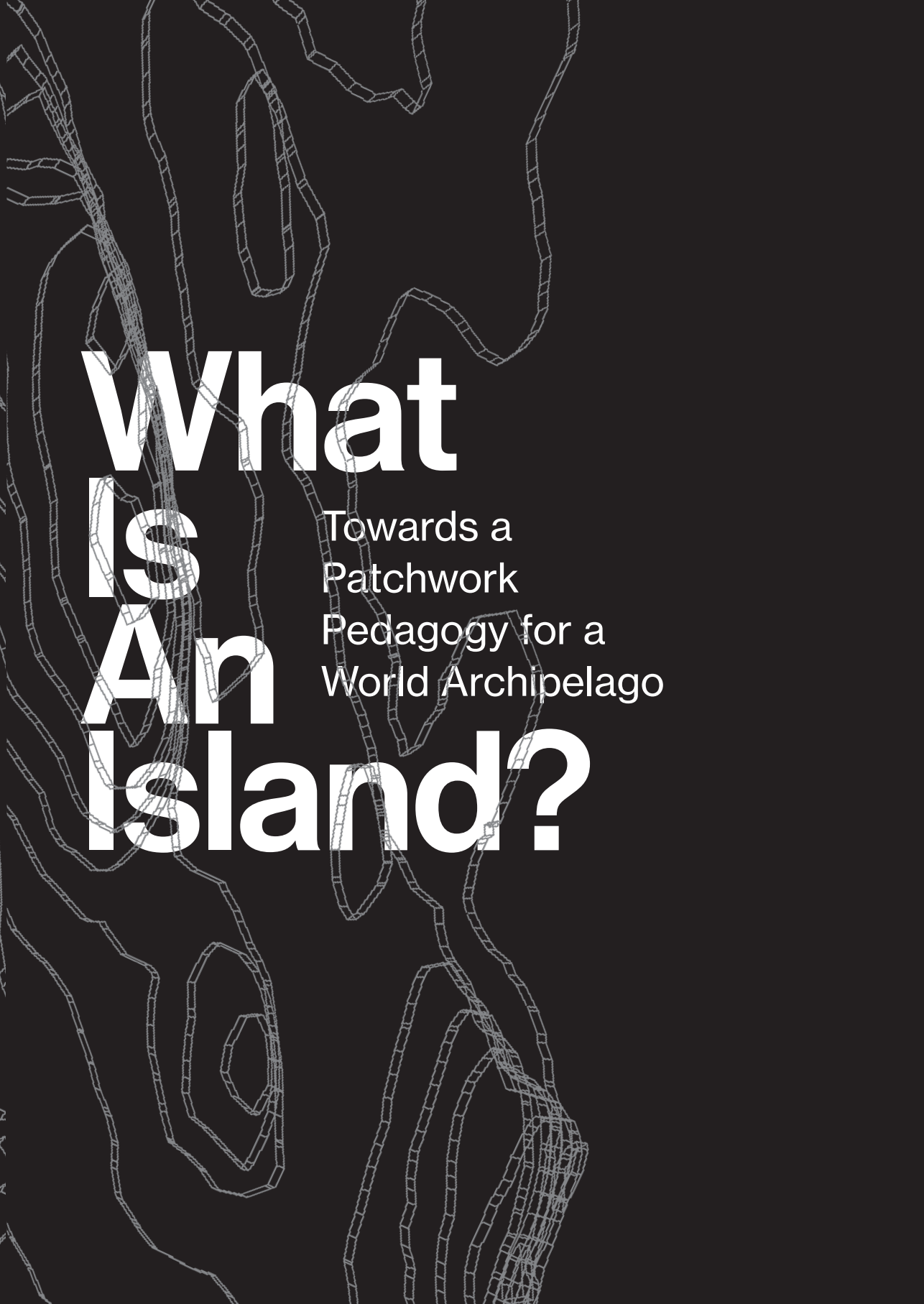
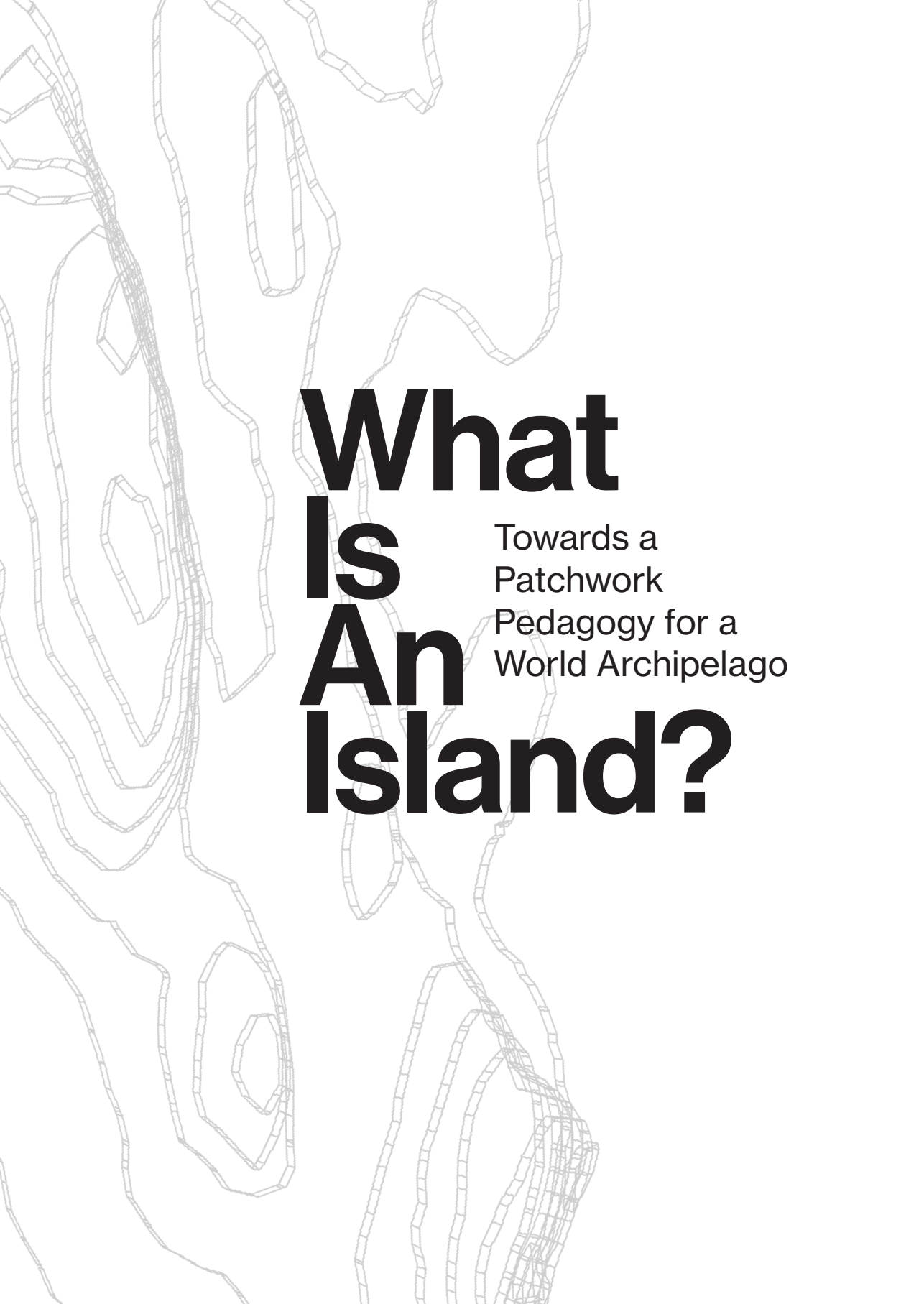




What Is An Island?

Towards a
Patchwork
Pedagogy for a
World Archipelago



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This publication is dedicated to Ailbhe Murphy,
our colleague, ally, and friend.

The introduction on the following pages features Ailbhe's
writing alongside that of Ann Davoren of Uillinn: West Cork
Arts Centre. Ailbhe was an integral part of the *What is an
Island?* project during her time as Director of Create,
both on land and sea, online and offline.

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Introduction: What is an Island?

Ann Davoren
Dr Ailbhe Murphy

What is an Island? is a multi-regional artistic research project which explores relational form through the concept of archipelagic thinking and collaborative arts practice. *What is an Island?* was developed by artist and educator, Glenn Loughran through the BA Visual Art Degree Programme, Sherkin Island (BAVA). In partnership with Uillinn: West Cork Art Centre and Create: The National Development Agency for Collaborative Arts, the project presented a series of seminars, workshops, commissions and exhibitions exploring Art and Archipelagic Thinking in the 21st Century.

What is an Island? offered Create and Uillinn the opportunity to work together and extend the reach and depth of their work, underlining the value of partnership between a national agency, a regional arts centre and a local arts education initiative. Working in partnership is a key strategy for both organisations, and partnership also underpins the success of BAVA, the unique visual art degree programme situated on Sherkin, a small island off the south coast of Ireland. The project also allowed both organisations to explore the positive and generative alignment between socially engaged and collaborative arts, and the community development, place-based ethos of BAVA on Sherkin and as part of the West Cork Archipelago.

Uillinn values partnerships that bring learning, experience and expertise and other resources to deliver mutual aims, increasing both the reach and depth of engagement, increasing impact, the alignment of concerns

and critical enquiry. These partnerships support Uillinn's ambition to be a space for dynamic flow and a catalyst for change and creativity at the heart of West Cork, sparking new connections, collaborations, practices and the exchange of ideas and expertise. In its work as the national development agency for collaborative arts, Create connects with a range of stakeholders and partners to form a diverse ecology that values and advocates for the distinctive cultural value of collaborative arts practice and its significant contribution to artistic, social and civic life. Working in partnership through *What is an Island?* created new cross sectoral constituencies and new audiences for both Uillinn and Create.

In its first iteration, *What is an Island?* directly engaged residents of Sherkin, Heir and Long islands as active agents in the dialogue and research journey. The following year, the enquiry focused on the role of islands in signifying climate change, linking the experiences of the communities of the Jambelí Archipelago on the Ecuadorian / Peruvian border and San Cristóbal Island in the Galápagos islands with those of the West Cork archipelago, interrogating ideas around perception, experience and resilience. The third and final iteration of the project was realised online in the form of a digital archipelago designed as an educational platform for contributory research and cultural exchange between islands, artists and academia.

As organisations concerned with the development of the arts, of socially engaged arts practice, and with issues of access to and participation in the arts for all sectors of society, Uillinn and Create recognise the importance of the role that the BA Visual Art Programme, the new MA Art and Environment and projects such as *What is an Island?* play both in building capacity in the arts and in underpinning the capacity for living in remote and rural island and coastal environments. Each strand nurturing the 'next generation' of socially engaged arts practitioners, as well as supporting the practice of diverse artists who work on the edges, within the margins, grounded in their communities, while exploring the divergent discourses of the rural/peripheral. In this sense, projects such as *What is an Island?* invigorate the process

of engagement with the arts, supporting the development of learning communities and promoting exchange between communities of interest and place and the interrogation of contemporary arts practice. The unique combination of arts based research methodologies developed and deployed by *What is an Island?* and the embedded nature of both Uillinn and BAVA means that subsequent learning is folded back into the arts centre and the island location, underlining its relevance for Uillinn and BAVA's particular situation on the edge of an island on the edge of Europe.

As publicly funded arts organisations both Uillinn and Create have a responsibility and commitment to provide services and resources to advance learning and understanding about the arts and in particular, collaborative arts within the cultural sector and across other fields. *What is an Island?* as a form of 'evental research' offered an important opportunity to support new forms of knowledge production and exchange. In collaboration with artists, academics, islanders, and arts and civic organisations *What is an Island?* explored urgent themes such as climate change, the sustainability of island life, the implications of Brexit, and their relevance to place-based / island experience. *What is an Island?* underpinned our belief that by working together, artists and communities can purposefully explore how collaborative arts engage in distinct, relevant and powerful ways with the urgent social, cultural and political issues of our times.

Ann Davoren, Director, Uillinn: West Cork Arts Centre, and
Ailbhe Murphy, Former Director, Create

Uillinn: West Cork Arts Centre is located in Skibbereen (population 2,903) with a catchment area that stretches from the tip of the Beara Peninsula in the west to Oileán Chléire to the south, a population of just under 57,000 according to the 2022 census. Located at the southern edge of Ireland, distant from the capital and about one and a half hours' drive from Cork – the nearest city, train station, and airport – Uillinn is a regional hub for contemporary arts engagement, artistic innovation, and critical conversation, supporting and nurturing both artists and communities.

Since its founding in 1985, West Cork Arts Centre has been a platform for local, national, and international artists to present their work accompanied by high-quality creative learning programmes. The move to its new home in the center of Skibbereen at the beginning of 2015 opened up further opportunities for people to engage with contemporary arts practice – to explore exhibitions, encounter artists in residence, experience art events and performances of all kinds and enjoy the facility of a world-class venue that places people's interaction with the arts at its heart.

Create is the national development agency for collaborative arts. Its work initiates cross-sectoral national and international partnerships which support artists to co-create work of depth, ambition and excellence. Its mission is to lead the development of collaborative arts practice by enabling artists and communities to create exceptional art together. Create believes that by working together, artists and communities can purposefully explore how collaborative arts engage in distinct, relevant and powerful ways with the urgent social, cultural and political issues of our times.

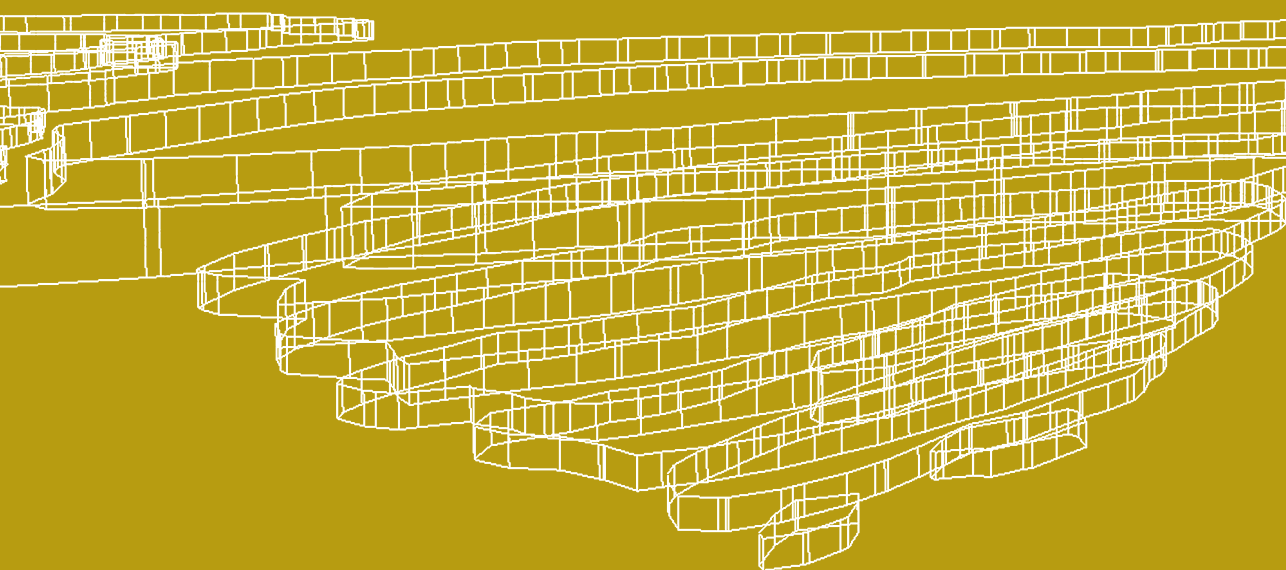
The **BA (hons) in Visual Art (BAVA)** is a community-based, four year, honours degree, visual art programme based on Sherkin Island. It is fully accredited, managed and delivered by the School of Art and Design, Technological University Dublin

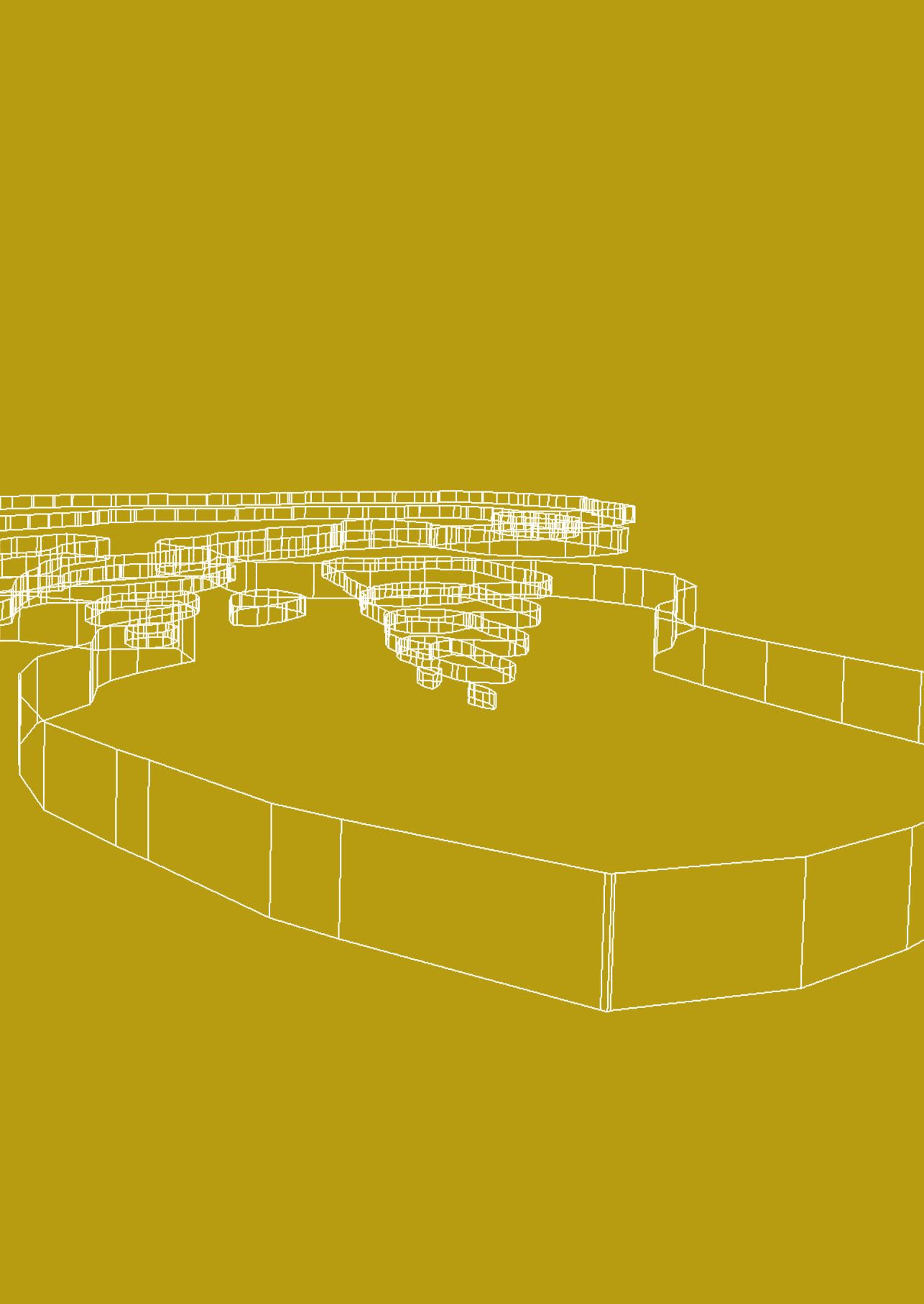
(TU Dublin) in partnership with Sherkin Island Development Society (SIDS) and Uillinn: West Cork Arts Centre, and is part-funded by the Department of Community and Rural Affairs and Cork County Council.

The **MA Art and Environment** (MAAE) uniquely combines post-studio art practice, interdisciplinary research, virtual teaching, Island Studies and community engagement. Taking contemporary art's relationship with environments (ecological, spatial, political, economic) as its object of study, the MAAE instructs students in artistic practices shaped by 'archipelagic thinking' (a decolonial spatial discourse that emphasises relationality and locality) and a pedagogy that is world-centred. A world-centred pedagogy is a pedagogy that is orientated towards 'events' in the world and the responses that they provoke in students and teachers.

Located in the West Cork archipelago and Uilinn: West Cork Arts Centre, the MAAE is supported by a team of artists, lecturers, and researchers in the Dublin School of Art and Design (TU Dublin), by community workers and technicians in the Sherkin Island Development Society (SIDS) and by an international, interdisciplinary network of peers and colleagues. www.art-environment.com

What is an Island? Towards a Patchwork Pedagogy for a World Archipelago. This publication presents a series of texts from, about, and responding to, the *What is an Island?* project. The first section presents images and overviews of the three iterations of the project alongside selected transcripts from speakers involved in the first three phases. This is followed by a broad reflection on the history of Ireland as an island from a phenomenological perspective by Anne O'Byrne, and a pedagogical reflection and epilogue by Glenn Loughran.







What is an Island? 1

Focused on an exploration of archipelagic thinking in direct response to the then fragile Brexit negotiations, the first iteration of the project aimed to develop a performative, pedagogical platform that could connect island communities around shifting perspectives of island life. Prompted by the question *What is an Island?*, three local artists were commissioned to develop an artwork on one of three islands in the West Cork archipelago – Sherkin Island (Mona O'Driscoll), Long Island (art manoeuvres) and Heir Island (Tess Leak).

The first exhibition on Sherkin Island, Mona O'Driscoll's *Insiders Perspective* explored the interaction between island dwellers and the visible and non-visible environment that lies beneath the surface of the sea. Through unique drawing techniques *Insiders Perspective* showed how fishermen used landmarks, visible to the eye, to create routes on the sea's surface and how to triangulate these landmarks to reference fishing grounds in order to harvest fish from beneath the surface. To investigate these interactions, *Insiders Perspective* explored traditional methods of navigation, echo sounder readings, nautical charts and drawing, all of which were linked in order to create a coherent whole.

Moving from Sherkin Island to Long Island, the collective performance *Immram* was facilitated by art manoeuvres; Marianne Adams, Sheelagh Broderick, Jennifer Corcoran, Moze Jacobs, Brendan McCormack, Eleanor Murray and Peter Tadd. *Immram* draws on Celtic immram – mythological sea voyages whose protagonists search for 'the Otherworld' on islands west of Ireland. The event took the form of a narrated, orchestrated walk across Long Island, moving from the dock pier to the island head. Pausing, sensing, listening and looking, the participants in *Immram* were instructed in ways of knowing beyond traditional forms of epistemological enquiry.

Finally, on Heir Island, the third intervention '*Our boats are open and we sail them for everyone*' was directed by artist Tess Leak in collaboration with composer Justin Grounds to explore ideas of opacity and transparency, stasis and fluidity. Performed on the site of a local restaurant, a diverse

collection of musicians took the form of a networked set of islands (archipelago), each defined by a single instrument (guitar, clarinet etc). Beginning with a loosely defined score, the audience were invited to move through and between the different island-instruments, influencing the performative dynamic and altering the compositional direction of the performance. The written-score, designed to be as open and accessible as possible, was available for the participants to take away and perform again with another group of musicians.

Each island exhibition was connected by an eight-hour ferry journey, which was in turn supported by a unique pedagogical programme, the *Tidalectic Lecture Series*. Presented from the ship's wheelhouse and delivered through the tannoy system, the lectures reflected on the historical, political and artistic nature of archipelagic thinking in the contemporary imaginary. Key presentations included: *What is a Boat?* / **Pat Tanner**, *Island Relation and the Anthropocene* / **Prof. Jonathan Pugh**, *Art and the Archipelagic Imaginary* / **Prof. Mick Wilson**, *Continental Thinking: A Report On Brexit* / **Emer Deane** (Diplomat) Director of Ireland's Brexit Team in Ireland's Embassy to the EU, and a final summation from philosopher **Prof. Richard Kearney**, titled: *Post-Nationalist Archipelagos*.





Pat Tanner (Ferry) What is a boat? If you look up the dictionary, it says a small vessel for traveling over water propelled by oars, sails or an engine, or a watercraft of a large range of type and size. Ships are generally distinguished from boats based on their larger size. So one answer is that a ship can carry a boat, but a boat cannot carry a ship. Another answer is, if you talk to the captain of a ship, he gets quite annoyed if you refer to his vessel as a boat, but a boat's captain is going to be quite pleased when you refer to his vessel as a ship.

Mona O'Driscoll (Sherkin Island) It's based a lot on navigation, a system that a lot of the men would have used here on the island and the surrounding area, where they would get bearings for navigation to clear rocks, or to find a fishing ground, they would use these bearings. So for example, if you wanted a

small visual idea, if, over here was Baltimore and then over here was Sherkin and you wanted to get to somewhere in the middle you could say I'll take a hill over here and house over there, and where the two would meet, where the two lines cross would be the area that you'd want to find, or it could be what you would want to avoid.

The sea is very important in this project, because we're talking about islands and that remoteness, and maybe, sometimes people think that you're isolated. But the sea actually isn't in one way, I think the sea is what's around us all, it's that common thread that connects a lot of people, even though you think that you're isolated, it's that same water that moves every day that connects us with each other.

Prof. Jonathan Pugh (Sherkin Island)

Something that deeply concerns me today when it comes to the politics of islands within the Anthropocene and global warming, is that the Island is once again, being romanticized as a figure of global warming and in particular, indigenous Islanders are being celebrated for that resilience, indigenous Islanders in the Pacific or the Atlantic or, or wherever, Islanders are resilient. They are tough

and strong people, don't get me wrong. But the point I want to make about this, is that this suits powerful people, because people in powerful nations are going with the idea that these kind of indigenous Māori or whatever are stronger, resilient and more attuned with the environment, which a lot of people are, are also celebrating from an anti-colonial perspective. In a weird way what's happening is that the figure of the indigenous Islander who is more attuned

to nature more in tune to the environment that fits into this whole new era we're talking about, can also be deeply problematic because, as my friends in the Caribbean say when they're celebrated as the indigenous subject, well, that's great then, so you're saying we've got to be resilient and it's over to us to deal with this stuff, when most of the pollutants are coming from America or Europe or whatever ...

Prof. Mick Wilson (Ferry) islands ... night ferry ... dull water, brackish washes, ... not beaching, but bird to the bare rock, ... night ferry, industrious unmooring... Factoring over water, ... scour dry rust day air, bearing out to the rock, bearing quiet, all rock word and sea word, no backward and forward, nor star ward nor sternward, nor even port, now, nor North. Just this uncertain ward of uttering, ... harboring lumping intentions ... scraped down within the dull which, where, words, ... salt, scratch, dust, ... bladder, rackage itch, ... dry, sharp, sea edge ... to the hour-gap appointed ... to an here, an awayness without leaving, ... night ferrying to ... night ferry.

Prof. Richard Kearney (Ferry) Our writers have been inspired by the very idea of an island. Shaw, for example, said that England is an island, and Ireland is an island behind an island, and he saw the notion of the British and the Irish as islanders, indeed, as he called them mongrel islanders, so it shouldn't be a huge problem to pool sovereignty, not only between Britain and Ireland, but within Europe as happened with the single European act. Things are really at a crisis point at the moment where Britain has to decide whether it's going to be an Island in the sense of a white navigatio, that is the life of an insular nation, as opposed to an archipelagic nation.

Art, performance, music, thinking... all these different disciplines are themselves archipelagic, because in a way, archipelagos do not accept the limits of strict borders of nation-state, borders of absolute sovereignty.

Dip. Emer Deane (Ferry) Brexit is very much about place and about belonging and about not belonging. And for many who voted leave, things seem to be going in the wrong direction. And it was time to wind back the clock. And clearly some things have not been working too well in the UK as in other

countries in recent years.

And if we just take one measurement, the so-called Gini coefficient, which is a measure of comparative wealth within a single country, we see that the UK has the second highest gap between rich and poor amongst industrialized nations. Only the US has a larger gap between rich and poor. And that of course has had consequences too. But I think we need another very long boat trip to get into that. If you picture a Venn diagram where one set is the United States and the other set is continental Europe and where they crossover in the middle, that is where Ireland sits nestled safely between

the intersecting smiles of those two groups. Because for Ireland, we've always realized that multilateralism whether it was originally to the League of Nations or the UN or now to the EU also is where small states and small nations can prosper, because politics in a multilateral setting has to be about something more than the survival of the fittest.





















What is an Island? 2

The second iteration of the project took an environmental turn, considering the various ways that islands and archipelagos were becoming increasingly important sites of navigation through the climate transition. Developed within the framework of the RealSmart Cities research project¹, this iteration was supported by the para-educational form: *The Listening School*. Set up between the town of Skibbereen, West Cork, the Jambelí archipelago on the Peruvian border, and San Cristóbal Island in the Galápagos Islands, *The Listening School* developed a research agenda for connecting with island communities in the global south around environmental challenges and rising sea levels.

A key experience within this research occurred when visiting the Island of Jambelí on the Ecuadorian border. Once a paradisiacal tourist destination in the region, it had in recent years been severely impacted by flooding, storms and sea levels rising brought on by climate change. As late as 2019, the landscape was dominated by fractured and broken architecture from a recent climate event. Importantly, the coastal areas were peppered with DIY flood barriers, constructed from one tonne bags of sand tied to coastal fences and palm trees.

Following these experiences, the project travelled to San Cristóbal, Galápagos, to develop workshops, exhibitions and discussions with islanders at the *Casa De Cultura* community centre. Conversations and discussions in *The Listening School* were organised around three conceptualisations of sound: **Sounding the Island**, *Dialogical workshops with islands and islanders*, **Sounding the Archipelago**, *Field recordings in and across archipelagic environments*, and **Sounding the Anthropocene**, *Public discussion on experiences of islands and islanders in the Anthropocene*.

By connecting distant territories, *The Listening School* brought emerging and established, local and international artists together with islanders, philosophers and cultural producers to reflect on contemporary issues around climate change and island living. These research events were

disseminated through a sculptural installation in the town of Skibbereen, West Cork. Referencing makeshift flood barriers, the *Listening Pods* consisted of eleven one tonne sand-bags, each with an audio device buried in the sand, attached to a set of headphones. Placed along the newly established flood-barrier system in Skibbereen, the sandbags were organised in an archipelagic formation of twos, threes and ones. The headsets were composed of sonic recordings of tropical wind, rustling palm trees, waves lapping against the shore, seals barking, birds chirping, children playing. The patchwork of environmental soundings was disparate and disconnected except for the abstract flow of static radio waves tuning in and out, searching for frequencies, finding them and losing them. Occasionally the chaos of soundings was interrupted by a loud Tsunami warning siren on repeat, and occasionally they were interrupted by quieter sounds of human dialogue and academic explication.

1 ReaLsMs (Real Smart Cities) was a three-year Marie Skłodowska-Curie funded research project led by RISE (Research and Innovation Staff Exchange) TU Dublin. Grant Agreement No. 777707. <http://realms.eu/>

Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner (Marshall Islands) Tell them ... we don't know of the politics or the science, ... but we see what is in our own backyard. Tell them, ... some of us are old fishermen ... who believed that God made us a promise. ... Tell them some of us are a little bit more skeptical of God, ... but most importantly, ... tell them we don't want to leave ... We've never wanted to leave ... and that we are nothing without our islands.¹

Prof. Elizabeth De Loughrey (Galápagos Islands) Kamu Braithwaite used the concept of Tidalectics as the movement of the sea back and forward. So it's the relationship between land and sea in constant movement and, importantly for a writer of African descent, he understood this knowledge base

as coming from what he called 'submerged mothers' and where the mother becomes a metaphor for the subaltern, the people that are silenced, the people who are marginalized from history. Importantly, this concept relies on an ancestral or familial connection, and a feminist interpretation of the creative power of women.

I believe this knowledge recuperates the dynamic aspect of islands, in the sense that islands are always moving, which we know geologically as the Galápagos is always moving, as well as the people of islands in dialogue with each other. This emphasis on movement is important too, because colonial representations of violence relegate islands to isolation, and the place of nature, instead of history. In that sense, colonial capitalism discourse has placed the island outside of history, and places the people of islands outside of time.

1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9D88ST9qbw>



Marie Jose (Galápagos Islands) I really want to thank you for this very important symbolic space at this dialogue table, which for me, is a platform where maybe we can find answers to all the questions that we have, to address problems that are important for us as people who live in the archipelago and the Galápagos, and the islands. And for me it was really interesting to listen to this concept of the archipelago that Paolo says, that the archipelago is the present, and is the relation with the multiplicity because for me, one of the biggest problems in the islands, is that tourism is what takes most of the attention of the construction or interpretation of the Island. And that focus on tourism creates this focus, this dichotomy, this difference and separation between men and nature.

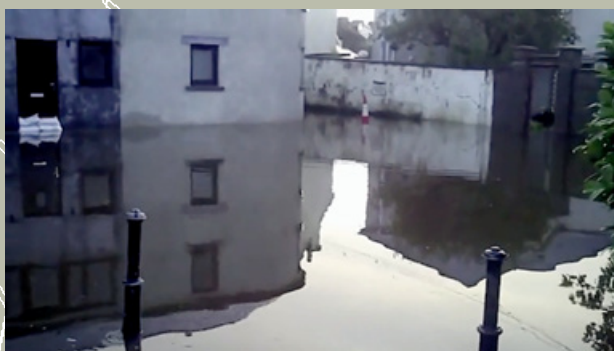




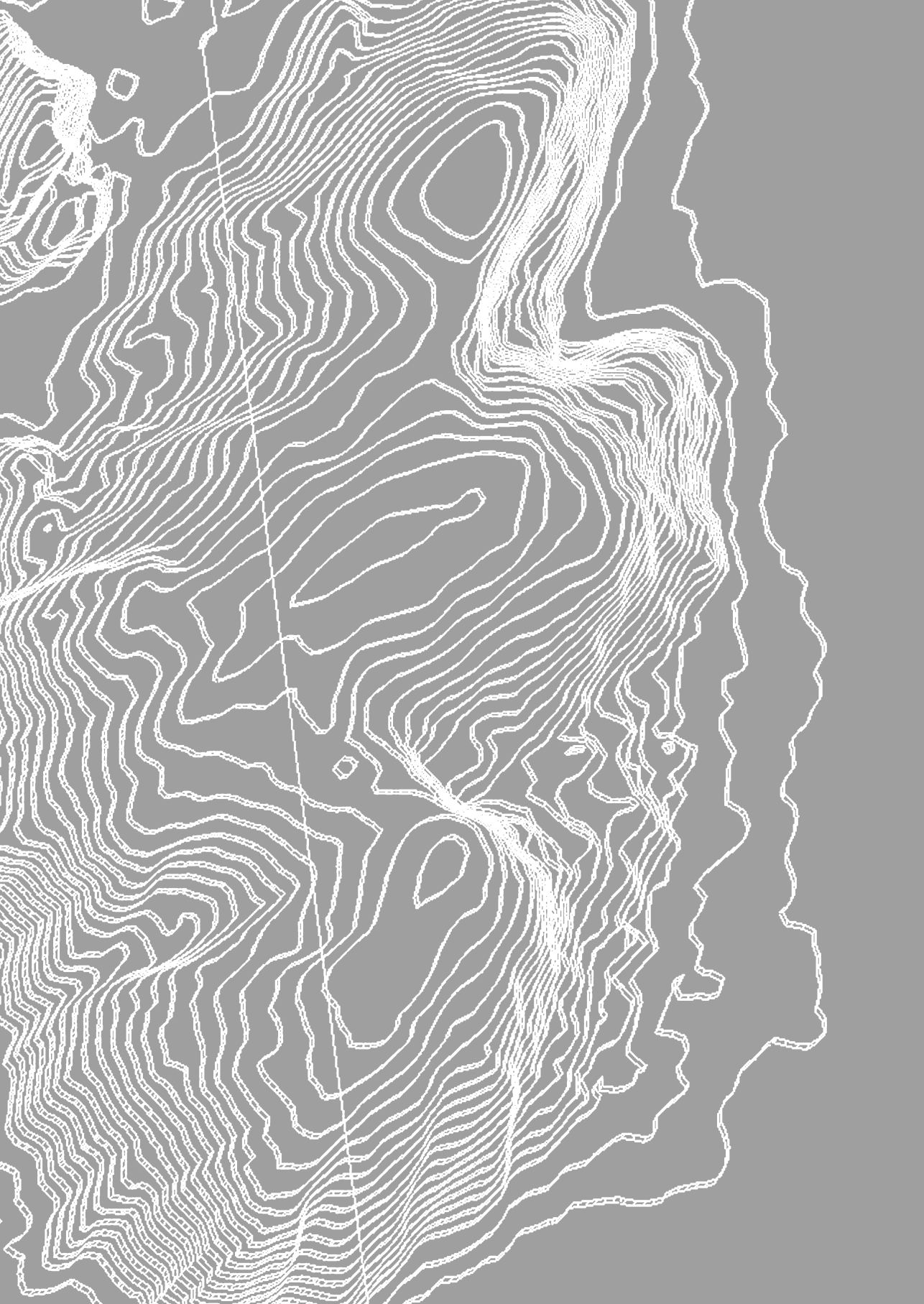














What is an Island? 3

Emerging at a time of extreme social isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic, the third and final iteration of the *What is an Island?* project aimed to use digital technologies to create contributory dialogues across global territories. Developed alongside the newly established archipelagic MA Art and Environment and in dialogue with Bernard Stiegler's posthumous research project *Archipelagos of the Living*¹, an immersive, archipelagic, digital-platform was constructed to explore the virtual capacities of social practice and education.

Connecting with a consortium of artists, academics and Islanders, a series of online dialogues were set up to establish a framework for thinking through the connective potential of a digital archipelago. Reflecting on this, Bernard Stiegler has argued for the need to develop "a network of territorial laboratories of digital contributory research."² Contributory research is a key thematic running throughout the *Archipelagos of the Living* project and aims to make the question of technology both a study and a practice. Rethinking the relationship between the particular and the universal, it considers how knowledge can be transmitted between islanders, academics and art students.

These online discussions motivated an experiment with virtual reality education, when, on October 7th, 2020, a suite of Oculus Quest VR headsets were delivered to seven MA students living in diverse geographic locations across the island of Ireland. Invited into pre-set environments the students were tasked with developing artistic responses to Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* (1990). So intuitive were the students' making capacities within the virtual environment, they had developed complex, digital sculpture installations within a matter of hours. From this brief experiment, a specifically designed VR curriculum was created to support skills acquisition and critical dialogue with islands and islanders in VR. Throughout this process the project focused on setting up online interviews with key stakeholders on the islands to make initial connections to the community and geography of the islands. Within these interviews, individual students contacted local actors to connect around their artistic research projects,

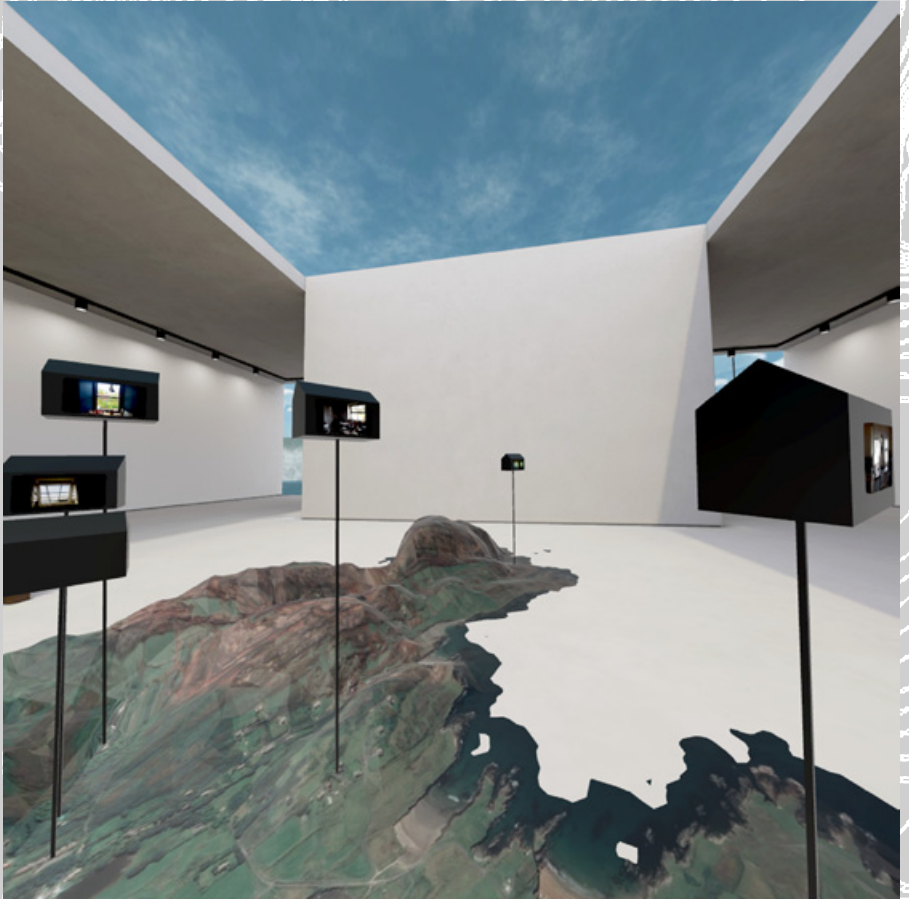
and these connections began to inform the various ways that the students thought about the VR space as idiomatic, rather than standardised.

Engaging with the students research in these immersive environments was surprisingly rich. You could at any time be surrounded by island sounds and rhythms; howling wind, fleeting birdsong, rustling trees, lapping tides, motor boats, alongside 3D Models of floating island forests and cinemas, plant nightclubs and fog harvesting sculptures, all supported by the voices and experiences of islanders during the pandemic.

At this time technician Dan Guiney was commissioned to develop a virtual reality model of the West Cork archipelago. Working in collaboration with the research team he developed floating island models based on Whiddy Island, Sherkin Island, Cape Clear Island and Bere Island. Following this, the virtual archipelago was used as a space for teaching and presenting artistic research. These ambitions were further developed with the European League of Institutes of the Arts (ELIA), into a Virtual Reality Conference on the future of the art school. Connecting universities and art schools across Europe, the three-day VR event engaged colleagues from five different European universities including; Dublin, Zurich, Amsterdam, Helsinki and Huma University in South Africa. Developed as a touring site for lectures and workshops on archipelagic thinking, it also presented and opportunity for the students to exhibit their work in a hybrid exhibition at Uillinn and in VR.

1 Stiegler, Bernard, *Archipelagos of the Living*, (Real Smart Cities. Ethics and Politics. 2020. XXII. Pp.9-17).

2 Stiegler, Bernard, *Archipelagos of the Living*, p. 58



Elvira Hojberg (Paris): Essentially what we are trying to do is experiment with what we call contributory research, which tries to bring together academic researchers with local actors and inhabitants in order to produce or develop or valorize knowledge that might help preserve life and living in all its diversity.

So that's, again in terms of biodiversity, but also taking in techno-diversity, economic diversity, diversity of thought and practice and memory. So far, we've been looking at the island of Cres of Corsica, and of the Galapagos Islands. And already, I think, you're starting to see that there are definitely points in common, there is already a forming of different networks, thoughts and ideas.

All of that being said, today we have Fiona Collins, who is living on Sherkin Island, and has been living there for all of her life, and who just graduated from a Master's in zoology, and I am hoping she can give us some insights into what it means to live on the on the island.

Fiona Collins (Sherkin Island):

The island is located just off Baltimore, and it's only a 10 minute ferry ride. It's about three miles long and two miles wide. So, the population at the moment is about 110, we're very small, but we're very diverse, we have a lot of different people. So, we'd have loads of artists and there's digital technology people as well as farmers and fishermen. What we're really trying to do is attract people who can work from home, which I feel like after COVID, I notice a lot of

people who didn't work from home before who are now learning that they can. And the issue with trying to do that is getting broadband here. So, we have broadband, but if we had high speed, fibre broadband, it would really bring more people to the island and you can then work from home and attract businesses and stuff like that.

Prof. Michael Krzykowski (Crès Island, Croatia): With Anna we have been claiming that one of the reasons why people move, is that they move because they

don't have, for the most part, food. This is what is happening, from America to the immigration from Africa to Europe is based on food and immigration from Latin America, in Central America to the United States is food. So, I was wondering, based on that premise, whether it's okay to say that a connection can be made between the island's ability to produce more food and the island's ability to bring people in.

For example, I don't know the specific policy these days about fishing, but I assume that the continent is consuming all the fish you can get. So, I don't know if by increasing the fishing, I don't know if it's going to hurt your father's business.

Prof. Sanja M Bojanic (Crès Island, Croatia): I don't know the local traditions of your island Fiona, but I think that is what one wants to preserve so as to avoid proletarianisation. If you have the know how you can build on that. You know, it's good for community and it's good if you have some traditions disappearing, that maybe some new traditions could be created. Something that glues people together in doing something that is collectively good.

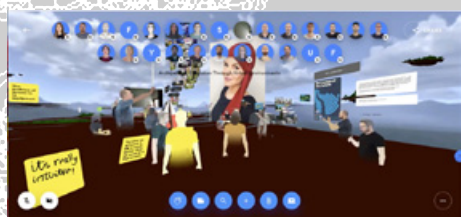
Fiona Collins (Sherkin Island): Well I'm also from the marine biology side, so I don't like overfishing because I do know that the main thing is like you need to be sustainable. So, you

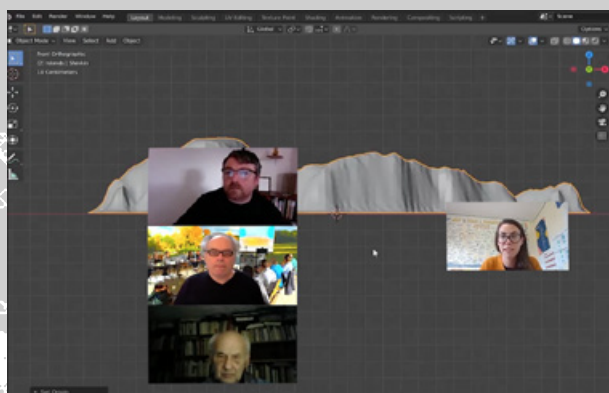
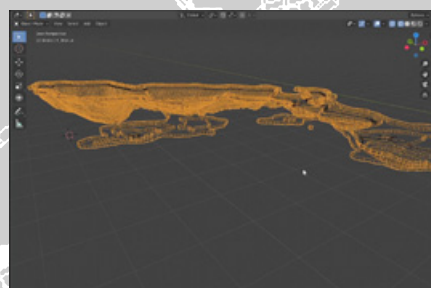
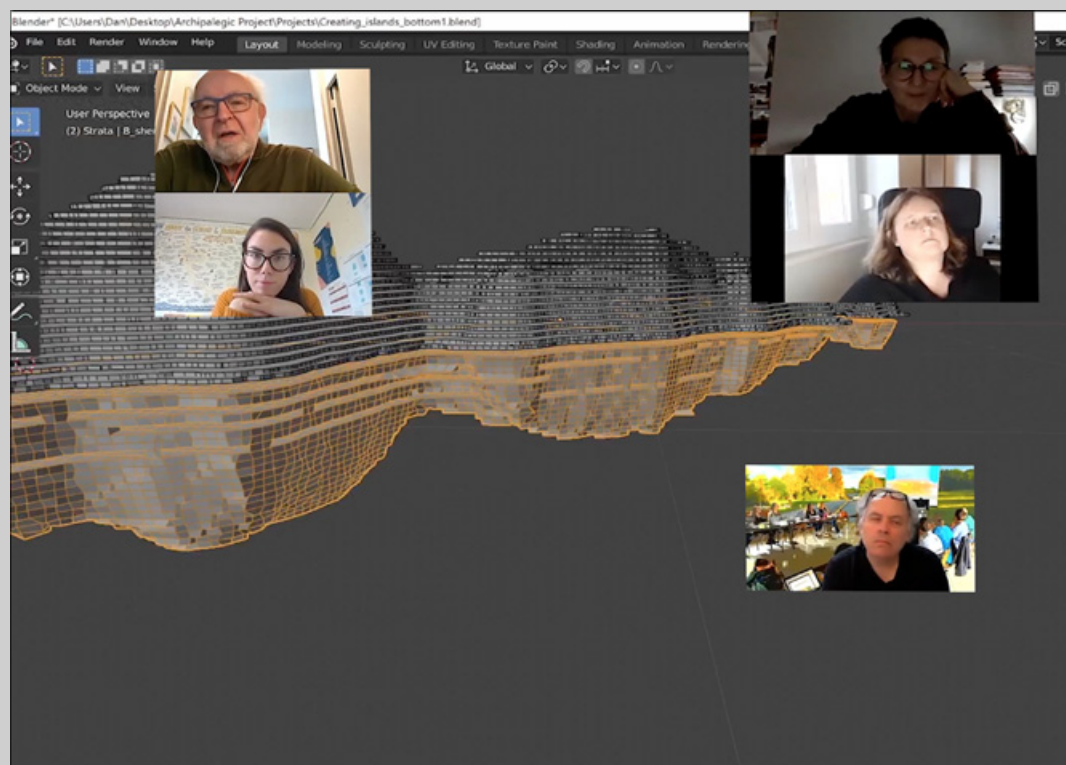
Prof. Jon McKensie (Boston): He's the last fisherman, Is that right? He's the last one on the island?

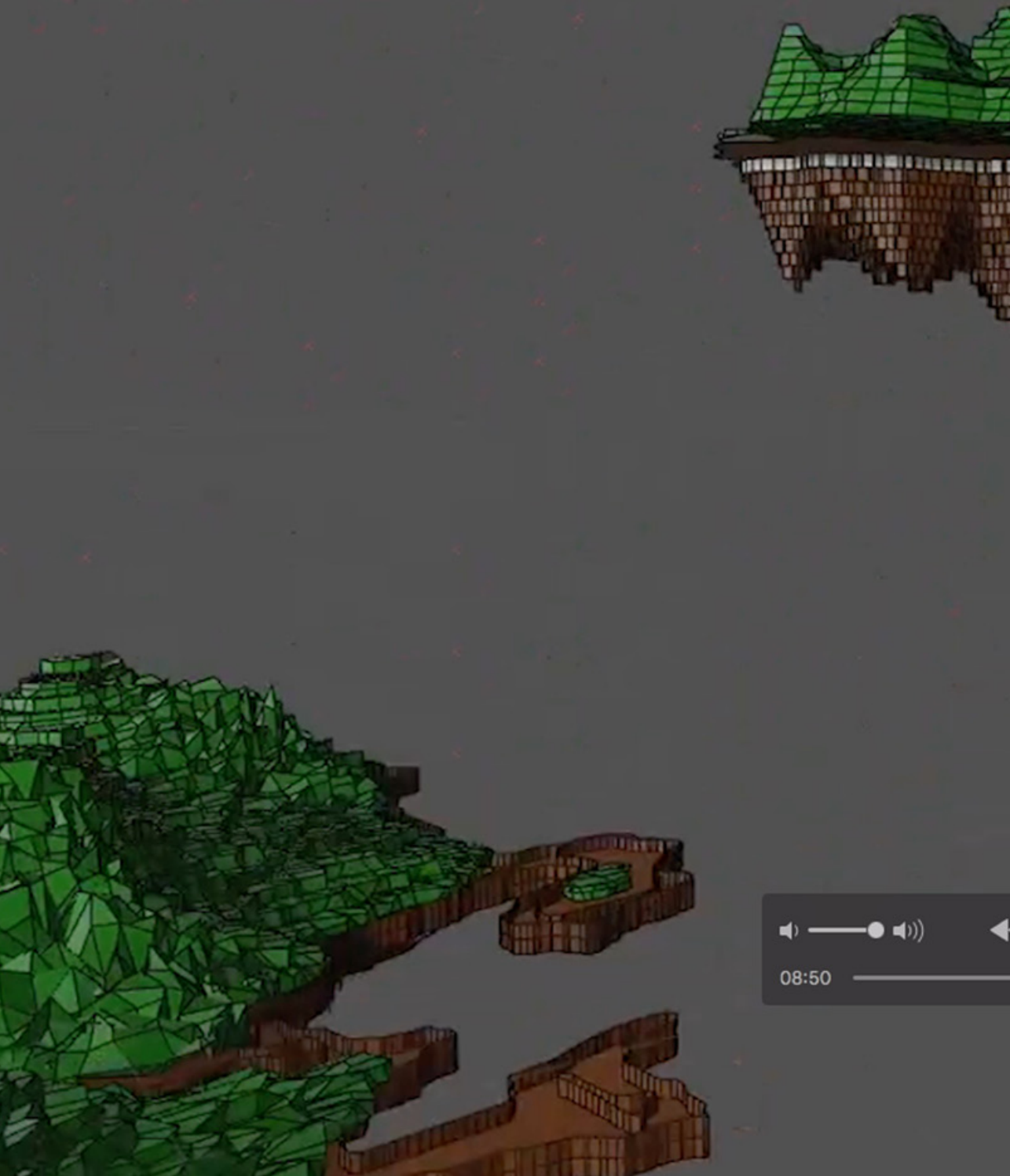
There is more from the surrounding areas, though. And there's quite a lot of fishing done around here but on the island, he's a small-time fisherman like one of the big trawlers as it's like a small boat to do some work.

do need people and people need to eat. People need work and make money and also we need to protect our environment. So, I don't know whether we need more fishing but maybe less big fishers would do. But I think we should focus on attracting younger

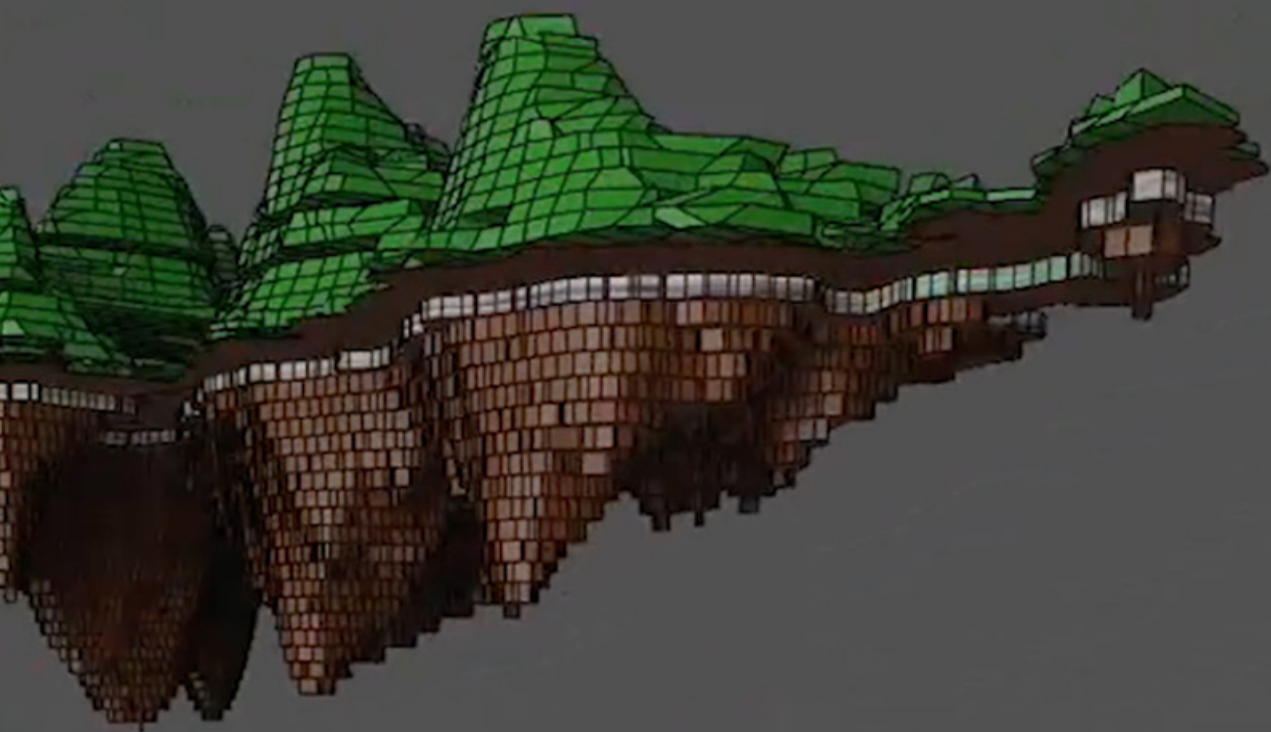
people and making the Island sustainable both environmentally, so looking at greenways, like a big thing now is green energy.

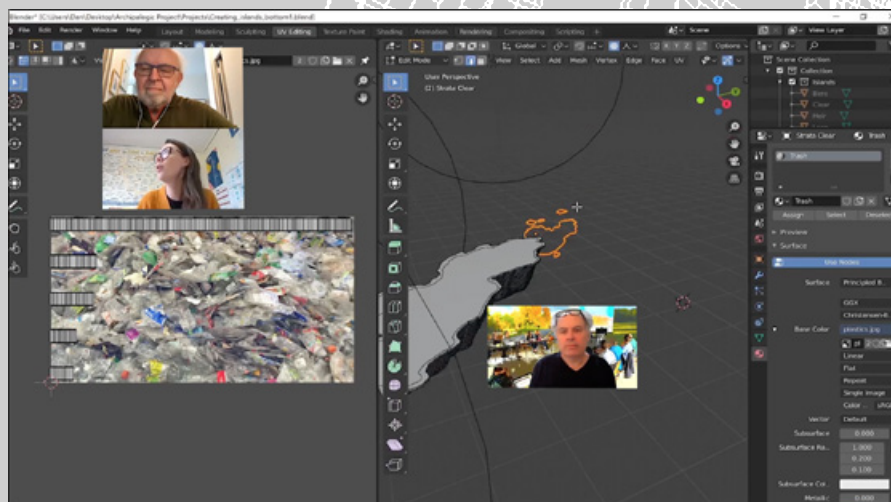
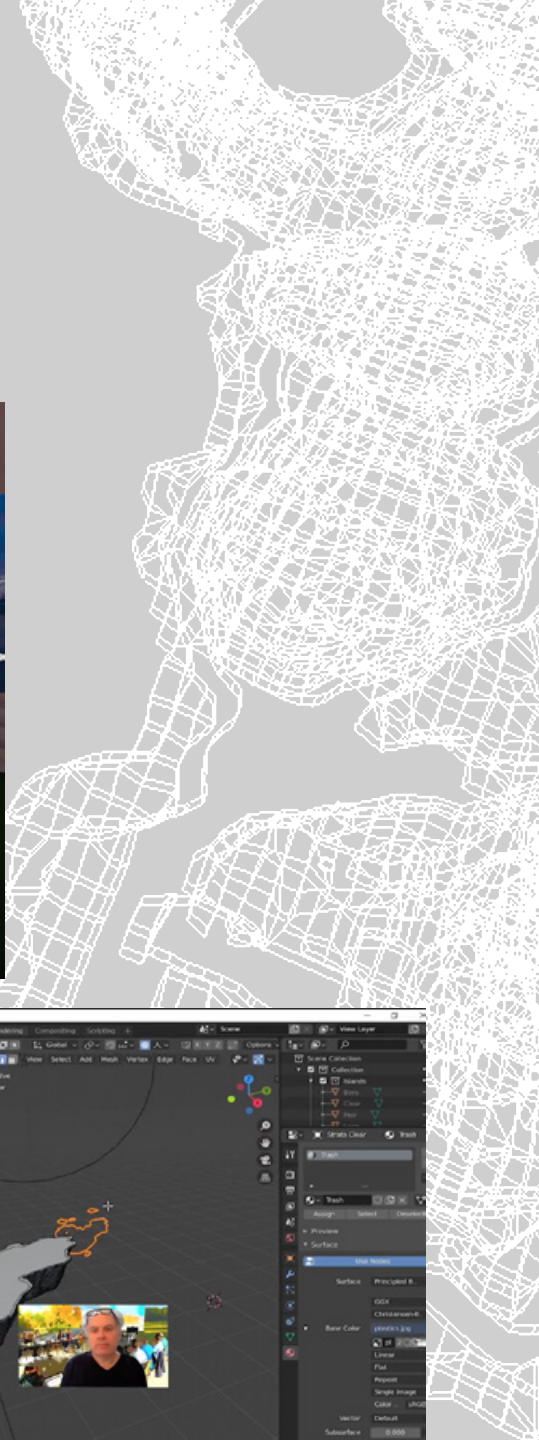


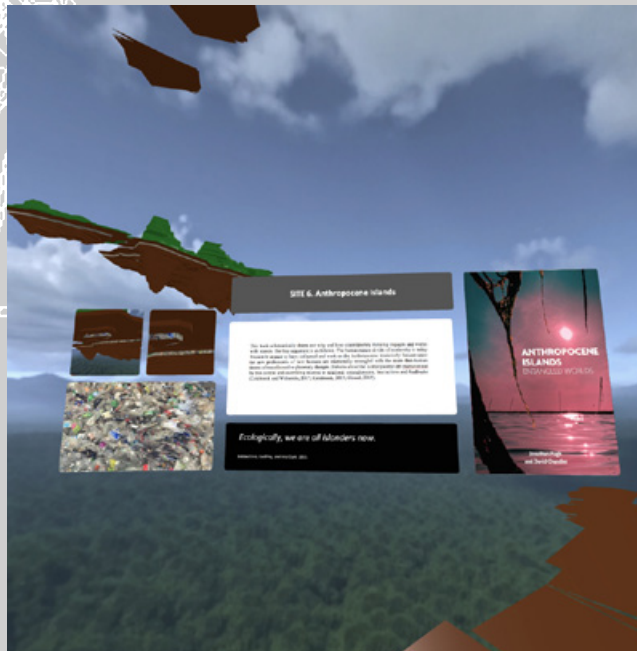


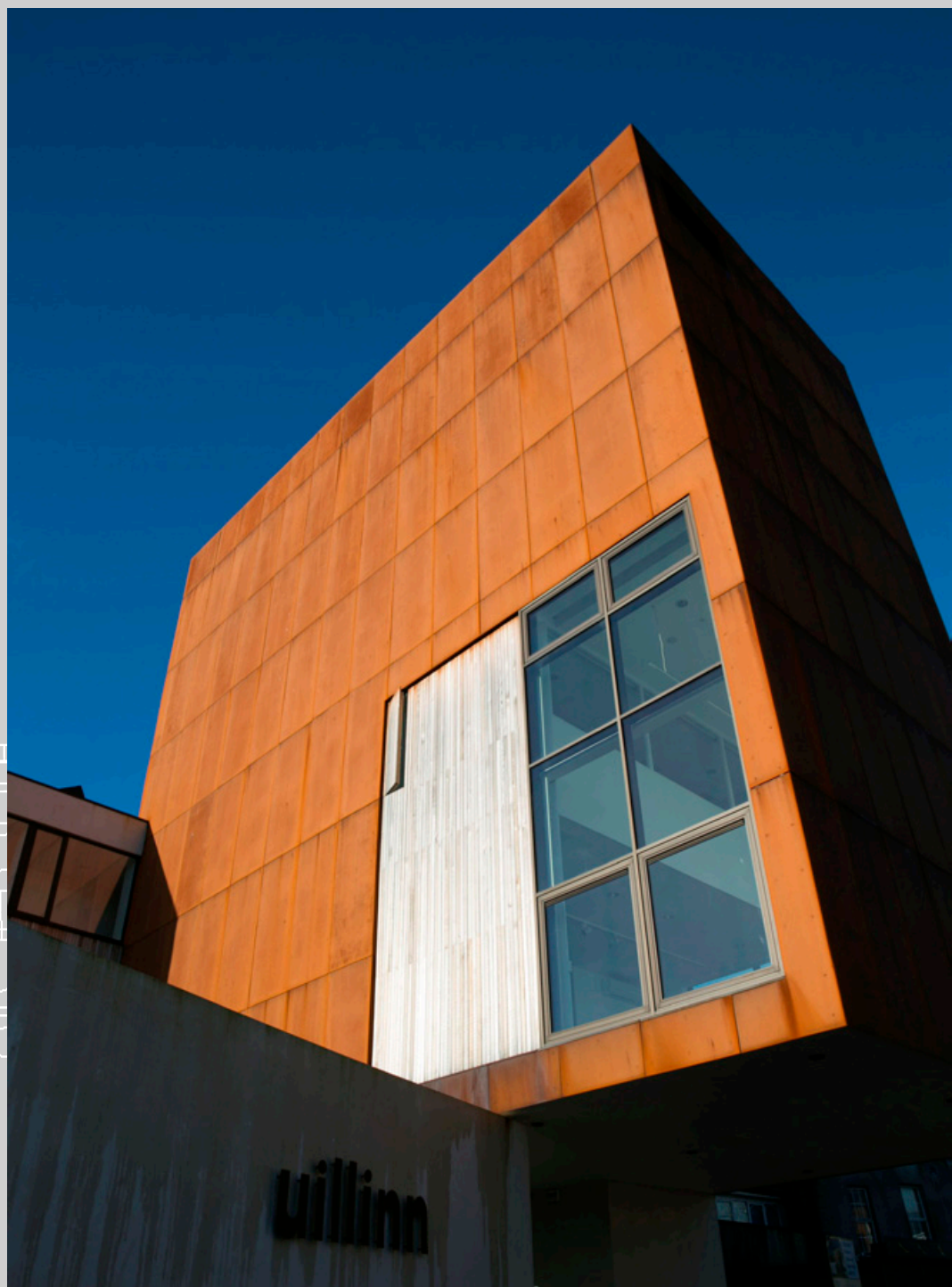


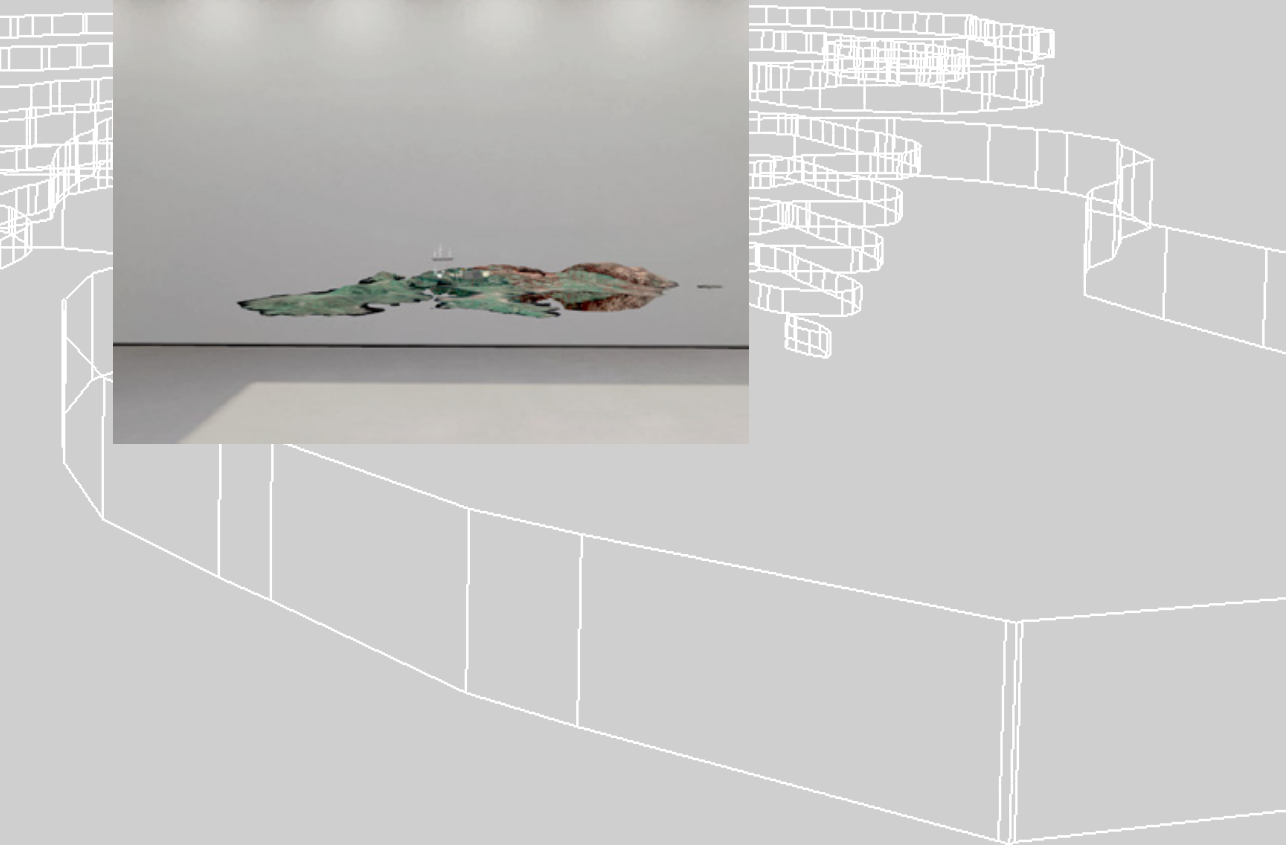
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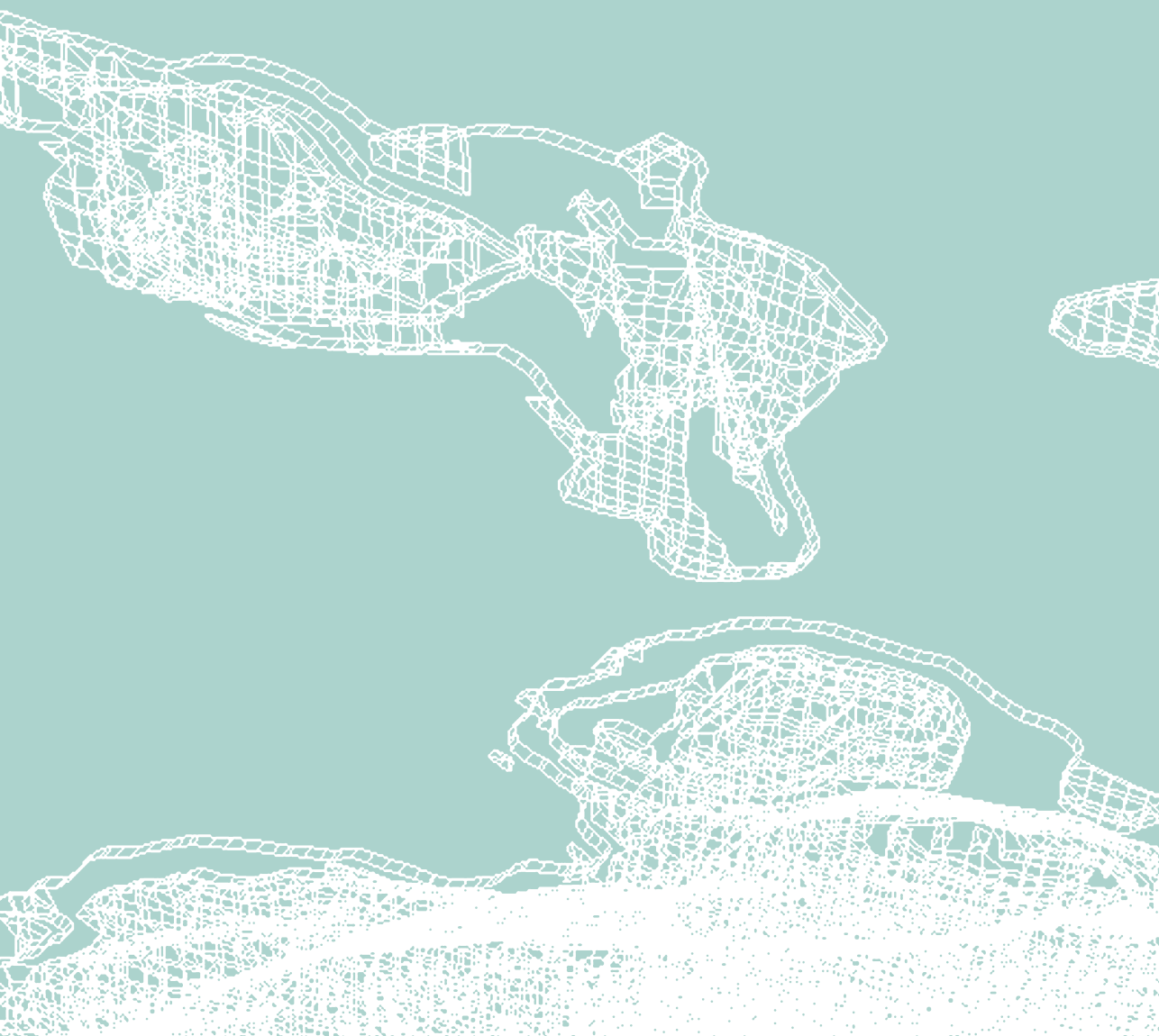














The Island of Ireland: Towards an Irish Nissology

Anne O'Byrne

In 1991, when the literal and figurative rubble of the Berlin Wall was still piled up, when Germany was at the point of reunification, and when the question of internal and external European borders was in flux, Jacques Derrida gave a talk in Turin about Europe as a promontory.¹ Back in 1939, Paul Valéry had asked: “What then is Europe?” and answered: “It is a kind of cape of the old continent, a western appendix to Asia. It looks naturally toward the west. On the south it is bordered by a famous sea whose role, or I should say function, has been wonderfully effective in the development of that European spirit with which we are concerned.”² Moreover, what it would become? The little promontory that it is *in reality*, or the thing that it *appears to be*, that is, the “elect portion of the terrestrial globe, the pearl of the sphere, the brain of a vast body.”³

Derrida took on the thought of the head and headland in the talk – later a book – called *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*.⁴ The trouble is that, despite their differences, Valéry and Derrida remained entirely continentalist, concerned with the terrain of the peninsula (or, in the case of Derrida, the cape of Europe and the northern shores of the continent of Africa) and ignoring extra-continental lands from Samos to Tenerife, Inishmór, Grimsey, Orkney, Shetland and Faroe, not forgetting Britain, Ireland

and Iceland, distinctly European islands but distinct from the continent and distinct from each other. After all, the continent is only a part of the picture, a dominating landmass jutting into the European archipelago. If we reject Valéry's insistence on descriptions that tend towards definitions and take up instead Derrida's preference for instances and examples, we would still have to make a study of each island, giving each one its due. This is the work of nissology, the study of islands as islands.

Now, a generation after the fall of the Berlin Wall and Derrida's talk in Turin, almost a century after Valéry's reflections on the greatness and decline of Europe, more than a century after the Irish Free State broke from Britain's empire and a border was drawn across the island of Ireland, some 50 years after Britain joined the project of European unification and several years after it voted to reject it, years into Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the internal and external borders of Europe are in flux again, including the border across the island of Ireland.

We can't just take Valéry and Derrida's truncated continental map and sketch in the outlying islands, adding missing places and ignored knowledge. That would leave the continentalists' assumptions intact. Derrida writes of the head, the headland, the other heading, and the other of the heading, subverting the logic of heading and leading, but following his pattern and writing of "the other island" wouldn't make much sense. There is always another island. Islands exist in relation, that is, in archipelagoes; even the most remote and most isolated have their place in the global archipelago and are related to others across the paths of the sea in ways that continents are not required to acknowledge. We always have to start somewhere, so let's begin with Ireland, this Western island already the other/outer/lesser island to the larger, greater, island of Britain.

If the word *Ireland* names a thing, a phenomenon, it should be possible to do a phenomenology of Ireland, that is, to give an account of it on its own terms, unconstrained by the various expectations, attitudes and ontologies

that take its island-ness for granted. There are ways to write and map its earth or its populations, narrate its past, study its languages and produce a scientific study of its society and its politics but what would a phenomenology of Ireland be? What could it mean for a country, something so geographically, demographically, historically, linguistically, sociologically and politically complex to “show itself from itself,” as phenomenologists say? The result could not be like Borges’s map that covers the whole territory, since that would lack phenomenology’s reach *into* the thing itself. Nor could it be the opposite, the transcendental Ireland, Ireland itself, the essence of Ireland, metaphysical or ontological Ireland, since anything we pin down as essential could immediately be disrupted by whatever of Ireland showed itself next; the new Ireland, revised Ireland, young Ireland, united Ireland, the Ireland of today, the Irish imaginary, the Ireland to come. Valéry asked: “What, then, is Europe?” At the conclusion of his own talk, Derrida dissolved Valéry’s answer into a series of double binds – Europe’s self-identity and non-identity, its love of difference and attachment to universal law, its two concepts of hospitality, its capacity for critique and deconstruction of critique, showing that the question should be rather: Which Europe? Likewise, we have to ask: Which Ireland? When? Why now?⁵

Brexit is a large part of why now. When Britain voted in 2016 to leave the European Union, the border was suddenly a thing, no longer just a border between parts of Ireland but the new Western border between Britain and Europe. In January 2020 Brexit became a reality and, in that moment, a border across the island of Ireland that had almost gone away after the peace of 1998 was now made to reappear, though only in some ways, even as another border appeared in the Irish Sea, though also only in some ways. Borders, which we think of as hard edges between one place and another, one jurisdiction and another, now turn out to have an evanescent quality, appearing and fading, sometimes named and sometimes proving unnameable. And meanwhile fish and animals, bacteria and viruses, air and water passed across

the borderlands and borderwaters, as they have always done. In the context of the Brexit debates and the shifting political, epidemiological, and ecological climate, the island of Ireland, at the edge of Europe, became a site for the question of all of Europe's borders, internal and external. In 1991, Derrida took Europe as both universal and particular by taking it as an example.⁶ The island of Ireland was now being asked to rise to an occasion of exemplarity.

Nissology

In *The Other Heading* Derrida turns frequently to Latin as the historical lingua franca of Europe and the source of the words that are central to Valéry's thought of Europe: the shared root of *culture* and *colonization* is uncovered in *colere* (to till, to farm), and the roots of *capital* and *captain* in the Latin *cap*, *caput*, *capitis*. *Island* is not a Latin word and does not emerge on the shores of the Mediterranean. It comes from Old Norse, Old Friesian and Old High German words for water and land, *y-land*, watered place, water-land, or land surrounded by water. The Latin *insula* contributes *insulate*, and *insularity*, with its connotations of inward-looking isolation. When geographers began to make a case for Island Studies in the 1990s, they rejected the insular and chose to name what they did using the Greek *nisos*, island.⁷ Nissology is "the study of islands on their own terms," the phenomenology of islands. The Japan Society for Island Studies began publishing *The Journal of Island Studies* in 2000; The University of Prince Edward Island in Nova Scotia founded an institute of Island Studies and began to publish *Island Studies Journal* in 2006. Routledge published a *Handbook of International Island Studies* in 2018.

How does a person experience an island? We arrive on the coast at the end of a sea journey, stepping onto land; we leave the island at the coast, embarking on the journey elsewhere; we follow the shoreline, the land on one side, the sea on the other. This might give us a sense of the edges of a small island, a place we might take in in a day's walk or that we

could see from edge to edge, but the island of Ireland is large enough on the human scale to have been historically divided into provinces, fifths, counties, parishes and townlands. You could live locally without ever *seeing* it as an island. You could know a stretch of coastline without knowing that you could keep walking and be back where you began within a couple of months, or keep sailing and have circumnavigated the whole island within days. Few of us have done that and, even now, not many have had the chance to look out an airplane window on a clear day and see the country pass below – Galway Bay, the Shannon, Dublin Bay--coast to coast. Yet even that falls short. To know the island as an island, we need access to the nissological imaginary.

The oldest known map, dating from 2nd century AD, was made by someone who never saw the place. Claudius Ptolemy, a Greek mathematician, developed a spherical grid of parallel latitudes and meridians of longitude on which to place what was known of the world, both what he saw himself in the Eastern Mediterranean and what was reported by sailors and travelers. Ireland takes shape on his maps about 100 A.D., an outline drawn between a set of coastal coordinates marking promontories – Carnsore Point, Dursey Head, Horn Head, Fair Head – the mouths of rivers, and places where people lived, assembled, and traded. Vikings of the 8th-10th centuries navigated without maps but their raiding expeditions nonetheless took them all around the coast. Chroniclers in the 11th century write of *Insula Sanctorum*. When the Anglo-Normans arrived in the 12th century, they found a patchwork of fiefdoms and kingdoms, at some points loosely federated under a high king, but also with connections to Gaelic-speaking communities in Scotland.

Was the island of Ireland a *thing* then? Or did it emerge only later, in the context the wars of conquest and colonization of the 16th and 17th centuries, when the quest to possess constituted and gave shape to the thing possessed?⁸ Gerard Mercator's map of *Irlandia regnum* appeared in 1595 during the Nine Years War. In the wake of the Cromwellian conquest, when land was being divided to

be granted to Cromwell's soldiers, William Petty produced a detailed survey published as *Hiberniae Delineatio* (1685). The map eventually settled into its familiar form with the maps of the Ordnance Survey. The British Ordnance Survey began as a military campaign to map the Scottish Highlands in the 1740s in order to suppress anti-English rebellion there; the Irish Ordnance Survey, also run by the occupying British Army, was established in 1824 and produced its most detailed map in 1842.

These are the forebears of the maps in our school atlases, maps on postage stamps, television weather maps, satellite pictures, the images on tea-towels, tee-shirts and mugs, and the shape hinted at by the "Guaranteed Irish" logo. A Dr. W. Drennan writing in 1795 claims to coin the title "The Emerald Isle." (OED). In 1914, shure, it's a little bit of heaven that fell from out the sky one day. In 1966, Dominic Behan's "The Sea Around Us" tops the charts with the chorus: "It's a sure guarantee that some hour we'll be free/ Thank God we're surrounded by water." When Dublin Airport advertises its new terminal in 2010, we're reminded that Ireland is a small island in a large ocean.

So Ireland becomes an island. What's more, once it's firmly lodged in the nissological imaginary, it appears to be only *natural* that it's an island. Never mind the archipelago of smaller islands sprinkled around its coast from Rathlin to Great Saltee to Fastnet to Tory. Set aside the British archipelago where Ireland is always going to be the little island. Ireland is *an* island, its unity so naturalised that, in the mid-1970s, my sixth class teacher could make an argument for a united Ireland that went simply: "Who would want a biscuit with a bite taken out of it?"

The unity of the island need not be a matter of provincial insularity. The island's edge turns us back toward the land and island life – we walk to the sea and can walk no further – but it also pulls us onto the sea towards the other islands and the continents that keep life on a small island going.⁹ As a hard edge, the coast cuts off the island community from its hinterland, and the result is that islanders

must travel and trade. Indeed, the island edge is not just permeable, but the site of a gestalt shift that makes it the portal to sea passages and sea trails that fan across the world, as Epili Hau'ofa of Fiji puts it in "Our Sea of Islands."¹⁰ Islands are nodes of sea communication. For the people of 17th century Connemara, it could be more natural to embark for Kerry, France and Spain than to face the mountains and bogs that separated it from the rest of the island of Ireland to the east.

Nissology distinguishes between continental and oceanic islands; Ireland is a continental island. The cape of Europe stretches westward, and its underwater continental shelf extends further still, dropping off to the depths of the Porcupine Abyssal Plain some 200 nautical miles southwest of Ireland.¹¹ The seas that bound Ireland to the east are shallow continental seas, and until about 16,000 years ago, when the last ice sheet began to retreat, the island was connected by land to Britain which was in turn connected by land to the continent. Valéry's (and Derrida's) European promontory finishes at the *finis terrae* of Finistère (France) or perhaps Finisterre (Spain), but had those land bridges survived, the end of the earth would have had to be Land's End (Cornwall) or Garraun Point (Kerry). But the glaciers melted and the seas rose, turning western peninsulas into islands, edged entities on the edge of Europe, and everything we might say about them turns out to be double-edged: they were cut off and set free; far flung but, on a clear day, within sight; claimed for Europe but not quite European; peopled by islanders and crossed by migrations; cultivated and wild. Ireland – Hibernia – the island the Roman Empire never colonized but that would become the western outpost of the medieval church of Rome. Ireland would become the colony of its neighbouring island, the European beginning of an empire that for centuries would dominate the globe and whose language would become the modern lingua franca in which I now write. But if, as for Valéry, the European promontory was leading the Asian continent into the west (while somehow disconnecting itself from the continent of Africa), if the culture of the old world reached it

finest point and leading edge in Europe, if it was the prow, the phallic tip, the nib, the cap, then what was to be made of those detached, scattered scraps of European land that lay ahead, surrounded by nothing but water? Neither Valéry nor Derrida reached that far.

Nissologists worry about precisely what Valéry took for granted. Speaking of – maybe *for* – the French, he announces: “We are universal – by which I mean, *men of universality*.” Seamlessly, laudably, though also sometimes ridiculously (in Valéry’s view), Frenchness passes into universality. Just as seamlessly, the author acknowledges the peculiarity of what he has proclaimed: “Notice the paradox: to specialize in the sense of the universal.”¹² Derrida takes up the thought and deepens the paradox. On the one hand, Husserl speaks out of a certain Germanness when he describes the European philosopher becoming a “functionary of mankind” (Crisis 17). Does that mean different variations on the theme of European can become specialists in the universal? On the other, what if the feeling of universality is not reserved for Europeans at all? Derrida detonates the fission reaction that splits the heading into headland and shoreline, both, and brings on the cascade of double duties and responsibilities that end his talk. Once it is no longer universal, Europe might be *exemplary*.¹³

The editors of *Island Studies* find that islands (and island-ness) are not granted such passage; they are “excruciatingly pinioned between the global and the particular” and struggle to gain access to the same paradox on their own terms.¹⁴ Edged, watered lands, they are already paradoxical places, paradoxical and disempowered, leaving them susceptible to being taken into or excluded from – in either case, subordinated to – continentalist discourse. Godfrey Baldacchino (of the University of Prince Edward Island and the University of Malta) writes:

There is something about the insular that beckons specificity, greater malleability, less inhibition, a more genuine ‘been there, done that’ (even if merely

psychological) finality, an opportunity for a more thorough control of intervening variables which then are more likely to guarantee successful outcomes (e.g. Baum, 2000: 215). But the small, remote and insular also suggest peripherality, being on the edge, being out of sight and so out of mind: situations which both expose and foment the weakness of mainstream ideas, orthodoxies and paradigms.¹⁵

The question of what sort of thing an island *is* gives way to the question of what sort of *example* it might be.

How is the island of Ireland exemplary? How is it exemplary now?

Ireland and its border

The term *the island of Ireland* became necessary in 1921 when a border was created, making two Irelands: the independent Irish Free State, and Northern Ireland, which remained part of the United Kingdom.¹⁶ The island preceded the border. It underlies and subtends it; the island extends from sea to sea. Those who inhabit it are islanders (though not all would describe themselves as Irish), and this includes those who live in the borderlands, occupy them, move through them, leave and return; they farm those lands and build on them. Roads, paths, and lanes cross the border, and where the 500km border falls, it in turn crosses 208 of these paths and ways. "There are more [border] crossings in Ireland than along the entire border between the European Union and the countries to its east, which has 137."¹⁷ *The island of Ireland* is not a matter of Ireland without its border; it refers to an entity, Ireland, including and despite its border.

In *The World on Edge*, Edward Casey observes that borders and boundaries determine histories, both personal and political. He writes:

This is so despite the abstractness of borders (their status as imagined or ideal). [Their] very intransigence and

intransitivity... – their status as instituted – along with their resistance to easy alteration act as a forceful historical determinant. Beyond any explicit intention of keeping historical events strictly delimited, borders give rise to an ever-broadening wake. Part of the wake includes the rigors of having to cope with their presence (for example, the necessity of dealing with the border fences erected recently in eastern Europe to exclude people fleeing from Syria) and part of it from an accumulating history of the subtle effects of a given border on many concrete aspects of ongoing life (as, for instance, the mixture of ethnic and national populations that come to reside on the opposite sides of a given border, such as East and West Germans before 1989, or Palestinians and Israelis since 1967).¹⁸

In the years of the Troubles, Ireland's was a hard, militarized border, though impossible to surveille thoroughly or police completely. In many cases, when the border crossed a country road, it closed the road. In other cases, it held a road open but caused towers to be erected and placed British soldiers in them, cleared a no-man's land on either side, and made the cars and bodies of whoever used the road open for searches. Yet in 1973, as the violence in Northern Ireland was still building to its height, Ireland *and* Britain joined what was then the European Economic Community (E.E.C.). This set the islands in a new relation to the project of Europe as the E.E.C. became the E.U. over the 25 years that followed. The 1998 Good Friday Agreement that largely brought the violence of the Troubles to an end emerged in a context where Britain, Ireland and Northern Ireland were engaged in broad, varied cooperation in a substantially homogenized economy. As Richard Kearney wrote in *Postnationalist Ireland* in 2002, communities that had been pitted against each other as Protestant loyalists oriented to Britain, and Catholic nationalists oriented to the Republic of Ireland could now find common purpose pursuing their shared interests as farmers or entrepreneurs working with a European administration. After 1998, the military look-out posts were dismantled, customs

checks were unnecessary, and country roads were opened again. The border softened and disappeared from sight. A shared system for healthcare was established; environmental projects were undertaken to protect the European eels of the border lake of Lough Erne; citizens claimed welfare and pension benefits in the other jurisdiction. The border existed but it had passed from experience; after two decades, its wake had diminished to the barely perceptible ripples.

After the Brexit vote, the European Council immediately recognized that the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland would be crucial in the negotiations that would make Brexit a reality.¹⁹ Note the role played in the Brexit campaign by opposition to the free movement of E.U. workers, and the conflation of that freedom with E.U. efforts – and failures – regarding migration into the E.U. from the eastern Europe, the Middle East and the global South. The “Vote to Leave the E.U.” campaign in Britain produced a poster showing a large group of male, presumably Syrian, refugees waiting at the Croatia-Slovenia border. The poster read: “Breaking Point. The E.U. has failed us all. We must break free of the E.U. and take back control of our borders.” Subsequent studies have shown the link between fear of immigration and a pro-Brexit vote.²⁰ Throughout the E.U., internal borders had faded even as external borders had strengthened. E.U. products and workers moved with ever greater freedom within the Union while the movement of people and goods over the land border to the east and over the Mediterranean to the south was subject to intense restriction, the Syrian-Afghan-Iraqi refugee crisis of 2015 notwithstanding. The number of people who migrated that year spurred talk of *failure* of borders, a *tide*, an *invasion*, a *crisis* of security, although it was not the first time the world had heard this way of describing the efforts of the displaced and disadvantaged to reach safety and prosperity. Meanwhile, in the 12 months between June 2015 and the Brexit vote in June 2016, 4,176 people drowned or went missing in the passage across the Mediterranean.

For many British voters, Brexit would be a failure if it did not replicate the intransigent borders at the eastern and

southern edges of the E.U., producing another strong border and line of defence around the shore of the island of Britain, as well as between the enclave of Gibraltar (Britain) and Spain (E.U.) and, perhaps most painfully, between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Only there, as it crosses the island, would a border cut through so many of the intimate rhythms by which people inhabit borderlands, cutting off so many of the lived activities that are as universal as anything we do, and cutting into a history of bloodshed and hard-won peace. It would be cut along the line of an old scar. Or would it turn out to be the inflamed edge of a wound still open? Claire Dwyer Hogg's short documentary film *Brexit: A Cry from the Irish Border* includes this narration:

Roads that start here and end there, somehow allowing a wound to heal...a gentleness in the mundanity...daily travel across political lines; work, school, grocery shops, back again...there, but not there; a line of imagination that needed imagination to make it exist while unseen...we live here and we're holding our breath again.²¹

The Brexit agreement did not draw or re-draw a border on the map of Ireland, and the Ireland/Northern Ireland protocol that is annexed to the agreement acknowledged the layered realities of the island of Ireland.²² For the most part, the protocol itself merely described and acknowledged those realities and avoided detailing their paradoxes. For example, it recognized the long-standing common travel area that allows Irish and British citizens free movement between the two countries, and also a unified customs territory that will allow for the free movement of goods between Britain and Northern Ireland, though *not* between Britain and the Republic of Ireland. That is to say, it recognized two borders/ not borders, one on the island of Ireland, the other in the sea between the island of Britain and the island of Ireland. It made no attempt to resolve their ontological status or minimize the political difficulties they entail, but it acknowledges that those difficulties might be forced to crisis point at any moment. In the

belligerent spirit of those early Brexit days, Article 16 stated:

If the application of this Protocol leads to serious economic, societal or environmental difficulties that are liable to persist, or to diversion of trade, the Union or the United Kingdom may unilaterally take appropriate safeguard measures.

What would count as a serious enough difficulty? Could it be predicted when it would be liable to persist? What did *safeguard* refer to? Who would say what is appropriate? In January 2021 the DUP withdrew from the power sharing government at Stormont. The E.U. moved to invoke the Protocol to block exports of COVID vaccines from the E.U. to Northern Ireland. Britain and Ireland's governments both intervened and no "safeguard measure" was taken. Earlier, there had been concern about the movement of trained guide dogs between Britain and Northern Ireland, but they were granted an exception. In the spring and summer of 2021, the object of controversy was chilled meats; the deadline for compliance was extended. For two years, civil servants ran government services in Northern Ireland and the EU and the UK tried to figure out what the protocol and what "border" now meant. The Windsor Framework (2023) added "the Stormont Brake."²³ The DUP disapproved (2023) and then approved (2024), allowing the Stormont assembly to convene again. Guide dogs, sausages, and vaccines are not the flashpoints they once were. The all-Island Single Electricity Market continues to work. There is no final answer to the question of the ontological status of the land border and the sea border. In fact, the very existence of the network of E.U., British, Northern Irish, and Irish committees, joint committees, laws, and protocols, as well as a Democratic Consent Mechanism, is an implicit acknowledgement that there is no such answer.

Ireland and its Archipelagoes

What any island *is* is a matter of land and water and also the place it occupies in its archipelago and in the global archipelago. That is to say, a nissology will always intersect

with a *logos* of the archipelago – we could call it an *archipelogos* – and with ways of studying sea-, lake-, and river-water that could fall under the headings of *ocean-ology*, *tidalectics*, *wave-thinking* or *meandering*.²⁴ Studying an island phenomenologically allows us to know *what* and *where* it is on the basis of observation and description, but, because this requires us to suspend the natural attitude, it also lets us shed the thought that any way of knowing will give us complete knowledge. Knowing opens onto imagining, and the nissology of Ireland opens into the Irish imaginary. I'll mention three ways in which this might be developed as an archipelagic imaginary.

1) The territory known as Ireland consists of the island of Ireland and also some 80 smaller islands that surround it and dot its rivers and lakes, a small number of them inhabited. The life of these islands plays an exceptionally large role in the Irish imaginary. They are places where the Irish language survived, where words and ways became objects of anthropological and philological study and fueled the Celtic Revival, the places where a late Irish language literature occurred. They offered political refuge for rebel fugitives and spiritual refuge for monks and pilgrims. Life on the windswept, treeless western islands was hard and precarious, requiring a subsistence agriculture often made painfully laborious by the need to create soil on the limestone fields by carrying sand and seaweed from the shore. Sayers, Ó Criomhtháin, and Ó Súilleabháin, whose autobiographies from Great Blasket became central to the mythologies of the islands, did not romanticize the loneliness and hardship of the life. Even so, when the government permanently evacuated the last of the island's population decades later, in 1953, the moment was marked melancholically, a failure and a loss.²⁵

2) At the same time, the island of Ireland belongs as the lesser island, the second-largest island in an archipelago still often known as the British Isles. As long ago as 1975, J.G.A. Pocock argued that the name should be abandoned in favour of *Atlantic Archipelago*, since *British Isles* fixes the identity of these islands as those whose politics and history has been dominated by the island of Great Britain and, more

particularly, the part of it that is England. He writes of the terms *British* and *Britain*: “their history in Scotland is unlike that they have in England, and both these are unlike that they have in Ireland, where there are good reasons in the republic for rejecting them altogether”.²⁶ Thirty years later he notes with resignation that the term never caught on. Indeed, Brexit appeared to entrench *British*-ness more deeply than ever. If remote islands suggest peripherality and resistance to orthodoxy, Britain in the days of its empire was the opposite: it was the island at the center of everything, the land that straddled the zero meridian, the country that took the measure of the world and made itself the start and finish of it all – Britannia, who ruled the waves. Valery saw France assigning itself the role of the exemplary European; the Frenchman, bearing the Rights of Man, thought himself the representative of universality. The English Bill of Rights, in contrast, did not attempt to speak for or to all humanity, but the Englishman would eventually also understand himself as universal in a different way. He became universal not in the mode of representation but in a way possible only for the rulers of an empire on which the sun never set: the British functionary of empire went everywhere, and found himself everywhere.

As the other island, Ireland's relation to its neighbor has been shaped by oppression, resistance, struggle, and disidentification but also cooption, cooperation and identification. Colonized and occupied, it also provided colonizers, soldiers, and administrators of empire in India, Africa, Australia and the Americas. Subaltern at home, the Irish civil servant became another British operative overseas.²⁷

3) That is to say, the otherness of the other British Isle is hard to discern from the other side of the earth. If the excruciatingly relevant distinction under the empire was between those who wielded and administered imperial power and those who were subjected to it, it has been replaced – post-colonialism – by a distinction between those who have no choice but to grapple with its long aftermath and those still unwilling to acknowledge the depth and extent of its violence and the weight of its inheritance. Pocock blamed the failure of

his term *Atlantic Archipelago* on the politics of post-modernism with its “general invective against naming or defining or having any identity at all,” as well as the clumsiness of the formulation.²⁸ The phrase is clumsy, but that has the advantage of making us pause for thought.²⁹ Meanwhile, post-modernism is also not the problem. The desire for identity has turned out to be extremely resilient, but that in itself does not explain enough. After all, on the one hand we can identify univocally, insisting to the point of violence on exclusiveness and purity, but, on the other, we can also identify in many ways at once, intersectionally, or in the spirit of irony, or in the service of strategies for social change. The problem, rather, is the sort of attachment to identity that refuses historical reckoning. This is the mode of identification indicated – for example – by the fact that 40% of British pro-Brexit voters say they would like Britain to still have an empire, and the 32% of all British voters who believe that colonies were better off as part of the empire.³⁰

The *Atlantic Archipelago* may yet gain traction.³¹ Meanwhile, the imaginary of the *global* archipelago draws us out onto an still more expansive network and, as Glissant puts it, requires a poetics of relation.³² Talk of home/overseas, center/periphery, capital/province is less useful now as we set about relocating Ireland in relation to the lands and seas of the world, which means reimagining its relation to the European continent and the island of Great Britain, to be sure, but also placing it in the Atlantic, and finding its Atlantic stories – the voyage of Brendan, the sea-faring of Granuaile, emigrant coffin ships, *Riders to the Sea*, and more – among all the stories of all the Atlantics. The slaving raid on the town of Baltimore by North African pirates in 1631, and the 17th century deportation of Irish workers into indentured servitude in Barbados have one role in an insular Irish imaginary and another in the Atlantic imaginary populated by millions of stories of the Middle Passage. Stories of migrations *from* Ireland to the United States in the 1840s emerge in a new way alongside those of Nigerian migrations *to* Ireland in the 1990s. And legends of Brendan’s voyage to the West take on one set of meanings in a Continental account of Ireland as a beacon

of medieval Christianity, another in the Atlantic story of early modern European westward “discovery” and conquest, and yet another in the 19th and 20th century history of the global network of Irish Catholic missions and schools.

A wave of work developing and theorizing the Irish and global archipelagic imaginary is already under way. In July 2018 a group embarked (literally and figuratively) on a day-long “durational artistic research event” in Roaring Water Bay in Co. Cork, reminiscent of the Hebridean voyages of Richard de Marco in the 1970s.³³ The event was the first part of a project that has continued with a conceptual “Listening School” that, over three days in 2019, linked the West Cork town of Skibbereen, and the Equadoran islands of Jambelí and San Cristóbal. Project leader Glenn Loughran writes: “Interrogating the western eco-colonial gaze on islands in the Anthropocene, the Listening School developed a pedagogical programme around listening and sounding the archipelago in the Anthropocene.”³⁴ The third iteration is a digital archipelago, part of a new Archipelagic MA in Art and the Environment. Meanwhile, the Caribbean continues to foment nissological and archipelagic thinking, taking up the provocations of Glissant and Derek Walcott and constantly re-working the experience of island and sea, the wake of the British island empire and the on-going presence of the American continental empire. The streams and drifts of the North Atlantic touch the shores of Caribbean islands and also the shores of Ireland. Thinking along those sea-paths will help an Irish nissology do its part in dismantling Valéry’s European exceptionalism. As Derrida writes, a decade after his reflections on the headland of Europe and in the last year of his life: “there is no world; there are only islands.”³⁵

Conclusion

The island of Ireland will continue to be the arena where post-Brexit disputes flare around the status of its borders/not borders. It may be that the post-nationalist, European Ireland identified by Kearney in 2002 is being lost in the resurgence

of old political commitments. Those identities – unionism and republicanism, certainly, but we could add British nationalism and Euro-centrism more generally – are old in many senses. They are long-established and deeply entrenched. They have histories and inheritances that have gone unexamined. But they are also ageing, finding it difficult to find a place in the world that persists in changing around them. This applies to their populations and institutions, their thinking and imaginaries. That version of a European Ireland emerged in a world struggling to reshape itself at the end of the Troubles, a context charged with hope for peace and also the anxiety that violence could erupt again; after all, the Omagh bombing, the single most deadly attack of the Northern Ireland conflict, happened in the months *after* the peace agreement was signed. Naturally, people are still holding their breath. An Irish nissology opens onto a new version not only of Ireland but of Europe, locating the island of Ireland in the archipelagic Europe that is dealing with Brexit, to be sure, but is also concerned with its ageing population, its land neighbours to the East and sea neighbours to the South and West, with the local and global matters of migrations, neo-liberal economics and climate change, and even with taking steps (small and tentative but unimaginable a generation ago) towards a reckoning with the aftermath of the European global empires.³⁶

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Notes

- 1 Thanks to Roisín Lally, Dan Bradley, Patrick O'Connor, Tony O'Connor, Richard Kearney, William Desmond, Felix Ó Murchadha and all the participants in the Irish Phenomenology Symposium, June 2021. Thank you to James Wheeler for editorial assistance.
- 2 Valéry, *History and Politics*, 311–12.
- 3 Valéry, 31.
- 4 Derrida, *The Other Heading*.
- 5 Derrida, 29, 76–80.
- 6 In *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Vol. II, Derrida takes up the thought of islands and world in the context of the Robinson Crusoe story. See Patrick O'Connor, "Derrida Saves the World: A Rope at the End of the Tunnel." Unpublished manuscript.
- 7 McCall 1994, 1996. Cited in Baldacchino, "Islands, Island Studies, Island Studies Journal" p.10.
- 8 Many thanks to Felix Ó Murchadha for introducing me to this line of thinking.
- 9 Patrick O'Connor makes the same point: "Islands are as subject to change, alteration and adaption as any other system. ... An island has a location: it may be lonely and singular. certainly, but it also relates beyond itself. The world as island is constituted through traces, detours, and relays toward and away from itself. To conflate islands with insularity is simply the imposition of an over-determined meaning." Unpublished manuscript.
- 10 Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands."
- 11 At this point another line of thinking opens up, leading further west and south across the abyssal plain, following in reverse the course of the Gulf Stream and opening a way to the islands of the Caribbean. The relation is already established in history and literature (the *Odyssey*, Joyce's *Ulysses* and Walcott's *Omeros* are all nissological works); another path would begin with Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*.
- 12 Derrida, *The Other Heading*, 74.
- 13 Derrida, 24. "The idea of an advanced point of *exemplarity* is the *idea of the European idea*, its *eidos* at once as *arché*...and as *telos*."
- 14 Cited in Hay, "A Phenomenology of Islands," 22.
- 15 Baldacchino, "Islands, Island Studies, Island Studies Journal," 6. He adds that "disempowerment, and the likelihood of being written about, still generally increases with smaller island population size," 7.
- 16 For a comprehensive historical account see Ferriter, *The Border*.
- 17 Ferriter, 141.
- 18 Casey, *The World on Edge*, 16.
- 19 Ferriter, *The Border*, 137.
- 20 Meleady, Seger, and Vermue, "Examining the Role of Positive and Negative Intergroup Contact and Anti-Immigrant Prejudice in Brexit." See also <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/brexit-latest-news-leave-eu-immigration-main-reason-european-union-survey-a7811651.html> 28 June 2017. Accessed 22 June 2021.
- 21 *Brexit: A Cry from the Irish Border*.

- 22 "Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland."
- 23 Curtis, "The Northern Ireland Protocol and Windsor Framework."
- 24 The terms archipelagos and ocean-ology are my own (though I doubt I am the first to have thought of them). Otherwise, see Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, on the thought of the archipelago; Chiaroni, "Fluid Philosophy: Rethinking the Human Condition in Terms of the Sea" on philosophies of land and sea; Laruelle, "*L'impossible fondation d'une écologie de l'océan*" on wave thinking [*une pensée ondulatoire*]; Klaver, "Meandering and Riversphere" on river waters; Hessler, *Tidialectics* and Braithwaite, *The Arrivants* on tidalectics.
- 25 See *Peig* by Peig Sayers, *The Islandman* by Tomas O'Crohan and *Twenty Years A-growing* by Maurice O'Sullivan.
- 26 Pocock, *The Discovery of Islands*, 293.
- 27 See Holmes, "The Irish and India: Imperialism, Nationalism and Internationalism." See also Daunton and Halpern, "Introduction: British identities, indigenous peoples, and the empire."
- 28 Pocock, *The Discovery of Islands*, 293.
- 29 Mealor and Schwyzer, *Archipelagic Identities*, 2.
- 30 "UK More Nostalgic for Empire than Other Ex-Colonial Powers | Colonialism | The Guardian."
- 31 Marland, "Literary Archipelagographies: Readings from the British-Irish Archipelago," 221–22.
- 32 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*.
- 33 Murray, "What Is An Island?"
- 34 Loughran, "What Is an Island?" Accessed July 13, 2021. Many thanks to Richard Kearney, who participated in the July 2018 event, for this reference.
- 35 Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume II*, 9. See also Jonathan Pugh and David Chandler, "There Are Only Islands After the End of the World" in Pugh and Chandler, *Antropocene Islands: Entangled Worlds*. My thanks to Glenn Loughran for making this connection.
- 36 For example, see Choksey, "Colston Falling." and DeBlock, "The Africa Museum of Tervuren, Belgium."

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Patchwork Pedagogies: From Island to Archipelago to World

Glenn Loughran

The *What is an Island?* project was initiated in 2018 within the geographic context of West Cork, the political context of Brexit and the environmental context of the Anthropocene.¹ It began as an open-ended, experimental journey into the changing nature of islands in contemporary life and an exploration of the characteristics of artistic research and its education. Through this process the project bridged two educational programmes: the BA in Visual Art on Sherkin Island (TU Dublin) and the MA in Art and Environment (TU Dublin) in the West Cork archipelago. Navigating these points, it cultivated an enquiry into the significance of art education operating at the edges of the university, an art education that links island, archipelago and world.

The form of this enquiry was multi-modal, combining live events, performative lectures and critical dialogue with island communities. Motivated by contemporary shifts in political ecology, these events reflected on i) the impact of visual arts education on isolated island communities ii) the development of event-based, artistic research processes, iii) the methodological potential of archipelagic thinking for art education in the Anthropocene. A central concept throughout the project, archipelagic thinking can be understood as a multifaceted postcolonial framework for thinking about difference, diversity, and relation beyond generic concepts of network and globality².

To think an art education within this context is to consider how it might form a complex assemblage that enables our understanding and interpretation of the geographic and geologic specificity of place. However, while assemblage theories can support the interconnectedness of island-archipelagic imaginaries at a time of increasing division, it can also lend itself to a conceptual abstraction that misses the entangled, material realities of lived experience on islands³. Alternatively, Island scholars Jonathan Pugh and David Chandler have argued for a deeper understanding of ‘patchwork ontologies’ across islands, stating,

Patchwork approaches develop and transform relational ontology so that the modernist imaginary of islands existing in a flat, two-dimensional space, side-by-side, tracing continuities in relation across linear time, is replaced with a more open ontology of spatial and temporal becoming (Glissant, 1997; Last, 2017)⁴.

Moving between the material realities of island life, artistic research and theoretical reflection, the *What is an island?* project developed a patchwork pedagogy over a period of three years, across physical and virtual islands. To capture this ‘spatial and temporal becoming’, the following essay is structured around three core concepts; *site*, *event*, and *world*. Through the *site(ing)* of the work, we gain an understanding of the educational context from which the project emerged, its material and educational realities on island communities. The *evental* dimension of the research explores the event-based character of artistic research, transferring the theoretical framework of archipelagic thinking onto the methodological ground of the project. This section provides a brief reflection on the different iterations of the project, as they unfolded across three distinct archipelagic environments: *West Cork Archipelago* (2018), *the Galápagos Islands* (2019) and the *Digital Archipelago* (2020). Finally, reflecting on the *World* dimension of the project, the essay presents a curricular overview of an archipelagic art education, based on a world orientation.

Site – Island

Sherkin Island, originally called *Innisherkin*, is a small, English-speaking Island located just off the southwest tip of Cork, beside the coastal fishing village of Baltimore. Approximately 5 x 2.5 km, it is accessible by a ten-minute ferry ride and recently recorded a population of 111 inhabitants⁵. In the late nineteen seventies and early eighties the accessible nature of the island attracted marine biologists, poets and artists. Through this wave of inward migration landscape painters, Majella O'Neill Collins and Bernadette Burns set up an art and culture pilot for adults which eventually grew into a formal degree in visual art. The BA in Visual Art aimed to address key policy directives set out in the White Paper on Adult Education Learning for Life (2000)⁶ namely; rural exclusion in the arts, curricular support for adult learners outside of work and family commitments, and infrastructural support for the arts ecology in West Cork.⁷ Over a period of twenty years, these aims and ambitions matured into a flagship project for island-based art education, supported by a unique partnership model that connected grassroots community organisations: Sherkin Island Development Society (SIDS), local arts infrastructure; the West Cork Arts Centre (Uillinn) and academic supports; TU Dublin (then DIT).

Built around six intense contact weekends per semester, the BA in Visual Art (BAVA) was delivered on the island, in the community centre, every two weeks, over four years. This unique weekend structure was designed to enable adult learners to continue their education whilst working or attending to family responsibilities. Highlighting the need to differentiate between levels of maturity and responsibility in adult education, the course strongly emphasized research-led teaching and peer-to-peer learning, understood in educational terms as andragogy.⁸ Coined by German educator Alexander Kapp (1833) the concept of andragogy instituted a shift from teacher-centric education to learner-centric education⁹. In the late 1970's critical pedagogue Paolo Friere made a similar case for

adult literacy in rural Brazil, focusing on a deeply political understanding of place and situatedness in education,

People as beings “in a situation”, find themselves rooted in temporal-spatial conditions which mark them and which they also mark. They will tend to reflect on their own “situationality” to the extent that they are challenged to act upon it. Human beings *are* because they are in a situation. And they will be more, the *more* they not only critically reflect upon their existence but critically act upon it¹⁰.

Emphasizing the local context, the BAVA curriculum was grounded in a critical study of rural environments, landscape painting, and community engagement that prompted a situated understanding of the historical, political, and aesthetic significance of islands.

Alongside the socially concrete conditions of adult education on the island-based course, there were also important historical connections between adult education, tele-communication and digital infrastructure. Progressive models of distance learning, such as the Open University (OU) (1969 – 2022), have for a long time utilized modern technology to provide educational access to marginalized learners. Originally named ‘the University of the Air,’¹¹ the Open University initiated telephone and radio tutorials, televised lectures, and postal delivery curricula.¹² Importantly, the early implementation and successful validation of the BA in Visual Art programme in 2006, was supported by the installation of an ISDN line on the Island. From an institutional perspective the ISDN line was instrumental in the validation process as it connected a diverse array of live lectures in an urban university to a student body on a remote island. Similar to the Open University, the BAVA programme utilized educational technologies to support blended learning, digital art and digital literacy in the curriculum. Following these experimentations, the use of technology became both a practice and a form of study on the course.

The BA in Visual Art is also key example of the sustainable impact that such interventions can have on the economic development of an island community. Ensuring that local facilitators and administrators are employed annually on the course, the BAVA has also contributed significantly to the increase in people using the ferry from September to May, to accommodation (hotels, hostels, and houses) and catering establishments on the Island being used by students throughout the winter months, and to a broader public engagement with the island through the all-island degree show. As such, the course has added to the economic and cultural vibrancy of the island, supporting an alternative vision of island communities as models of sustainable tourism rather than hide-away retreats for urban dwellers.

The impact of this educational intervention across the wider West Cork region has helped promote Sherkin Island as a contemporary art community, however, while the concept of intervention has mostly positive connotations within social and educational discourses, it is a much more contested term within the context of islands and island studies. This is due largely to the historical role of colonialism on islands, and because of this there is a need to be sensitive to the language of intervention when discussing island communities. Within this is important to acknowledge that the success of the BA in Visual Art programme over the past twenty years is due largely to the strength of the partnership agreement which supported the role of each participant in the project and protected the integrity of its ambitions. At the centre of this partnership are local actors, who developed the project out of a painting course on the island, for the island. This locus remains the ground upon which the course has managed to expand its range of innovations and explorations, and yet, since most islands also exist within a certain proximity to other Islands, there has also been a desire to expand on these ambitions with other Islands.

Following this then, several strands of research began to be formulated between 2015 and 2018. Firstly, as suggested, the sustainable nature of the course and its impact

on the local community motivated the team to expand on the model, to create broader links with other island communities, locally and internationally. Within this, the disciplinary contexts informing the course also expanded to connect artistic practices and discourses with emerging debates in island studies. These disciplinary links brought a greater awareness of the changing nature of islands in contemporary life, particularly regarding their geopolitical significance, their relational 'patchwork' character, and importantly, their increasing relevance for thinking about sustainable life in the Anthropocene.¹³ From this perspective, the figure of the archipelago emerged as a theoretical and practical framework for thinking through artistic research and its education.

Event – Archipelago

Archipelagic thinking can be understood as a post-colonial, theoretical discourse that emerged out of island contexts in the late eighties through the work of Caribbean thinkers such as Barbadian poet Kamu Braithwaite and Martinique philosopher Édouard Glissant. Arguing against colonial geographical binaries of 'center' and 'periphery', Glissant emphasised a global relationality that posited 'flow' and 'dialogue' against modernity's 'continental' presumptions of 'origin, unity and security'¹⁴. Through this position he challenged the image of the island as an isolated, inward-looking entity,¹⁵ privileging the interdependent, multi-scalar experience of the archipelago, he writes, '[C]ontinental thought [...] makes us think that we see the world as a bloc, taken wholesale, all-at-once, as a sort of imposing synthesis, just as we can see, through the window of an airplane, the configurations of landscapes or mountainous surfaces. With archipelagic thought, we know the rivers' rocks, without a doubt even the smallest ones'¹⁶.

This unique geological dynamic inspired Glissant to argue for an 'archipelagic imaginary' that was spatialised in the process of 'relating' *between* islands, and where 'the imaginary

of my place is connected (*relié*) to the imaginable reality of the world's places"¹⁷. Importantly then, for Glissant, the concept of relation defined simultaneously, the geographical reality of islands/archipelagos, and the radical potential of those spaces to produce cultural transgression and transition, what he called *creolisation*¹⁸. Understood as deeply political, creolisation is for Glissant an event, a rupture with the status quo, an opening towards the unnameable, the "difference that makes contact and produces the unforeseeable".¹⁹ Reflecting on creolisation²⁰ as an evental phenomena in Glissant's work, Lincoln Z. Shlensky argues for a 'hermeneutics of the event', where "every genuine event, as such, has its history, opens a history, which can later be closed in its turn when the new possibilities given rise to by the event have been 'exhausted', when other events has arisen without relation to this history"²¹. While events may be historical and material, they can also be nuanced and poetic, as evidenced by Glissant's own disciplinary transgressions between academic and artistic borders, where he merged story, poem and philosophy, as stated 'I find it quite pleasant to pass from one atmosphere to another through crossing a border. We need to put an end to the idea of a border that defends and prevents. Borders must be permeable'.²²

Today, art and its education have taken on a similar character, expanding beyond traditional borders, sites of production and reception within the gallery circuit to foster modes of exchange across a diverse range of local and global contexts. Often understood as the 'social turn',²³ these expanded practices have brought artists into contact with non-traditional art communities where social engagement and relational form have become central to the artist's operational toolbox. Within this discourse, Brian Holmes makes a connection between the event and disciplinarity through the concept of *eventwork*²⁴. For, Holmes, *eventwork* takes place when the policing borders of our professional fields are transgressed to such an extent that they can point towards a new collective force. Proposing a 'fourfold matrix' of contributory actions against the hegemony of global

capitalism he argues for the convergence of “art, theory, media, and politics into a mobile force that oversteps the limits of any professional sphere or disciplinary field, while still drawing on their knowledge and technical capacities”.²⁵

In many ways this proposition captures the performative dimension of event-based artistic research in the *What is an Island?* project, which simultaneously composed an enquiry that is instrumental and open, geographically situated and poetically diffuse. Expanding on this, Ian McKenzie and Robert Porter argue that specific forms of artistic research can address the “study of events” in such a way that “reveals their significance without neutralizing it.”²⁶ Similar to the event of *creolisation* in Glissant, they argue that the performative dimension of artistic research, its political nuances, can accumulate, communicate and disseminate research through the sensible-imaginary, rather than the rational alone²⁷. What is at stake in this strategy is the capacity of events to be performed in such a way that does not preclude their closure, which would otherwise eliminate their unique ‘evental’ quality²⁸.

Exploring the archipelago as an image of openness and relational diversity against the archipelago as a closed colonial fact, the *what is an island?* project aimed to develop artistic research events that could enable a similar performative exploration through collective experience. The following outline presents an account of these events as they were configured across three geographic regions and media.

Ship School (2018)

Emerging out of the placed-based BA in Visual Art on Sherkin Island (BAVA), the first iteration of the project focused on an exploration of archipelagic thinking as a direct response to the then fragile Brexit negotiations. Prompted by the question *What is an Island?*, three local artists and artist collectives were commissioned to develop an artwork with island communities, on one of three islands in the West Cork

archipelago: Sherkin Island (Mona O'Driscoll), Long Island (art manoeuvres) and Heir Island (Tess Leak).

The first intervention *Insiders Perspective* explored aspects of the interaction between island dwellers and the visible and non-visible environment that lies beneath the surface of the sea. Through unique drawing techniques, *Insiders Perspective* showed how fishermen used landmarks, visible to the eye, to create routes on the sea's surface and how to triangulate these landmarks to reference fishing grounds in order to harvest fish from beneath the surface. To investigate these interactions, the project explored traditional methods of navigation, echo sounder readings, nautical charts and drawing, all of which were linked in order to create a coherent whole.

Moving from Sherkin Island to Long Island, the second intervention – the collective performance *Immram* – was facilitated by art manoeuvres: Marianne Adams, Sheelagh Broderick, Jennifer Corcoran, Moze Jacobs, Brendan McCormack, Eleanor Murray and Peter Tadd. *Immram* draws on Celtic *immram* – mythological sea voyages whose protagonists search for 'the Otherworld' on islands west of Ireland. The event took the form of a narrated, orchestrated walk across Long Island, moving from the dock pier to the island head. Pausing, sensing, listening and looking, the participants in *Immram* were instructed in ways of knowing beyond traditional forms of epistemological enquiry. Finally, the third intervention took place on Heir Island. Titled "*Our boats are open and we sail them for everyone*", Tess Leak in collaboration with composer Justin Grounds explored ideas of opacity and transparency, stasis and fluidity. Performed on the site of a local restaurant, a diverse collection of musicians took the form of a networked set of islands (archipelago), each defined by a single instrument (guitar, clarinet etc.). Beginning with a loosely defined score, the audience were invited to move through and between the different island-instruments, influencing the performative dynamic and altering the compositional direction of the performance. The written score, designed to be as open and accessible as possible, was

available for the participants to take away and perform again with another group of musicians.

Each artistic event was connected by an eight-hour ferry journey which was in turn supported by a unique pedagogical programme, *The Tidalectic Lecture Series*. Bringing artists, academics, philosophers, diplomats and Islanders together on a single ferry journey, presentations in the series were delivered from the ship's wheelhouse, through the tannoy system, and reflected on the political and poetic potential of archipelagic thinking as a contemporary imaginary. Key presentations in the series included; '*What is a Boat?*' – Pat Tanner; '*Art and the Archipelagic Imaginary*' – Prof. Mick Wilson; '*Continental Thinking: A Report on Brexit*' – Emer Deane, diplomat and director of Ireland's Brexit team in Ireland's embassy to the EU; and a final summation from philosopher Richard Kearney.

Through this process the exploration of archipelagic thinking began to shift in emphasis from a historical, colonial context towards an exploration of the eco-colonial gaze on Islands, in the Anthropocene. A key moment in the research, this shift was inspired by Jonathan Pugh's presentation: '*Island Relation and the Anthropocene*', where he argued that, due the historical figure of the 'resilient islander', islands were once again becoming sites of signification and romanticisation, stating "the Island is once again being romanticized as a figure of global warming, and in particular indigenous Islanders are being celebrated for that resilience. Indigenous Islanders in the Pacific or the Atlantic are resilient and tough people. But the point I want to make about this, is that this suits powerful people"²⁹.

A similar position is taken up by Carol Farbotko in response to a series of flooding events that took place on Tuvalu island in the Pacific Ocean in 2019. Highlighting the symbolic and structural violence resulting from the western ecological gaze on Islands, Farbotko argues that Islands are increasingly being viewed as "canaries in the coal mine", as sites of experimentation with new forms survivalism that fit far too neatly into neoliberal policies of privatization³⁰.

islands imagined as laboratories appropriate the space of an already marginalised population; these are imaginings by cosmopolitans who demand, for various and at times conflicting reasons, that disappearing islands provide tangible manifestations of the statistical abstractions that dominate climate science.³¹

The crisis of the Anthropocene has brought the arts into a renewed correspondence with the social and earth sciences. Within this shift, Elizabeth De Loughrey has drawn particular attention to the role that islands and the visual arts play in representing how “crises are narrated or visualised”.³² Referencing Walter Benjamin, De Loughrey focuses on the emergence of allegory at times of crisis, and its role in providing symbolic order through ‘form, method and thematic’.³³ For De Loughrey, the method of *allegoresis*, is effective in capturing the complexity of the Anthropocene, by staging “the present’s relationship to the past” and telescoping out “from part to whole and back again”.³⁴ Expanding on this proposition, the second iteration of the *What is an Island?* project used the concept of allegory to support ‘constellations’ of exploration between past and present ecological events, in island communities. Taking the elements of sand and sea as *evental narratives* in the Anthropocene, the second iteration journeyed from Island-archipelago to world-archipelago, from the western hemisphere to the southern hemisphere through *The Listening School*.

The Listening School (2019)

The Listening School was a conceptual school set up in July 2019, between the city of Guayaquil, Ecuador, the Jambelí archipelago on the Peruvian border, and San Cristóbal Island in the Galápagos Islands. Developed over a three month period the project initiated a research framework for reciprocal modes of exchange, through mediated listening practices. A key moment within this research occurred when

visiting the Island of Jambeli on the Ecuadorian border. Once a paradisiacal tourist destination for the region, it had in recent years been subject to funding withdrawal for key services and infrastructure, impacting on the destruction of coastal mangrove forests, and leaving the island vulnerable to rising sea levels, flooding after a destructive storm in 2012³⁵. Arriving on the Island in 2019 we were struck by a stark landscape composed of remnants from holiday promotional activity and broken architecture. Peppered throughout the coastlines were a series of locally fabricated flood barriers, made from one tonne sandbags, strapped to coastal fences and palm trees. Speaking to local islanders on the events of 2012, we heard familiar stories about political neglect, indifference and resilience. Through these discussions, the often-positive concept of resilience took on a darker, more insidious character, one of coercion and co-option, where the islanders felt uncomfortable being celebrated for their ingenuity and creativity.

Where the first soundings in *The Listening School* were developed on Jambelí and focused on island forms of listening, the final project, at the *Casa de Cultura* in San Cristóbal focused on methodologies for public dialogue. Initially developed within the framework of the RealSmart Cities research project³⁶, early conversations with islanders and community workers in this process drew out significant tensions in the way environmental and conservation concerns had overshadowed social inequalities and issues related to gender violence. Responding to these discussions, a series of Long Table events were developed within the community centre.

Long Table methodologies were originated by feminist artist Lois Weaver and performed under the heading: Public Address Programme³⁷. Typically combining ‘theatricality and models for public engagement’ the methodology aimed to appropriate domestic forms ‘as an open-ended and non-hierarchical format for participation’³⁸. Offering a unique aesthetic format for democratic participation, the Long Table methodology begins with the placing of a domestic table in the center of a room. On the periphery of the table, around the

walls of the room, participants listen and observe. At no point are individuals or groups invited to contribute, nor are they addressed directly through prompts or provocations. Instead, participants decide to come to the table to speak based on what they have already heard spoken, or what they have *not yet* heard spoken, at the table. A key ambition of this process is to slow down communication through the spatialisation of dialogue, enabling participants to remain open to receiving and transmitting through bodily techniques of communication; the glance, the sigh, the sniff, the shift in the seat.

These research events were disseminated through a sculptural installation in the town of Skibbereen, West Cork. Referencing makeshift flood barriers, the Listening Pods consisted of eleven one tonne sand-bags, each with an audio device buried in the sand, attached to a set of headphones. Placed along the newly established flood-barrier system in Skibbereen the sandbags were organised in an archipelagic formation of twos, threes and ones. The headsets were composed of sonic recordings of tropical wind, rustling palm trees, waves lapping against the shore, seals barking, birds chirping, children playing. The patchwork of environmental soundings was disparate and disconnected except for the abstract flow of static radio waves tuning in and out, searching for frequencies, finding them and losing them. Occasionally the soundings were interrupted by a loud tsunami warning siren on repeat, and by the quieter sounds of human dialogue from the long table methodologies and accompanying academic presentations.

By connecting distant territories, *The Listening School* brought emerging and established, local and international artists together with islanders, philosophers and cultural producers to reflect on contemporary issues around climate change and island living. Whilst the research in the Listening school was focused on the impact of climate change on Islands, it was through these geo-locational, aesthetic events that an emphasis on technology and connectivism began to emerge, influencing the final iteration of the project: The Digital Archipelago.

Digital Archipelago (2020)

One of the key academic supports behind the project in Ecuador was French philosopher Bernard Stiegler, who, throughout his life and work, has argued for our capacity to intervene in the negative effects of technological change through artistic experimentation and exploration³⁹. Speaking at the Guayaquil Archipelago conference in 2020, Steigler conceived of the archipelagic imaginary as a means to overcome the standardising image of the social network, which he argued, tends to reduce the strategic resonance of local realities by favouring generic structures⁴⁰. Such generic structures often undermine the real and genuine expression of differences, which the archipelagic framework highlights by affirming the role of localities (local institutions, local forms of knowledge, local practices, etc.) as agents of transformation. This proposition led Stiegler to develop the 'Archipelago of the Living'⁴¹ project, in 2020, bringing together artists, academics and islanders around an exploration of the archipelago as a site where "the deferral of entropy was possible",⁴²

The Archipelago of the Living intends to develop a network of territorial laboratories of digital contributory research in order to study constraints on living archipelagos with regard to the ecological niches of species that inhabit the same territories.⁴³

Developed in dialogue with the 'Archipelago of the Living' project, the final iteration of *What is an Island?* modelled a digital archipelagic platform on real-world islands in West Cork, using satellite imagery. Through this platform the project aimed to aimed to i) use digital technologies as educational tools to create contributory dialogues across global territories; ii) support masters student engagements within virtual environments; and iii) develop virtual environments that could function as artistic research environments.

Connecting with a consortium of academics and islanders online, a series of dialogues were set up to establish

a framework for thinking through the connective dynamics of a digital archipelago. Prompted by these discussions an immersive archipelago was constructed in the 3d modelling platform Blender⁴⁴ to provide space for students to work and think critically about the digital environment and to cultivate an archipelagic, relational dynamic. At this time all seven students on the MA Art and Environment were in full Covid lockdown in different parts of the country, and on the 7th December 2020 all seven students were sent Oculus Quest headsets with instructions to join a virtual education session in the workplace platform: Spatial⁴⁵ (available in beta at that time). This first session focused on a close reading of Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, from which the students were tasked with developing a virtual installation in response. With very rudimentary skills they were quickly able to visualize a response to the text, that was both spatial and dynamic.

Following this experiment, skills-based classes were set up to support students to develop artworks in virtual reality. Alongside these workshops a series of theoretical lectures on the history of virtual reality and the concept of techno-genesis supported a more critical and philosophical understanding of technology, particularly through the VR experience. Throughout these educational processes students connected with the islands and islanders, developing interviews and archival research. Presentations and installations organised within their virtual studios were surprisingly fluid, analytical and generative. Walking through these immersive studio environments you could experience island sounds and rhythms; wind, birdsong, rustling trees, the sea, motorboats, three-dimensional models proposing floating cinema's, floating forests, plant nightclubs, fog harvesting sculptures, and audio environments that captured the voices and experiences of islanders and island life during the pandemic.

These artistic research experiments culminated in the develop of a large-scale virtual reality conference on the future of the art school with the European League of Institutes of the Arts (ELIA). Connecting universities and art schools across

Europe, the three-day VR event engaged colleagues from five different European universities including; Dublin, Zurich, Amsterdam, Helsinki and Huma University in South Africa. Used as a platform for lectures and workshops on archipelagic thinking, the digital archipelago also presented an opportunity for the students to exhibit their work in a hybrid, immersive exhibition at Uillinn. While such experiences provided much-needed novelty and excitement for the students at a time of extreme isolation and routinisation, they also raised important pedagogical questions around the potential for embodied knowledge experiences within virtual environments and the need to engage further with connections between the biosphere and the techno-sphere. Taking the environmental concept of ‘rewilding’ as a form of ecological restoration, the students had, through their artistic research practices, managed to ‘re-wild’ and ‘re-world’ the virtual, *enhancing* rather than *flattening* its diversity.

World – Environment

Responding to the natural, social and technological challenges in contemporary education, thinkers such as Philippe Meirieu, Aislinn O’ Donnell and Gert Biesta have begun to formulate an argument for a world-centred education that provides space for students to “exist in the world without occupying the centre of the world”⁴⁶. Contrary to constructivist modes of education, in a world-centered education the event exists as the possibility of interruption in the student’s sovereignty, through their dialogue with the world.⁴⁷ Within this, Aislinn O’ Donnell highlights the practical challenges in motivating students towards a world orientation that may not be immediately translatable in a culture that privileges “the all-too-human tendencies toward one-dimensional thinking,”⁴⁸ and arguing for the need to create pedagogical conditions that support students to “understand that our existence depends and inter-depends on other humans, other species, the earth, the atmosphere, and the wider universe”⁴⁹. To begin to think

how such a world-centered education might be instituted into curricular models of organisation is a challenging task, however, it is one that was explored in the development of the MA Art and Environment in West Cork in 2020.

Expanding on the model of the BA Visual Art (BAVA) on Sherkin Island, the MA Art and Environment was implemented across three islands in Roaringwater Bay in West Cork: Sherkin Island, Cape Clear Island and Whiddy Island. Navigating this chain of Islands, the MA Art and Environment aimed to utilise archipelagic thinking to support a world-centered art education in the Anthropocene. These aims were developed around three educational ambitions: i) To develop a pedagogical ethos that supports research engagements between island communities and academic communities, ii) To develop an appropriate intellectual framework for navigating environmental change on islands ii), To establish a level 9 educational provision for the study of environmental arts across island communities, locally and internationally.

The world-centred ethos in the MA Art and Environment was inspired by Biesta's key work in this area⁵⁰, and more specifically his early work on the three fundamental dimensions of education: qualification, socialisation and subjectification⁵¹. Where the dimension of qualification in education emphasises the skills-based nature of education and its connection to market values, the social dimension aims to cultivate a sense of citizenry and community⁵². In the acquisition of qualification students access professional skills and attributes to develop a sustainable career in the visual arts, however, developing these skills within an island community prompts a reciprocal demand, which in turn highlights the need for social engagement in the course. Within this context the world-centred ethos supports models of contributory research, premised on collaboration, creativity and intervention to systematically re-value the acquisition of knowledge through socially engaged art, developing new relational intersections between arts practice, arts institutions, and island localities. Whilst *socialisation* is an important aspect of student engagement in the world-centred ethos, it is equally

important that students are supported in their subjective capacity to develop critical thinking, and to speak back to the community and the world through the artistic practices they develop. Understood by Biesta as the *evental* quality in education, this subjective dimension is central to the arts, and to the existential experience of “becoming, growing and forming oneself in the world”⁵³.

Beyond the contemporary hegemony of qualification in educational discourse, the world-centred approach supports students in their capacity for social engagement and subjective action in the world. As such, it provides an appropriate model of educational subjectivity in the Anthropocene, one which simultaneously recognizes the world and the environment as agents in the formation of educational subjects. To support this ethos more practically, the MA Art and Environment curriculum was designed around three dominant modes of governance in the Anthropocene, outlined by David Chandler as *Mapping, Sensing, Hacking*.⁵⁴ Similar to William Pinar’s disciplinary conception of curriculum, this architecture forms both vertical and horizontal engagements with learning environments⁵⁵. In Pinar’s model the vertical conception of knowledge concerns the intellectual histories and contexts of a particular enquiry (Mapping), whereas horizontal explorations are informed by circumstantial and experiential learning (Sensing). Finally, the diagonal lines drawn between the intellectual and circumstantial constitute the student’s subjective interpretation and negotiation of this structure (Hacking).

Following this, the first module on the course *Mapping*, introduces students to the key historical themes, debates and conceptual frameworks that have emerged in the environmental arts over the past fifty years. These histories explore aesthetic, social and political intersections between multiple disciplines and practices focused on the Anthropocene: biological and earth sciences, anthropology, visual art, design and political activism. Alongside these thematic students are introduced to mapping as a ‘diagrammatic method’ through which to explore the

interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary character of the environmental arts. While students are taught to 'cognitively map' areas of contemporary environmental art practice and discourse, mapping as an artistic research methodology enables students to build artistic frameworks for participatory fieldwork in the second semester *Sensing*.

Opening up new spaces for dialogical exchange and providing a mechanism for the archipelago to be viewed as both a specific, and a generalisable framework for sensing the environment, this semester emphasizes a world-centred approach through eco socially-engaged, arts practices that connects with human and non-human actors in the environment. The incorporation of socially engaged art methods in the second semester aims to mitigate against the illustration and objectification of island culture through co-production and creative methods. With long distance learning central to the archipelagic reach of the course, virtual learning and in particular virtual environments are also a key aspect of study in the second semester. Finally, the third module *Hacking* encourages novel forms of creative disruption and critical intervention into any system, be it technological, social, economic or environmental. Through this process students are supported to develop large-scale interventions and events in environmental contexts. These interventions are further presented through an archipelagic exhibition across multiple island sites with multiple communities and actors.

Moving beyond linear models of curriculum development and student-centred learning, the patchwork pedagogies developed in the MA Art and Environment, across the West Cork Archipelago, point towards an art education for the Anthropocene. One that is simultaneously about going out into the world, and cultivating 'nissological knowledge'⁵⁶ through creative dialogue, but one that is also about inviting the world into the educational scene, the curriculum and the virtual classroom.

Conclusion

The BA in Visual Art on Sherkin Island is a long-standing model of sustainable arts education and intervention that has impacted significantly on the economic development and artistic ecologies of an Island community. Since most islands also exist within a certain proximity to other Islands there has been a need to expand on this model *within* and *alongside* other Islands. To begin this process an artistic research framework was set up under the question *What is an island?* Aiming to connect the BA in Visual Art course with other islands in the region and beyond this process utilized the concept of archipelagic thinking as a heuristic device for exploring a world-centred art education in the Anthropocene.

While such Initiatives usually start from social and economically concerned research, they are rarely led by artistic research processes. Within this, the *What is an Island?* project initiated an 'evental' mode of artistic research across multiple regions, through transdisciplinary approaches, to open up new spaces for studying art and environment in island contexts. Each iteration explored a set of thematics relevant to place-based art education with the first project focused on *mapping* as an artistic form and drawing out the relationship between art and archipelagic thinking across Roaringwater Bay, in West Cork. The second iteration explored the contemporary shift towards environmental politics on islands in the Anthropocene and focused on *sensing* the island through mediated listening practices with islands in the Global South. Finally, the third iteration of the project experimented with immersive education for distance learning by *hacking* and repurposing virtual reality platforms into a digital archipelago for environmental education.

While these events were mapped out across three distinct spatial contexts in the *What is an Island?* project, their collective impact was to motivate the development of an archipelagic master's programme in Art and Environment in the West Cork region. Delivered across multiple islands in the

archipelago, the MA Art and Environment developed a world-centred approach to environmental education through three key concepts: *Mapping, Sensing, and Hacking*. Together these modules form the basis of a praxis-oriented engagement with the West Cork archipelago, and in February 2022, after seventeen months of study, through the depths of the Covid Pandemic, the first group of students opened their graduate exhibition; *Idir Sholas* (between light) at Uillinn: West Cork Arts Centre.

Glenn Loughran is an artist, and educator at the Dublin School of Art and Design, TU Dublin. From 2015 to 2022, he was programme chair of the BA in Visual Art on Sherkin Island and, in 2020, he set up the archipelagic MA Art and Environment in collaboration with Uillinn: West Cork Arts Centre. Loughran works across the fields of artistic research and educational research and initiated the *What is an Island?* project, with Ann Davoran (Uillinn) and Ailbhe Murphy (Create) in 2018.

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Notes

- 1 The Anthropocene describes a new geological epoch where human activity has had a significant impact on the planet's climate and ecosystems. It was popularised in the late eighties by ecologist Eugene F. Stoermer and popularised in the 2000s by atmospheric chemist Paul J. Crutzen.
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O'Donnell. A. *Sharing the world without losing oneself: education in a plurlistic universe*, (Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education 2022)

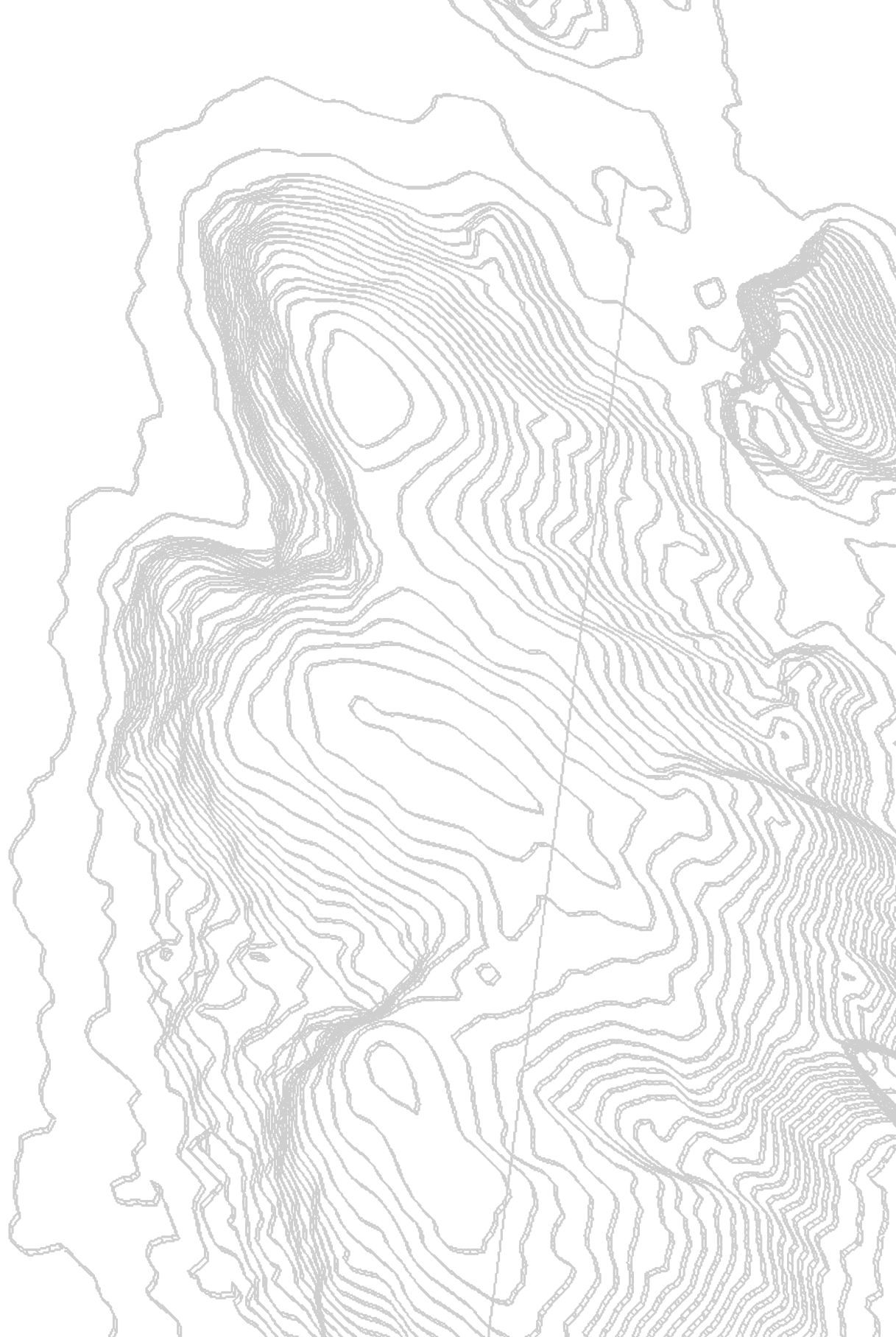
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Epilogue

The *What is an island?* project brought together three distinctive arts institutions around an inquiry into the role of islands and island thinking in collaborative arts and education. Each of these institutions were represented by an individual contributor: Glenn Loughran (TU Dublin), Ann Davoren (Uillinn), and Ailbhe Muphy (Create). Over the course of this journey together we reflected on the differences and similarities between island communities and urban contexts, on the need to move beyond centre-periphery dichotomies, and on the need to develop new concepts, new frameworks and new modes of exchange for collaborative arts and education at a time of dramatic social, environmental and technological change. Through the lens of archipelagic thinking we constructed a patchwork pedagogy across multiple island territories and communities, engaging a diverse range of human and more-than-human actors, through the use of a variety of relational tools: the ship, the sandbag, the radio, the VR headset. If the tools helped us to mediate the relations between places and spaces, it was the individual contributors that added complexity and intensity to these exchanges. Artists, educators, philosophers, mariners, fishermen, environmentalists, activists, islands, animals and oceans all influenced the direction of travel our discussions would take. As the unfolding research moved from the informal to the formal, from artistic research events to an archipelagic master's degree, we slowly began to collate the different elements of the project. That was just over three years ago. Since then we have faced individual obstacles and tragedies, trauma and loss. The sea has been rough and we have been adrift for sure, but this publication stands as a testament to the strength of the bonds formed around this project. Its energy, ambition and intellectual spirit are a reflection of all those that contributed to its development, but none more so than Dr. Ailbhe Murphy.

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