ARCHIPEDAGOGY – Un-islanding Artistic Research and Its Education

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Artistic research is a fluid form of embedded research that enables interdisciplinary engagements between artistic practices and academic discourse. It can incorporate unpredictable entry points and unforeseen consequences that are continually (re)creating, (re)articulating and (re)imagining new forms of engagement in the public realm. Each time artists engage with artistic research, they bring something new to the practice and discourse, some new concept that usually emerges from their ongoing attempts to navigate practice and theory. This paper explores how the concept of archipelago and archipelagic thinking were used as a theoretical method to support event-based, artistic research strategies. Notably, these archipelagic frameworks emerged from placed-based education in island contexts and were further translated into archipelagic pedagogies of care and attention towards the world.

Archipelagic thinking can be understood as a multifaceted postcolonial framework for thinking about difference, diversity, and relation beyond generic concepts of network and globality.[1] In 2011, reflecting on archipelagic thinking as a disciplinary method, a group of prominent island studies scholars called for researchers to expand on "the ways of being, knowing and doing—ontologies, epistemologies and methods—that illuminate island spaces as interrelated, mutually constituted and co-constructed".[2] A similar statement could be made about artistic research today, where the ecologies of practice that define artistic research are rarely brought into dialogue in a significant format outside of the art-science career path complex. Within this context, there is a need

to further illuminate artistic research "ontologies, epistemologies and methods" as "inter-related, mutually constituted and co-constructed."[3] Archipelagic thinking provides such a transdisciplinary framework, supporting practices that transgress disciplinary boundaries and borders through techniques of "un-islanding."[4]. To "un-island" artistic research is to point artistic research away from disciplinary silos towards co-production, relation, and openness. In 2018, un-islanding was developed as an artistic research strategy to explore the "inter-related, mutually constituted and co-constructed" fields of art education and island studies, through the *What is an Island?* project[5].

The *What is an Island?* project was initiated within the geographic context of West Cork, the political context of Brexit and the environmental context of the Anthropocene.[6] 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. Connecting these educational points the project opened up an inquiry into the significance of place-based art education operating at the edges of the university, an art education that links the island, archipelago and world. The form of this enquiry was multi-modal, combining live events, performative lectures, and community dialogue within island communities. These events reflected on: i) *the methodological potential of archipelagic thinking for art education in the Anthropocene*, ii) *the development of event-based, artistic research processes*, and iii) *the impact of visual arts education on isolated island communities*.

To fully capture these lines of flight, the following overview is organised around three key structural 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, highlighting the broad impact of art education on island communities. Through the *evental* dimension of the research, we explore how historical, political and artistic events can motivate and inspire imaginative action and reflection. Finally, reflecting on the *World* dimension of the project, this paper concludes with

an outline of an archipelagic art education designed to support a world orientation. By transferring the theoretical framework of archipelagic thinking onto the methodological ground of artistic research this paper reflects on each iteration of the project, as it unfolded across three distinct archipelagic environments: West Cork Archipelago (2018), Galapagos Islands (2019) and Virtual Archipelago (2020).

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 inhabitants[7]. Historically, the island is connected to the Carbery and O'Driscoll clans, and is divided into six townlands; *Slievemore, Nine Greeves, Kilmona, Horseshoe Harbour, Cloddagh,* and *Farancoush*.[8] In the late nineteen seventies and early eighties the accessible location and natural beauty of the Island began to attract landscape painters, photographers and writers.[9] Within this burgeoning art community, local artists Majella Collins O'Neill and Dublin-based artist Ber Burns set up a popular summer school, which eventually grew into the BA in Visual Art. Initiated in 2001, the BA in Visual Art was developed in response to education policy directives set out in the White Paper on Adult Education Learning for Life (2000).[10] As outlined in the paper, the course aimed to address three key areas that remained underdeveloped at the time: 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.[11]

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). In 2004, the BA Visual Art was formally validated as an off-campus, level 8 honours degree programme, offering up to 20 stu-

dents per year access to art education on a remote island off the west coast of Cork. Built around six intense contact weekends per semester, the BA in Visual Art was delivered on the Island, in the community centre, every two weeks over four years. Structured weekends were further supported by online lectures and tutorials, providing adult learners with flexible supports and expanded content. Emphasizing the local context, the curriculum was grounded in the study of rural environments, landscape painting, and community engagement. Supporting adult learners to continue their education whilst working or attending to family responsibilities, the course strongly emphasized research-led practice and peer-to-peer learning.

Key to the early implementation and successful validation of the BA in Visual Art programme was the installation of an ISDN line on the Island in 2001. From an institutional perspective, the ISDN line was instrumental in the formal validation process of the program since it connected a diverse array of live lectures in an urban university to a student body on a remote island. Following this, the programme explored methodological innovations with educational technologies and supported artistic enquiries on the role of technology and connectivity in an island community. The combination of education and technology is often central to pioneering models of adult or distance education that prioritize access over social reproduction, such as the Open University (OU) (1969–2022). Originally called 'the University of the Air.'[12], the Open University utilized technological infrastructure to support democratic principles of access and inclusion. Led by Prime Minister Harold Wilson and Scottish socialist Jennie Lee, then Minister for Education, the OU initiated telephone and radio tutorials, televised lectures, and postal delivery curricula.[13] Following such models, the idea of the expanded academy gained increasing traction within educational discourse and practice. Due to the development of digital technologies, networked communications, and the COVID-19 pandemic the past ten years have seen a significant acceleration of such applications on the course.

In addition, the BA in Visual Art has had a critical economic impact on the community and the region, ensuring that local facilitators and administrators are employed annually the course significantly con-

tributed to an increase in people using the ferry from September to May. Accommodation (Hotels, hostels, and houses) and catering establishments on the Island also benefitted from the students throughout the winter months, and educational field trips bringing Dublin-based students to the Island at non-peak times also brought associated economic benefits to the region. The impact of these rich cultural experiences across the wider West Cork region has helped promote Sherkin Island as a contemporary art community, which has, in turn, helped inform the strategy of "The Island of the Arts" (2015–18). As such, the course contributed to the economic and cultural vibrancy of the island, proposing an alternative vision of island communities as models of sustainable tourism rather than 'hide-away' retreats for urban dwellers.

The economic benefits of these kinds of projects for rural environments have been the focus of numerous studies, including the *Europe 2020 Flagship Initiative Innovation Union*[14] driver for economic and social development, innovation, and social cohesion. However, whilst the impact of the BA in Visual Art on Sherkin Island was significant, several unrealized opportunities began to be formulated between 2015 and 2018. Firstly, the sustainable nature of the course and its impact on the local community highlighted the need to expand on the model so that it could create broader links with other island communities, locally and internationally. Within this, there were opportunities to expand on the disciplinary contexts informing the course, connecting artistic practices and discourses with emerging debates within island studies. These disciplinary links brought a greater awareness of the changing nature of islands in contemporary life, particularly with regard to their geopolitical significance, their relational 'patchwork' character, and importantly, their increasing relevance for thinking about sustainable life in the Anthropocene[15]. From this perspective, the figure of the archipelago emerged as a theoretical and practical framework for thinking through artistic research and its education in the Anthropocene.

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 French Caribbean thinkers such as Martinique poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant (1928–2011). Arguing against traditional colonial representations of "centre" and "periphery", Glissant challenged the image of the Island as an isolated, inward-looking entity left behind by modernity.[16] An antidote to modernity's "continental" presumptions of "origin, unity and security", Glissant privileged the interdependent, rootless subjectivity of the archipelago, its multi-scalar processes and relational ontology. 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."[17]

This unique geological dynamic inspired Glissant to argue for an "archipelagic imaginary" that was spatialized 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."[18] To think the world as an archipelago, is to think difference beyond political and geophysical borders, as a fluid historical relation between land and sea and sky. In this oppositional understanding of globalization archipelagic thinking proposes a form of counter-mapping which emphasizes dispersal, flow and relation against stasis, control and division. Importantly for Glissant, the concept of relation was defined simultaneously by the geographical reality of islands/archipelagos and the radical potential of those spaces to produce cultural transgression and transition, what he called *creolisation*[19]. Understood as deeply political, creolization is not to be confused with other post-modern brands of cultural mixing; it was rather, for Glissant, an "event", a rupture, an opening "the difference that makes contact and produces the unforeseeable".[20] Following this, Glissant experimented with, and advocated for disciplinary transgressions between academic and artistic borders, merging story, poem and phi-

losophy, claiming, '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'.[21]

Today, art and its education have taken on a similar character, expanding beyond traditional borders, including 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",[22] these expanded practices have brought artists into contact with non-traditional art communities where social engagement and relational forms have become central to the artist's operational toolbox. Further broadening this toolbox, Brian Holmes proposed the concept of *eventwork* to support the transgression of disciplinary fields, pointing towards a 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".[23] For Holmes, such transgressions often require an institutional sidestepping or externalization, as characterised by the disciplinary experimentations of Argentinian collective *Tucumán Arde*, he states;

> So, what was achieved by the move to these zones external to art? At a time when institutional channels were blocked and the modernizing process had become a dictatorial nightmare, the project was able to orchestrate the efforts of a broad division of cultural labor, capable of analyzing complex social phenomena. It then disseminated the results of this labour through the expressive practices of an event in order to produce awareness and contribute to active resistance. What resulted was a change in the finality, or indeed the use-value, of cultural production […] Or as the *Robho* dossier put it, "The extra imagination found in *Tucumán Arde*, if compared for example to the usual agitation campaign, comes expressly from a practice of, and a preliminary reflection on, the notions of event, participation, and proliferation of the aesthetic experience." That's a perfect definition of eventwork.[24]

In many ways, this proposition captures the performative dimension of un-islanding in artistic research, which, through "aesthetic work",

can simultaneously compose an enquiry that is instrumental and open, geographically situated and poetically diffuse.If un-islanding can be understood as materiality and metaphor, action and ambiguity,[25] then artistic research, as a disciplinary form perceived through the lens of archipelagic thinking, should also support a form of disciplinary "counter-mapping" that emphasizes evental procesess over scientific ones. Reflecting on the tensions inherent to this proposition, Prof. Barbara Bolt has emphasized the concept of "method as emergence"[26] in artistic research as an alternative to the "methodological guaranteeism",[27] characteristic of the sciences. For Bolt, artistic research methods openly unfold through the relationship between performance, practice, and theory. Similarly, Mackenzie and 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'.[28] What is at stake in this strategy is the capacity of events to be understood and studied in such a way that does not preclude their closure, which would otherwise eliminate their unique 'evental' quality[29]. Following this, the next section presents a short account of three artistic research strategies that aimed to extend the Island based education on the BA in Visual art towards an archipelagic Masters programme in Art and Environment. As a part of the *What is an Island?* project they aimed to un-island artistic research through *event-based, artistic research* methods.

West Cork / The Ship School (2018)

The first iteration of the project aimed to connect with island communities around *their* perception of Islands and island life. In response, 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, Long Island (art manoeuvres) and Heir Island (Tess Leak). The first event, initiated by artist Mona O'Driscoll was titled: *Insiders Perspective* and aimed to explore aspects of the interaction between island dwellers and the visible and non-visible environment beneath the sea's surface. Through unique drawing techniques, *Insiders Perspective* showed how fishermen used landmarks, visible to the eye, to cre-

ate routes on the sea's surface and how to triangulate these landmarks to reference fishing grounds to harvest fish from beneath the surface. To investigate these interactions, the project explored traditional navigation methods, echo sounder readings, nautical charts, and drawings, all of which are linked to create a coherent whole. Moving from Sherkin Island to Long Island, the second event – 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 was 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.

Fig. 1: Prof. Mick Wilson. What is an Island 1. 2018. Image: Daniel Harper

Courtesy of Glenn Loughran

The third and final event 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, 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 was 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, was supported by a unique pedagogical programme, *The Tidalectic Lecture Series.* Bringing artists, academics, philosophers, diplomats, and Islanders together on a single ferry journey, the series delivered presentations 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. A critical shift in perspective towards the Anthropocene was inspired by Jonathan Pugh's presentation, *'Island Relation and the Anthropocene'*[30], which in turn, significantly influenced the second iteration of the *What is an Island?* Project developed in the global south.

The idea of the Anthropocene derives from the work of Nobel prizewinning chemist Paul Crutzen, who argued that we have left the Holocene and have entered a new geological epoch. Because of the environmental effects of industrialization, population growth and economic development, this is the first epoch to be anthropogenic – that is, to be man-made.[31] This crisis has brought the arts into renewed correspondence with the social and earth sciences. Within this shift, island studies scholar Elizabeth DeLoughrey has drawn particular attention to the role that the visual arts play in representing how "crises are narrated or visualised."[32] Referencing Walter Benjamin, De Loughrey focuses on the use of allegory, how it emerges at times of crisis and that its role

within this context is to provide symbolic order through "form, method and thematic".[33] Similarly, Bruce Clarke has stated that allegory "typically models a concept of world-space through an articulation of nested structures, universal systems with a montage of ontological levels."[34] Understood as *allegorises,* these methods capture the complexity of the Anthropocene by staging "the present's relationship to the past" and telescoping out "from part to whole and back again".[35] Expanding on this proposition, the second iteration developed the concept of allegory to support "constellations" of analysis with island communities. Taking the elements of sand and sea as binding 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*.

Galapagos Islands / The Listening School (2018)

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 Cristobal Island in the Galapagos Islands. Developed over three months, the project initiated a research agenda for reciprocal modes of exchange across island localities, through mediated listening practices. A pivotal moment within this process occurred when visiting the Island of *Jambelí* 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. Alongside this, the destruction of coastal mangrove forests, which act as natural flood barriers, left the Island vulnerable to rising sea levels and a catastrophic storm which impacted the Island severely in 2012.[36]

Speaking to local islanders about 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. A common experience in island communities and a common theme emerging in island studies in the Anthropocene,

a similar position was expressed by Carol Farbotko about a series of flooding events that took place in Tuvalu island in the Pacific Ocean in 2019. Highlighting the symbolic and structural violence resulting from the Western ecological gaze on Islands, Farbotko argued that Islands are increasingly being viewed as "canaries in the coal mine", sites of experimentation with new forms of survivalism that fit far too neatly into neoliberal policies of privatization[37].

> 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[38].

Following these experiences, the Listening School was set up to engage islanders on these issues through three conceptualizations of sound: *1. Sounding the Island: Dialogical workshops with islands (Sherkin/Galapagos) using horizontal public-address techniques. 2. Sounding the Archipelago: Workshops to facilitate field recordings of the island environments. 3. Sounding the Anthropocene: Public Interrogation of the perception of the islands in the Anthropocene.* Where the first sounding methods focused on recording environmental, island forms of listening, the final project, at the *Casa de Cultura* in San Cristóbal in the Galapagos islands, developed methodologies for public dialogue. Reflecting on these discussions, a series of Long Table events were developed. In the Long Table Methodology a table is placed in the centre of the room. On the periphery of the table, around the room's walls, participants listen and observe. At no point are individuals or groups invited to contribute, nor are they addressed directly through prompts or provocations. Participants decide to come to the table to speak based on what they have heard spoken or what they have not heard spoken at the table. Through this "spatial slowing down", participants remain open to receiving and transmitting through bodily techniques of communication: the glance, the sigh, the sniff, and the shift in the seat.

Fig. 2: What is an Island 2. The Listening School (2019). Image: Tomasz Madajczak

Courtesy of Glenn Loughran

Initiated by feminist artist Lois Weaver the Long Table methodology offers a unique aesthetic formulation of democratic participation, and where "models of public engagement function through the appropriation of domestic forms as an open-ended and non-hierarchical format."[39] Early conversations with islanders and community workers in

this process drew out significant tensions with the way environmental and conservation concerns had overshadowed gender inequalities and issues related to gender violence, followed by reflections on modernity, decolonization, rising sea levels and the role of technology on islands. These conversations were streamed live through a series of public sculptures installed in the town of Skibbereen. Consisting of eight one-tonne sandbags, a series of *Listening Pods*, each with an audio device buried in the sand, translated the discussions alongside environmental soundings from the different archipelagic regions. Through these geo-locational, aesthetic events, a unique focus on connectivism and digital education began to emerge, influencing the final iteration of the project: The Digital Archipelago (2022).

Digital Archipelago / Virtual Pedagogy (2022)

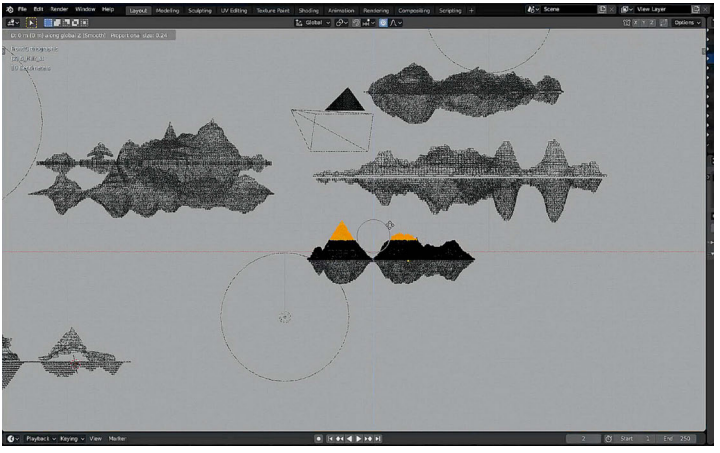
One of the key academic supports behind the second iteration of the project in Ecuador was that of French philosopher Bernard Stiegler, who, throughout his life and work, argued for our capacity to intervene in the negative effects of technological change through artistic experimentation and exploration[40]. In public discussions on his work in Guayaquil, Stiegler formulated a concept of the archipelagic imaginary as a means to overcome the standardizing image of the social network, which, he argued, tends to "reduce the strategic resonance of local realities by favouring generic structures"[41]. Such generic structures often undermine the real and genuine expression of differences, and for Stiegler the archipelagic framework has the capacity to highlight the role of localities (local institutions, local forms of knowledge, local practices, etc.) as agents of transformation. At the centre of this proposition was the concept of contributory research, which aims to rethink the relationship between the universal and the particular, how knowledge can be transmitted between localities. Following these discussions, Steigler formed a consortium of academics and islanders around the proposal for an *Archipelago of the Living* which "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".[42] Supported by the *Archipelago of the Living* consortium, the final iteration of the *What is an Island?* Project developed a digital platform for based on real-world islands using satellite imagery. The stated aim of the platform at the time was to *i) use digital technologies as an educational tool to create contributory dialogues across global territories; ii) support masters student engagement with 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 on Zoom to establish a framework for thinking through the connective potential of a digital archipelago. Following these discussions, a 3D archipelago was constructed in Blender[43] to provide space for academic, islanders and students to work and think critically about the digital environment through an archipelagic dynamic.

On the 7th of December 2020, seven students in the MA Art and Environment were in full lockdown in different parts of the country; most were living on the West Coast, with two students living directly on the islands of Sherkin and Cape Clear. At this time, all seven students were sent Oculus Rift headsets with instructions to join a virtual space in the workplace platform: Spatial[44] (available in beta at that time). The first session in the programme focused on a close reading of 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 reaction to the text that was both spatial and dynamic. Following this experiment, skills-based classes were set up to support students in developing artworks in virtual reality. Alongside these workshops, a series of theoretical lectures on the concept of techno-genesis supported a more critical and philosophical understanding of technology, particularly through the VR experience. Throughout this educational process, students connected with islanders and the islands in the archipelago, developing interviews and conducting environmental/archival research. Across these activities students would organise virtual representations of their research to be presented to their peers in virtual studio spaces. These dialogical "crit" experiences were surprisingly fluid, analytical, and generative. Walk-

ing through virtual installations, you could experience island sounds and rhythms, wind, birdsong, rustling trees, the sea, and motorboats; group discussions would reflect critically on three-dimensional models that proposed floating cinemas, floating forests, plant nightclubs, fog harvesting sculptures; and audio environments captured the voices and experiences of islanders and island life during the pandemic. While these experiences provided much-needed novelty and excitement for the students during extreme routinization and limitation, they also raised important pedagogical questions about the potential for embodied knowledge experiences within virtual environments and the need to engage further with the connections between the bio-sphere and the techno-sphere. Taking the environmental concept of "rewilding" as a form of ecological restoration, the students aimed to "re-wild" and "re-world" the virtual, *enhancing* rather than *flattening* its "diversity".

Fig.3. What is an Island 3. Virtual Archipelago (2020). Image: Dan Guiney



Courtesy of Glenn Loughran

As outlined previously, in archipelagic thinking, *relation* can be understood as the formation of *relationships* between islands and entities[45]. The emphasis on connection broadens our understanding of the Island beyond its representation as radically isolated and outside of modernity; however, more politically, *relation*, as defined by Glissant, can also be understood as the spaces and places of difference and hybridization where such connections are made, unmade, remade[46]. The traditional technology for *relating* between islands has been the ship, the ferry, and the boat. Historically, it is the ship that connects islands and continents, and within the context of the BA Visual Art, the ferry provides the relational dimension, in that it offers students the capacity to move between islands, work with island communities and study islands in the plural. However, due mainly to the extreme social isolation experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, when it was no longer possible for students to move beyond a three-mile radius, Virtual Reality emerged as a relational supplement to the ferry. Although not without complications and tensions, the virtual environment far surpassed the computer screen as an appropriate space to develop embodied pedagogies around the exploration of environmental art, and while there were many technical questions around curriculum development, learning outcomes and assessment, one of the key issues emerging concerns the over-emphasis in VR education on technicity and training. To some extent this is because the questions being asked of VR education were still primarily economic, and it was clear that there was a greater need to explore the potential for VR to support non-instrumental forms of education based on critical dialogue, experience, and imaginative action.

Reflecting on this issue more broadly with the context of today's educational scene, Prof. Gert Biesta has called for a renewed focus on educational questions over economic or technical ones. For Biesta, educational questions are concerned with our capacity to live well with others in a world of depleting resources, because "Educational questions are fundamentally existential questions about how we try to exist as human beings, how we try to live our life well *in* and *with* a world that is not of our making"[47]. Reflecting on this need, Biesta has argued for a world-centred education based upon the interconnection between three

key dimensions: *qualification, socialization, and subjectification*[48]. To begin to think about how such an ethos 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.

World – Environment

Expanding on the BA Visual Art (BAVA) model 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 utilize archipelagic thinking as a heuristic philosophy to support a world-centred art education in the Anthropocene. To support these ambitions, a curriculum framework was designed around three dominant modes of governance in the Anthropocene, outlined by David Chandler as *Mapping, Sensing, and Hacking*.[49] On the one hand, Chandler identifies each mode as providing a "distinct conceptualisation of governance in a world framed as complex, entangled and unpredictable."[50] And on the other, each can be mobilized to problematize ontological claims that "affirm" the Anthropocene. Where Mapping gathers historical and "empirical knowledge", Sensing engages with contemporary "creative assemblages" outside of empirical data, "emphasizing an intuitive, experiential response to the complexity of the environment".[51] Finally, Hacking encourages imaginative action and "new creative ways of engaging on the basis of repurposing, recompositing and finding the play in already existing arrangements and practices".[52]

As Elizabeth DeLoughrey has suggested, to understand the future of island culture in the Anthropocene, we must first understand the historical relation between continents and islands, "a shifting history between colonial power, economic expansion and environmental change."[53]. Engaging with the concept of Archipelagraphy across multiple geographical sites, the first module, *Mapping…the environment*, introduces students to the key historical themes, debates and conceptual frame-

works 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 analyses, students are introduced to Mapping as a "diagrammatic methodology", aiding further fieldwork on human and natural ecologies throughout the West Cork archipelago. These artistic methodologies introduce students to the interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary character of the environmental arts and provide artistic frameworks for critical mapping of crucial themes, concepts, and questions.

While students must '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…the Environment*. Such fieldwork is essential to an eco-social art practice that engages with human and non-human actors in the environment. Within this context, the programme supports models of contributory research premised on collaboration, creativity, and intervention to systematically re-value knowledge acquisition through research activities outside of centre/periphery binary definitions of research. The incorporation of artistic methods into research is not meant to merely illustrate island culture but participates in the co-production of knowledge with multiple island communities through creative methodologies, opening up new spaces for dialogical exchange and providing a mechanism for the archipelago to be used as both a specific and a generalizable geo-historical framework for mapping local communities and environmental habitats on Islands.

Together, these modules form the basis of a praxis-oriented engagement with the environmental humanities on Sherkin Island and the West Cork Archipelago. Where students accumulate empirical knowledge in module 1 through cognitive mapping and aesthetic knowledge in module 2 through experiential, participatory fieldwork, in the third module, they are required to deliver a final project that "hacks" the local environment. Taking a transdisciplinary approach, the third module, *Hacking…the environment*, 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 in developing large-scale interventions and events in an environmental context. These interventions are further presented through an archipelagic exhibition across multiple island sites with multiple communities and actors. Finally, to evaluate the efficacy of these interventions, students will utilize bespoke theoretical frameworks developed through the course and with critical stakeholders in the environmental context.

Where the dimension of qualification in education emphasizes the skills-based nature of education and its connection to market values, the social dimension aims to cultivate a sense of citizenry and community as an essential characteristic.[54] In acquiring qualification, students gain professional skills and attributes that help them develop a sustainable career in the visual arts. Qualification, in this sense, is gained through an interdisciplinary framework that enables students to develop intellectual skills, methodological skills, and artistic skills. Through this process, the students develop artistic research *in* and *with* island communities. As a result of this dynamic, there is often a reciprocal demand in the course, which informs its ethos of social engagement. Through socially engaged art modules, students develop new relational intersections between the arts, institutions, and localities. Finally, whilst socialization is an important aspect of student engagement, it is equally important that students are supported in their subjective capacity to develop critical thinking and speak back to the community and the world through the artistic practices they develop on the Island. Understood as the *subjective* quality in education, this dimension is central to the arts and the existential experience of becoming, growing, and forming oneself in the world.[55] Beyond the contemporary hegemony of qualification in educational discourse, this curricular approach supports students in their capacity for social engagement and subjective action in the world; and, as such provides an appropriate model of educational subjectivity for the Anthropocene, one which simultaneously introduces the world and the environment as an active agent in the formation of educational subjects.

CONCLUSION

Due to their heightened sense of precarity and vulnerability, islands and archipelagos are often seen as micro-representations of global ecological instability and possibility. From this perspective, they are central to any political, pedagogical or artistic engagement with climate change today. By transposing the theoretical framework of archipelagic thinking onto the methodological ground of artistic events, the *What is an island?* Project aimed to connect the essential characteristic of archipelagic thinking to artistic research through an emphasis on openness and worldliness. Central to this process, the B.A in Visual Art on Sherkin Island was presented as a long-standing model of sustainable arts education that has positively impacted educational, economic cultural developments on an island community. However, it is important to acknowledge within this context, islanders often treat such "interventions" with caution and suspicion. Navigating these tensions, the *What is an Island?* Project instituted a series of artistic research events aiming to expand on the model of the BA in Visual Art through dialogue and critical reflection with island communities. Through this process, the concept of the archipelago and archipelagic thinking emerged as a heuristic device for exploring the significance of islands, in the Anthropocene, in an *evental way*.

In the Anthropocene, art and its education have taken on a similar "evental" character, where artists and educators must now think across spatial and temporal scales, from a planetary 'shared sense of catastrophe' to more local historical and cultural contingencies.[56] These local/planetary contingencies were mapped out across the three geographical and spatial iterations in the *What is an Island?* Project. First through West Cork island event with its emphasis on relation and locality (2018), to the second iteration with its emphasis on climate change and globality (2019), ending with the final iteration's focus on networks and digital pedagogy (2020). While each event navigated different research thematics with expanded island communities, each was also percieved iteratively as steps towards a more structred and sustainable intervention through the development of an archipelagic Masters programme

on Art and Environment in the West Cork archipelago. Following this, the *What is an Island?* Project was instrumental in determining the educational focus on archipelgic thinking, digital studies and a world centered education in the Masters curriculum. By further addressing the lack of structural access to the Masters provision in the arts locally, the *What is an Island?* Project implemented a platform for knowledge-sharing across multiple island contexts, exploring socially engaged arts methodologies for navigating local and virtual environments. While such Initiatives usually start from social, economic, and culturally motivated research, they are rarely led by artistic research processes. At stake within this enquiry is the proposal that performative modes of exchange can support multiple registers across diverse communities.

Notes

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