve the standard of living for tenants.

The government talks plans, and new schemes but rarely follows through with sufficient numbers of homes to meet the need.

Scandal after scandal reveals their relationship with developers and the planning process, not to mention the number of our Elected Representatives that are themselves ...

ALL

Landlords

SANDRA

Leading to the current homeless situation we are faced with, on top of the increase in people seeking asylum and those still trapped in Direct Provision.

People, desperate for somewhere to live accept poor standards

Large numbers live in the same space.

ALL

Bunk Beds

Shared Shift Beds

SANDRA

Harking back to the old days when the tenements
were the norm for low income families.

Bringing us full circle.

So where does that leave most working class people?

KAREN

Usually waiting on lists for local authority housing.

And ye can't even talk to them in person, can't even
get them on the phone.

SANDRA

The State stopped building houses and handed the
job over to private developers.

Despite wanting to grow the economy they made no
provision for where people would live

TONY

Accommodation for students

Hotels rooms for tourists

Apartments for rent

I don't understand REIT

I don't understand HAP

I don't understand Vulture Funds

I don't understand what's happening to our
neighbourhood

I really don't understand this Housing Policy

TONY

All that has improved is access to indoor plumbing.

KRISTINA

"Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose"

ALL

The more things change the more they stay the same

EXTRACT 02

KAREN

We helped with chores as quick as can be

So we could get back out to play with our friends

Where the pavements were free

Plenty of room to roam

From S BLOCK to J, H and P

Those were the Blocks

The best to be.

To the shops in the middle of the flats

Christy's and Sadie's Shops were the best

From Penny Sweets to 5p Bars

Time outs and Macaroons

Leo who organised the Discos

We'd look forward to every Friday

Dance our socks off

I was always first on the floor

I didn't care

I felt free

I was being me

I had family in nearly every block

These pavements were our playground

EXTRACT 03

RICHIE

Another generation and another generation and another

The flats built by Herbert Simms, then the new garden suburbs and the flats of Ballymun where I lived, which were a solution to a housing crisis back then

There was a Dublin Housing Action Campaign in the 60's and now we are in dire straights

ALL

AGAIN

RICHIE

We've gone from Strumpet City to Strumpet City 2.0

The Political will isn't there for a solution

How many landlords are there in the Dáil as members of the Dáil?

What is the political agenda now?

We need houses for people not tents

For communities we need to challenge the orthodoxy

We need homes for people to live in

To grow in, have their families, go to college, go to their place of work

To live basically

EXTRACT 04

KRISTINA

The swans there have come back. They didn't like the building chaos of creating the Luas. They must be used to noise now as the Luas rattles alongside the canal like a large snorting monster every ten minutes or so.

On the horizon, cranes announce the arrival of new apartment complexes.

To planners, the question I ask is "Who is paying the price for poor planning" ?

Those who live in the new apartment complexes have no playgrounds for their children to play. They have no room to have children. Social capital is not part of the planning process so the tenants will never get to know their fellow renters. Soon people will jog along the canal which will be surrounded by apartment complexes built to satisfy greed. These complexes will create a dark corridor of buildings.

EXTRACT 05

RITA

We had 2 churches, 4 butchers, 1 pork butchers, 2 drapers, a bootmakers, and pubs to beat the band.
There was a hardware shop, a chemist, 2 men's barbers, a picture house, a post office, an undertaker, 2 pawn shops and last of all, a graveyard.
Oh and there was 2 men's loos.
We have nothing now.
It's full of broken down derelict shops and houses.
All over Dublin 8 it's the same.

You wouldn't miss the cattle going to Collins' to be slaughtered, when a calf would break loose and run all round the street.
You could go to Rafters and watch the men milking the cows and feeding the pigs.
Sit in the Lyric Cinema sucking sweets
The thundering in the cowboy pictures was so real that I'd have to go out to go to the toilet to look out the window to make sure it wasn't really happening.
There's a lot of history in James's Street, in Thomas Street, in The Liberties
But its hidden away with all the mess
All over Dublin 8 is the same now
It's a mess.

EXTRACT 06

SANDRA

My dream is that people could have a choice when it comes to accommodation
Whether they wanted to rent or purchase
That it would be maintained to a certain standard
We need to demand more accountability from government with mandatory updates to the people with time frames on their plans

KAREN

People need somewhere to live
People need somewhere to call home
We need to get people off the streets
To feel safe
To have somewhere to cook meals
There are so many properties derelict
More than 12,000 people including 3594 Children are homeless
and living in hotels, or homeless accommodation
Past and present governments are to blame
They refuse to build enough Public Housing

KAREN

Open the properties
Take people off the streets
Give them somewhere to call home
Give the children a safe space

TONY

We need a city community (not a transient population)
With people who stay for life and not just pass through
for a few days, weeks, months, or terms.
A community where people get to know each other;
where a glance doesn't mean

ALL

"WHAT'S THE WAY TO THE GUINNESS STOREHOUSE"
"CAN YOU SPARE SOME CHANGE"?

TONY

We need a people-centered approach not just tourism
focused.
We need real accommodation

ALL

HOUSING FOR ALL

UNA

Who is there to listen?
We need to deal with the issues now
We need benches to sit on
More bins around Dublin
Especially we need housing now
We need those who are in charge to get out and see
the needs of the people
When you look at the speed of NAMA...
Well, who did it benefit?

ALL

NOT ME

RICHIE

Declare a Housing Emergency

ALL

It's a DISASTER

MARY

2 4 6 8
WHAT WOULD WE APPRECIATE?
A PLACE TO LIVE FOR EVERYONE

ALL

A SIMPLE HOME, A PLACE TO LIVE

MARY

WE CAN DO THE REST
WE CAN DO OUR BEST
TO DECORATE AND MAKE SECURE
TO BUILD A LITTLE NEST

UNA

WE NEED TO GROW COMMUNITIES NOT VULTURE
FUNDS

UNA

A TENT IS NOT A HOME HOUSING IS THE KEY

ALL

NÍL AON TINTEÁN MAR DO THINTEÁN FÉIN



create national development
agency for collaborative arts



Artist in the
Community
scheme



arts
council
england
funding
the arts