

Narrativas Mínimas: O tecido do espaço público
Minimal Narratives: The fabric of public space

Erasmus Placement Project-Based Report presented to Faculty of Fine Arts of the
University of Porto in Art and Design for the Public Space.

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Porto, Portugal

2022

Abstract

This research is concerned with everyday life in the context of public space, looking at Portobello Square, a public plaza located in Dublin, Ireland. My motivation was to explore this site, wondering about the narratives constantly being written through experiences, spatial and social interactions and evolved from the concept of space from humanist geography, philosophy, and literature.

The objective was to look at my surroundings as I became familiar with their structures, dynamics, context, constraints, and possibilities, then explore them through visual thinking strategies such as illustrations, photography, and storytelling. In response to that, I created a book that unfolds the minimal narratives of space. The book narrates a place, combining reality and imagination, a patchwork made of the different forms of perceiving space from tangible human experiences to a wonder.

The project has a report dimension once it was developed during Erasmus Placement into the Master of Art, Research and Collaboration program at the Institute of Art, Design and Technology incorporating peer and professional-led learning, mentoring, events, group critiques and active research on-site.

Key Words: Space, Narratives, Every day, Perception.

Summary

Introduction	7
Methodology	8
I. Chapter One: Matters of Space	10
I.I Humanistic perspective of space	10
I.II Poetic perspective	12
I.III Space as a product	13
I.IV The middle path	15
II. Chapter two: Narratives of space	16
II.I First impressions	17
II.II The fear of disappearance	19
II.III Common ground	28
II.IV Public Consultation: Portobello Harbour Refurbishment	34
III. Chapter three: Creative Practices	38
III.I Spatial attempts	39
III.II Minimal Narratives, Portobello Square: Zine.	44
III.III Book: Minimal Narratives, Portobello Square.	48
IV. Erasmus+ Placement Art & Research Collaboration MA: Intersections	52
IV.I Project Statement: Functional Writing	53
IV.II Off-Campus Exhibition: The Narrow Gate of the Here-and-Now, IMMA	53
IV.III Project Development: Exhibition	55
IV.IV External Collaboration	60
Final Considerations	61
Bibliography	64
Web References	66

List of Figures

Figure 1 Laura Hutton, Published by The Irish Times, Sat, Jun 12, 2021, 05:00.	21
Figure 2 The Journal.ie, Published on Fri, May 14, 2021, 18:31.....	21
Figure 3 Laoise Neylon, Published by Dublin InQuirer in 22, December 2021.	22
Figure 4 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2022.	23
Figure 5 Author 's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2022.	23
Figure 6 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2022.	24
Figure 7 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2022.	25
Figure 8 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2022.	25
Figure 9 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2022.	26
Figure 10 Print Screen Instagram @goblinskatemag_ , 2022.	26
Figure 11 Print screen Instagram @skated8_ 2022	27
Figure 12 . Print screen Instagram @reclaim_our_spaces	28
Figure 13 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2021	29
Figure 14 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2021	30
Figure 15 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2021	31
Figure 16 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2021	32
Figure 17 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2021	33
Figure 18 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2021	33
Figure 19 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2021	33
Figure 20 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2021	34
Figure 21 Public Consultation marketing image, 2022.....	35
Figure 22 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2022.	36
Figure 23 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2022.	37
Figure 24 Spatial attempt: object on the square, 2021	39
Figure 25 Spatial attempt: object on the square, 2021	40
Figure 26 Spatial attempt: object on the square, 2021	40
Figure 27 Spatial attempt: object on the square, 2021	41
Figure 28 Spatial attempt: Drawing on the square, 2021	41
Figure 29 Spatial attempt: drawing on the square, 2021	42
Figure 30 Spatial attempt: object on the square, 2021	42
Figure 31 Spatial attempt: measuring the hoarding, 2022.....	43
Figure 32 Spatial attempt: measuring the hoarding, 2022.....	43
Figure 33 Minimal Narratives: Portobello Square. Zine 1, Cover layout, 2022.	44
Figure 34 Author 's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2021	45
Figure 35 Author 's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2021	46
Figure 36 Minimal Narratives Illustration Series, Natalia Panis, 2022.	46
Figure 37 Hoarding Space, Digital Illustration, Natalia Panis, 2022.	47
Figure 38 Set of two images: digital sketching on photography, 2022.	48
Figure 39 3 images: Hayahisa Tomiyasu, TTP, 2011. Published by We Present, 2019.	50
Figure 40 Digital Illustration, 2022.	51
Figure 41 Fragment of text, Minimal Narratives Portobello Square, Natalia Panis, 2022	51

Figure 42 Group critique photo register, Natalia Panis, 2022.	52
Figure 43 Visit to IMMA Photo register, Natalia Panis, 2022.	54
Figure 44 Visit to IMMA Photo register, Natalia Panis, 2022.	55
Figure 45 Project Development Session register, Natalia Panis, 2022	56
Figure 46 Prefactory marketing image by Natalia Panis, 2022.....	57
Figure 47 Zine Distribution Set Up: Author 's Photo Archive, 2022.....	58
Figure 48 Prefactory Event Photo register, Michael Croghan, April 2022.	59
Figure 49 Prefactory Event Photo register, Michael Croghan, April 2022.....	59
Figure 50 Proposition, digital illustration, Natalia Panis, 2022	60
Figure 51 Propositions, marketing image, Natalia Panis, 2022.	61
Figure 52 Proposal sketch, natalia panis, 2022.	63

"In every life, each waking hour is filled with observations and experiences. Almost all soon disappear. But not all". (Tuan, 1930, vii).

Introduction

The present research is a result of a project-based work conducted while undertaking Erasmus+ Placement at the Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology, within the Art & Research Collaboration (ARC) Master's program. Engaged with ARC learning outcomes of art thinking and art practices. My research explores layers upon layers of all sorts of narratives from everyday life that ultimately create a fabric of public space.

I am now living in the Portobello area, where my apartment faces Portobello Square, a public area located in Dublin, Ireland. Sitting on the floor by the window, I look outside, and I have been captivated by the minimal narratives that pass me by. Kids playing around, all sorts of gatherings, adults going to work, or people just there for no distinguishable reason.

There is something about ordinary life, it has always fascinated me. It not only expresses the human experiences and behavior as a social being but also allows us to recognize ourselves and navigate through our own subjective perceptions.

The Portobello Square, particularly, has a certain dynamic and plurality that has caught my eye instantly. Since then, my curiosity started to become a method of observation and photography. Wonderings from what I see happening in that spaceframe that I have nominated *Minimal Narratives, the fabric of public space*. Rather than simply describing the space, the research aims to appropriate the existing structures and narratives as resources to investigate through practical means how space is produced.

By exploring visual thinking strategies such as illustrations, photography, video and storytelling, the objective, among the different experiments and outcomes, is to draft a book, accompanying this document, as a form to sketch reality and imagination, sewing together the different forms of perceiving public space. A long-term goal is to seek funding to distribute the book to those who frequently use this particularly space, inviting them to explore the square by their interpretative possibilities. During the process I also hope to create small disruptions, overlapping the current dynamics of the space, inviting myself to perceive something that is yet to be imagined.

This report is divided into four chapters presented and written to review the concept of space, contextualizes Portobello Square as the object source of investigation, unfold its narratives and explore the creative process and project

development through different outcomes and practices and finally considerations of the Erasmus+ Placement recognizing its interferences and impermeations all along.

The relevance of this current research is to perceive a specific space, designing practices that would necessarily speak to the location and context, as well as to the public. Exploring a subjectiveness that is overlooked by social sciences, political and planning practices. Investing into perspectives beyond the limits of what is tangible. Understanding space as scenery to experiment, to create affective relations and meaningful experiences, combining our cognitive senses within subjectivity and imagination that might lead into the transformation of the space into a place that we belong.

Methodology

As a social scientist, I have always been curious about how people live. But being able to reside in different cities and countries reinforced that interest, and, at the same time, it enhanced my consciousness of the environment, which inevitably appears in my practice.

Space and narratives are recurrent features relevant to this research. In this sense, the methodology combines theoretical and empirical reflections on these themes by using bibliographic references, subjective perceptions, project development and creative practices.

In the first chapter, I will be recurring to Yi-Fu Tuan, Gaston Bachelard and Henri Lefebvre considering that these authors, well combined, offer a substantial debate about space, exploring its phenomenology within a playful sense. Their conception of space immediately intersects with my very own apprehension, which contaminates the creative process.

The following chapter is concerned with the space in consideration: Portobello Square, exploring its narratives. Narrative, in this context, is a term thought by Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin and Robert T. Tally. At this stage I am not necessarily exploring the concept of narratives itself, but I am appropriating the term as a format to read, write and understand space. Structures that ultimately describe a quotidian and location. This chapter also portrays Portobello Square. Its history and infrastructures are based on research through different mediums, such as newspapers

and social media, as well as the general public perception of space sourced by social behaviour observation and other forms of interaction.

Thus, the third chapter combines the reflections and the project development, experimenting with visual thinking strategies on how to perceive the space. At this time the research has a less strict commitment to following a precise definition of space or highlighting its real dimensions but to exploring its possibilities.

The main resources for this phase of the project development are the narratives that are impregnated in the space. Everyday life and spatial practices become a set of inputs collected through observation and documentation. By exploring creative practices such as design thinking, literature and visual poetics the narratives are transformed into illustrations and storytelling, featuring an imaginary space that still resounds with ordinary life.

In time, the third chapter explores the process of creating the book. The book is not necessarily a response or an illustration of the research, but a form of experiencing space itself. A patchwork of the different narratives that constitute Portobello square.

Finally, the fourth chapter comprehends the practical learnings through the ARC program, such as the regular group critiques, lectures and external collaboration activities. Exploring its intersections with project-based research, as well as the different fields of enquiry supports its development.

Therefore, the methodology articulates the fields of sociology, philosophy, humanistic geography and art, The material conditions of space, namely its historical and infrastructural and the subjective perceptions and imagination. In general lines, the research plays up with phenomenology - summarized by Stan Lester (1999) as a study that emphasizes experiences and the individuals' perceptions by their own perspectives without prevailing towards normative assumptions - combined with ethnographic practices to identify a particular set of characteristics of how Portobello Square is being conceived, perceived, and lived.

To sum up *Minimal Narratives: the fabric of public space* is an art research project that aims to explore perception and imagination in the context of everyday life and public space. Simply to wonder upon the narratives that are there. Creating ways of perceiving space beyond its conception and objective forms, exploring a hybrid investigation between critical thinking and creative thinking.

I. Chapter One: Matters of Space

How to perceive space? How to acknowledge the narratives existing in space? Is perceiving space a way to recognize ourselves, relate to each other, empathize and be aware of our surroundings? How to experience, create and produce space? When does a space become a place?

Our existence presupposes a body that occupies certain spaces and performs in certain ways. Nonetheless, we often experience senses of belonging, not belonging, connection, recognition or no recognition, mainly because we share the social structures of the society we live in and its spatial conditions. Everyday life weaves in the process of experiencing space, and it can be quite dynamic especially in the context of public areas such as squares and train stations, as the architect Vito Acconci explores:

“‘Real’ public space is multi-directional and Omni-functional. When you go to a railroad station, you go to catch a train; but, in the meantime, you might be browsing through a shop, or having a drink in a bar, sitting in a lounge. When you are going to a museum, on the other hand, all you are doing is going to the museum” (Acconci, 1995, p.417).¹

Public space becomes a setting for everyday life to happen walking, playing, meeting, talking, skating, running, passing through, eating, wandering, browsing, jumping, exercising, and reading, among many other stories or situations which constantly overlap each other in space and time.

During this chapter, I will explore the matters of space, recurring to a humanistic approach, a poetic perspective, followed through a critical view, exploring its political and economic issues, and eventually looking for a convergence of all aspects.

I.I Humanistic perspective of space

I remember my first year studying social sciences and how anthropology studies impressed me at first. The subject fascinated me until I failed the finals and

¹ Acconci, Vito. (1995). *Public Space in a Private Time*. Organized by Carla Blanca.

realized, after all, anthropology was way more complex than just studying other cultures. How easy is it to look at others through these folkloric lenses?

I cannot precisely date, but it was back then as a bachelor student that I started to become aware of my very own surroundings and understand that the social scientist was not separated from the human being that I inhabit. Inevitably that brought me to study art, as you already guessed. With this brief story I hope to convince you why, when I seek to understand space, I start with the humanistic perspective.

Humanistic geography focuses attention on human awareness, where human experiences and their lives place a significant role in the understanding of space. For this matter, I appeal to Yi-Fu Tuan, one of the most pertinent geographers that approached the understanding of space and place in relation to human perception and experience.

Topophilia, first published in 1974 and *Space and Place*, 1977, are Tuan's most relevant contributions to humanistic geography into the development of the idea of space and place. In *Topophilia* (1990) – a term developed to refer to the affective bond between people and place - Tuan highlights that perception, value and attitude are the key terms speculate about space, inquiries such as:

“What are our views on the physical environment, natural and man-made? How do we perceive, structure, and evaluate it? What have been and what are our environmental ideals? How do economy, lifestyle, and the physical setting itself affect environmental attitudes and values? What are the links between environment and world view? “(Tuan, 1990, p. 1).

Perception is a response to our senses, but also to external stimulation, in its turn, what we perceive has value and attitude is considered primarily a cultural sense, built through our experiences. These terms represent the three levels of a human being, explains Tuan (1990): a biological organism, a social being and a unique individual, he concludes that culture and experience strongly influence the interpretation of the environment.

Thus, people's spatial feelings and experiences are the main sources of humanistic studies to develop a comprehension of space. The consideration of our perception, behaviour, attitudes, and other phenomena also enhances an

understanding of ourselves, and by that a significant effect on the interpretation of reality.

In *Space and Place* (2001), Tuan explores the concept of space, an abstract term that comes from the spatial sciences, that he considered primarily as a location, marked according to objective means. Nonetheless, as we establish connections within the space, we add value and meaning, and consequently, space becomes a place. Space and place require each other for their definition.

Tuan (2001) creates an analogy of movement and pause to refer to space and place. Like describing a performance, space is movement and “each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place” (2001, p.6), therefore it is only when humans imbue meaning into a portion of space, that it becomes a place. The place requires us to stop, rest and be involved.

The importance of looking into space considering the humanistic perspective is to be able to look closely at human nature, unfolding our intricacies and finding places that cannot necessarily be measured or deduced, but as Tuan (2001) proposes, to design a more human habitat.

I.II Poetic perspective

Not too far from the humanistic geography is Gaston Bachelard, the phenomenological philosopher and poet. He also explores the idea of subjectivity of the space, but he appeals enthusiastically to the imagination, not necessarily refusing the “real space,” but exploring elements such as memories, imaginings and dreams.

In *The Poetics of Space*, first published in 1955, Bachelard considers houses as an element to think of as forms of living. Bachelard (2014) understands the house as a place where we experience the most fully and unconsciously lives, therefore its architecture, dimensions, and organization are a set of analytical tools to comprehend it. It is also the primal space we are in contact with; thus, it frames our understanding of outside spaces.

He assumes that our house is the space we first “daydream”. As much as Bachelard’s reference of the house is the subject of critique once is certainly not experienced by everybody in the same way based on several social-cultural conditions, the main idea to take into consideration is to develop our awareness of

being, based on personal knowledge, interpretation while exploring subjectivity and imagination is yet relevant.

Bachelard (2014) uses several analogies and dialectical strategies to develop his ideas of space. Whereas “large” and “small” does not represent dimensions necessarily, the idea of immensity and miniature, invites us to relativize sizes:

“In the past, the attic may have seemed too small, it may have seemed cold in winter and hot in summer. Now, however, in memory recaptured through daydreams, it is hard to say through what syncretism the attic is at once small and large, warm and cool, always comforting.” (Bachelard, 2014 p. 91).

Bachelard proposes that we do not refer to space in terms of the obligations of following normative assumptions or dimensions so that we can experience space on a broader scale. He wants to emphasize our ability to imagine and manipulate reality, as Danielewski suggests in the Forward to *The Poetics of Space* “(...) Encourage you to live beyond gutters and margins, frames and apps, the limits of map and page” foreword (2014, p.8).

Perceiving the space considering Bachelard’s approach is to explore localities of our own intime being. That explains why, when I look outside seeking to perceive this space before my window, I often see my own memories, stories and emotions.

Imagination and memory are the two significant perspectives that Bachelard highlights to create a sense of a topography of the spaces, and therefore us. In his words, I found the courage to explore space from a poetic perspective, where poetry plays the role of drawing imaginary places until they become real, “To give unreality to an image attached to a strong reality is in the spirit of poetry” (Bachelard, 2014, p.71).

I.III Space as a product

“Bachelard has left wonderful pages on the house,” assumes Lefebvre (1996, p.21), recognizing individual consciousness and subjectivity to be taken into consideration by philosophy when understanding space rather than on a practical, historical, and social reality. However, he engages with the idea of space being perceived considering its political and cultural dynamic. Thus, space is a combination of the dynamics that constitute our society.

Henri Lefebvre, philosopher, and sociologist has dedicated years of studies about space to this premise. His main definition calls upon the economical dynamics, where space is considered a product. Space as a product is a concept explored in *The Production of Space* (1991), in which Lefebvre, highly influenced by Hegel and Karl Marx, develops his understanding of space resulting from the capitalism dynamics, mainly profit and property, that he would then refer to as *social space*.

Understanding space through Lefebvre's perspective leads us to a more critical approach in the sense of recognizing that they are not arbitrary spaces, in fact there are many systematic categories and phenomenon's to be considered that act in different levels and transposition. In *The Right to the City* (1996) Lefebvre contextualizes that since industrialization the urban concentrations have been accompanied with the concentration of capital and agglomerations, and by that, the growth of property speculation towards space.

Lefebvre (1991) has highlighted that space is set up into three aspects: Spatial Practice, Representation of the Space and Representational space, which respectively corresponded to a space perceived, conceived and lived. These aspects have a dialectic relation that is expressed by how we use the space. Our economic system, capitalism, plays the key role in Lefebvre's understanding of space, which promotes dynamics of power that strongly affects the way the space is built by the ones who take control of the means of production, namely government, media, academia, financial institutions among others.

“Every social space is the outcome of a process with many aspects and many contributing currents, signifying or not signifying, perceived and directly experienced, practical and theoretical. In short, every social space has a history, one invariably grounded in nature, in natural conditions that are at once primordial and unique in the sense that they are always and everywhere endowed with specific characteristics (site, climate, etc.)” (Lefebvre, 1991, p.110)

Dynamics that set a challenging environment, where public space represents a series of sociological implications related to the right for the space and its democratic policies, impacting who occupies the space and what types of activities can take place.

At the same time, the space is also imbued by repetitive practices that Lefebvre (2004) describes as cyclical and linear. The first is based on nature, the rhythm of days, nights, seasons, and the waves and tides of the sea (p.8), the latter comes from human activity and social practices. In a dialectical relation, these dynamics produce a rhythm that contains a measure, a structure, that in turn, produces the space.

I.IV The middle path

“Public space is made, not born” (Acconci, 1995, p 418). With that affirmation, Acconci explores the idea that public space is either produced by a government or private agency, established by that a contractual relationship, an agreement between institutions and individuals. Thus, space is an undergoing process, especially shared public space that is constantly exposed to cultural, economic, and social transposition.

Everyday life is not a mere reproduction of the objective rules from the spatial practices, contrary, is constantly a form of subjectivation, reframing and contestation. Recognizing that would deconstruct the idea of space as a setting but also a scenery to experiment, to create forms of living from affective relations and meaningful experiences combining our cognitive senses within subjectivity and imagination that would lead to the transformation of the space into a place that we actually belong.

Even though this research engages with a materialistic approach, exploring the material condition of things, where the social norms and historical context represents a conceived space, it is the everyday practices that create the space. Contextualizing space through the theory of the city in its history, philosophical and sociological aspect enhances its spatial conditions and understanding of the systems of objects, values and dynamics, carried out by the urban fabric, however, as Lefebvre (1996) assumes, daily life and immediate relations based on individual consciousness and subjectivity are active outcomes of changes in space, and not a passive response of a practical, historical and social reality.

A middle path, as Andy Merrifield (1993), urban theorist, would also defend, where Lefebvre's contribution in defense of space and place to be perceived together through a dialectical approach, where “place is where everyday life is situated” Merrifield (1993, p.522), and as such, a place can be taken as a practiced space, that ultimately carries political and economic practices into a broader spatial scale.

This approximation appeals to a more incisive phenomenological approach where the *place* is not reduced to a “purely phenomenological realm of experience and metaphysical meaning”, Merrifield (1993, p. 527). Space is a product of the imagination: projections, symbols, utopias among other sensory phenomena and at the same time it relates to the spatial concerns of social relations and structural factors.

An approach explored also from Michel De Certeau (1988), philosopher, who merges everyday life, spatial order and lived practices. He assumes that the spatial system ensemble a set of possibilities in determining actions and behaviors, but also recognizes the autonomy of the walker, as in analogy to human beings, that in its way would move and invent other possibilities beyond the spatial constraints, transforming space into something else.

As this research aims to investigate through practical means how people perceive, experiment and produce space into a specific context, Tuan, Lefebvre and Bachelard are to be considered to recall the complexity of the space. Unfolding its historical and current context and structures, as well the perception of space through lived forms, experiences, imagination, and subjectivity.

II. Chapter two: Narratives of space

The space is constituted by a multitude of interactions and spatial dynamics. Narratives, in this context, are forms of representing these practices. Beyond its descriptive characteristic, narratives also imply subjects, objects, characters and subjectivities. A premise that is based on the idea that narratives offer a structure, reflecting a system, or, according to Roland Gerard Barthes (2011), philosopher and literary critic, a set of rules that can take form in the simplest to the most complex structure.

Oral or written, pictures, still or moving, gestures, and an ordered mixture of all those substances, narratives, Barthes (2011), is expressed in an infinite variety of forms and it can be considered from several encounters: historical, philosophical, sociological, aesthetics, ethological, etc., but inevitably refer to a system. In this sense, narratives can be seen as an input that summarizes the many ways of living and perceiving space. “It is presented at all times, in all places, in all societies; indeed, narratives start with the very story of mankind; there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative;” (2011, p. 237).

Narratives are constantly out there and reflect a combination of political, economic and social structures, human behaviour and their relationships, it is also represented by aspects that are not necessarily visible, tangible, palpable or evident such as wishes, memories, wonders, desires and feelings, assumes the philosopher Walter Benjamin (1987), narratives are always a combination between memories and experiences that could unfold into several other encounters. When we narrate, we are not simply describing reality but shaping it, because what we see is emphasized with all kinds of experiences.

Narratives are conjectures that do not just take place in the space, but in fact constitute the space, as Robert T. Tally (2013) sees: narratives become ways of understanding spaces, in which the narrator weaves disparate elements, producing, “this patchwork representation of a world” (Tally, 2013, p. 49). The space itself is imbued with literature and history that transforms and determines how the space is being read or mapped. Narratives are the written form of both reading and describing the space:

“In a manner of speaking, literature also functions as a form of mapping, offering its readers descriptions of place, situating them in a kind of imaginary space and providing points of reference by which they can orient themselves and understand the world in which they live” (Tally, 2013, p. 2).

De Certeau (1985) brings up the idea of an urban text, where spatial practices mean a form of operations, or ways of doing, therefore constitute contents. Assuming that our bodies are practitioners and the paths we follow are interconnected, De Certeau suggests that we create “strange poems of each body is an element down by and among many others” (1985, p.124), made from fragments of trajectories.

In this context, writing about what I see is certainly not an objective description of everyday life, but a presupposition that articulates space, place, lived experiences and my own perspectives. These nonverbal narratives before my eyes, interacting with one another, become a space, a practice, a place.

II.I First impressions

I remember when I first visited my current apartment. I did not even notice the Square facing the opposite direction from the two windows in my small kitchen/sitting room. It could be the fear of finding a place to live as soon as possible or the pressure of the real estate agent's eyes following me through the visit.

Nowadays, looking for a space to live, even temporarily, whatever overpriced meter square, is an incredibly stressful process. Dublin has the sixth most expensive rent among capital cities, says *The Irish Times*, 2021. But that day things worked out. After showing interest, the agency started the rental process and soon enough I had an address to call my new, here I go again, home.

It was only after settling down that I looked out the window and started to realize and assimilate my surroundings. And there was the Square where a few months later I locate my obsession. Intrigued by it, I stare. I take mental notes and start to recognize timetables, faces, routines, marks, signs, and structures.

I leave the camera strategically positioned over a line I drew with a pencil, so I can get the whole square to fit into a photograph. I experiment walking around, to get an understanding of its dimension and often I tell myself all the stories I imagine about those people I see.

The Portobello Water Channel Square is in Dublin 8, by The Grand Canal, constructed in the 11790s which connects Dublin with the River Shannon, the longest river on the island. Situated in South Dublin's suburb, existing since the 18th century and by then it was an area for middle classes and working classes to live, where suburbs, points Lefebvre (1996), strategy-oriented were created under the pressure of circumstances to respond to the growth of industrialization and rural exodus.

Its name intersects with the Battle of Portobello in 1739, a considered triumph for the British against Spanish defenders, War of the Jenkins' Ear. After the attack at the Portobello port in Spain Main, the name became a form of celebration. That way, the Grand Canal area was named Portobello, and therefore carries its context.

From the windows, my eyes started to read the minimal narratives of the space, its texturology. I am certainly not looking at Manhattan from the 107th floor of the World Trade Center, but still, I develop this sense of being an author, spectator, as De Certeau describes: "*His altitude transforms him into a voyeur. It places him at a distance. It changes an enchanting world into a text*" (1985, p.123).

More and less like an ethnographic method, while investigating public space, I find myself tangled into the contradictions of making assumptions, reflecting upon a

self-idealization of space. A critic sustained by Hal Foster (2014), who questioned the artist as an ethnographer, upon Walter Benjamin's notion of the *author as a producer*. Since creative practices started to come closer to anthropology and ethnographic research in the ninety's, Foster would draw attention to its convergences and divergences, but mostly he would criticize how often the artists are calling upon the *other*, that is *outside*, where, in a global economy, the outside is impossible.

Looking through my window, where I have a privileged view combined with a safe distance of real commitment I have the perfect set to the danger, mentioned by Hal Foster of an "ideological patronage" (2014, p. 303). However, the square I am looking at not elsewhere from where I stand. Alterity is not what this research is looking for, but to get lost and moved in by the narratives of public space.

II.II The fear of disappearance

It first appeared to be an ordinary square, first open to the public in 2004. In time the square has been a "significant cultural and social hub for people in the city", especially for the skate community, says the writer and journalist Shane Brock. In his essay, published in May of 2021, Shane draws attention to the Square, contextualizing its existence in parallel with huge prize speculation and privatization that has become what he calls a threat to access to the public space. A public portrait of the general organization conditioned since the industrial growth.

As I further research the Square, I started to comprehend the other layers that are not immediately evident in the space. Looking at images of the Square between 2009 and 2021 by using Google Street View the square did not change as much, however, the building next to it has been demolished. An observation that drastically changed my comprehension of the space.

According to Brock, on 21st January 2019 a hotel group, Jurys Inn, was given permission to build a hotel around that spot, planning permission that sums up a cost of €40 million. Before the commission to further approved a campaign called "Save Portobello Harbour" emerged, based on charge.org online petition platform, where almost 8,000 signatures were collected, as the campaign stated: the hotel "will undoubtedly restrict locals and those who are not using the hotel's services from using this public space for markets, skateboarding, biking, ball games & all other activities that occur here on a regular basis" (2008).

Not only does the hotel create a disruption of the use of the public space, but it also accentuates the problem of accommodation in Ireland, where a hotel is clearly a disservice. Confirming the ambiguous relationship between state and private enterprise, discussed in *The Right to the City*:

“This crisis of the city is accompanied here and there with a crisis of urban institutions (municipal) due to the double pressure from the State and industrial enterprise. Sometimes the State, sometimes private enterprise, sometimes both (rivals in competition, but often associates) tend to commandeer the functions, duties, and prerogatives of urban society.” (Lefebvre, 1996, p.45).

With the big picture already pointing to the fragility of the public space over its commodity speculation, another ambiguous conflict of interest arises during the pandemic. From March 2020, as Covid-19 kept spreading out, people were asked to be at home, isolating themselves from the virus that we did not know much about. As the restrictions were on and off according to each country's regulations and policies both private and public spaces became a vital environment.

The pandemic has proved to be an immense disruption in everyone's life, and the public space became a subject of concern for the authorities into a level of attention concerning public health and the community. The importance of the public space, highlights Carey, 2021, is to nourish democratic relationships, promote social well-being, empower communities as well as torment civic engagement, communication and interactions, where people are more likely to engage face to face, rather than virtually. As the restrictions loosened for outdoor spaces, where gathering was more likely to be safe as people could practice physical distance, there was a significant increase for its usage.

With the crescent demand for the usage of outdoor spaces, the Square has become a popular and valued amenity for all, according to the independent.ie, 2021. But it also raised a controversial debate, as people used the space in a manner that the media called *anti-social* behavior, leading to a disagreement between residents, authorities and other stakeholders who regularly frequent the square. As a result, the Square was, eventually, locked up for about three following weekends between May and April 2021, after the pressure of local residents and the Dublin City Council.



Figure 1 Laura Hutton, Published by The Irish Times, Sat, Jun 12, 2021, 05:00.



Figure 2 The Journal.ie, Published on Fri, May 14, 2021, 18:31.

In fact, closing a public space does not necessarily solve the issues emerging from the different perspectives of its usage, but it does raise the visibility of its complexity, as well as elucidates its potential to serve a wider range of the public as a place for effective access and socialization.

The pandemic has added more controversy to a space that is already facing the pressure of privatization. The threat of the disappearance of public space could negatively impact the nourishment of communities, as it also harms democracy and the right for space, a de-urbanized process described by Lefebvre:

“All perceptible, legible urban reality has disappeared: streets, squares, monuments, meeting places. Even the cafe (the bistro) has encountered the resentment of the builders of those large housing estates, their taste for

asceticism, the reduction of 'to inhabit' to habitat." (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 13).

More recently, the threat has become a reality. In December 2022, builders were seen erecting a wood hoarding around the Square, result of the Council approval in granting part of the Square to be used as storage of the materials for the construction of the hotel, previously mentioned. The project is expected to take up to two years to be finished. Part of the agreement compels the project the right to redevelop the Square, which, as the council predict, will carry out a public consultation around April 2022.



Figure 3 Laoise Neylon, Published by Dublin InQuirer in 22, December 2021.

The square could remain as a public space owned by Dublin City Council, but with the revamp being funded by the hotel company there is a certain common sense that the design would necessarily privilege the hotel interest despite the general public. The idea of space becomes vulnerable and subject to economic, social and political factors. Immediately the hoarding is turned into an empty canvas for protests and inquiries:



Figure 4 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2022.



Figure 5 Author 's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2022.

Not too late afterwards a mural artist is commissioned to paint over the hoarding. Either from the construction company, or the Dublin City Council, a new set of colorful patterns and figures took place were used to be a dark grey wall. From the finished mural till nowadays the graffiti keeps appearing, eventually being washed away until it is back again.



Figure 6 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2022.

A simple dynamic, yet useful to understand how complex is the space. How many voices constitute the public space, and how does each one of them find its way of being heard? As Lefebvre argues (2004), spaces are imbued with a sense of rhythm, and repetition, and it comes down to everyday practices.



Figure 7 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2022.



Figure 8 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2022.



Figure 9 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2022.

Looking upon social media and using the location tag as a filter, I easily found information about the square, especially about its current condition of temporary closure. The majority seems to come from the skater's community. They were claiming the space and inviting people to think about it, re-imagine its possibilities and highlight its importance to the public realm, such as this example:



goblinskatemag_ We're looking for inputs on what you would like to see at portobello. Before the design consultation takes place with the council next year, we want the best examples of public space that you've witnessed in any part of the world to act as a guide for what the space could be transformed into. Be it skate objects, playgrounds, seats or paving, DM or email us your input so we can use it going forward to push the council to make it a space for everyone and not just the hotel.
Goblinskatecompany@gmail.com

Figure 10 Print Screen Instagram @goblinskatemag_, 2022.

Other forms of organization were addressing the issues of public space in the context of Portobello Square, producing ways of engaging people with the spaces and places we live in. *Skate D8*, per example, a community led group that is working to integrate play into the dynamics of the cities. They are precisely addressing Portobello Harbour, inquiring to have input in the redesign of the Square. Skate D8 has already perceived a successful petition for the construction of Weaver Park, after engaging with local business, councilors, the residents and the skateboards, the group they mostly represent. Defending an inclusive space, accessible, hoping to reflect the plurality of Portobello's square against the logic of space as a constant premium resulted by the privatization of space.

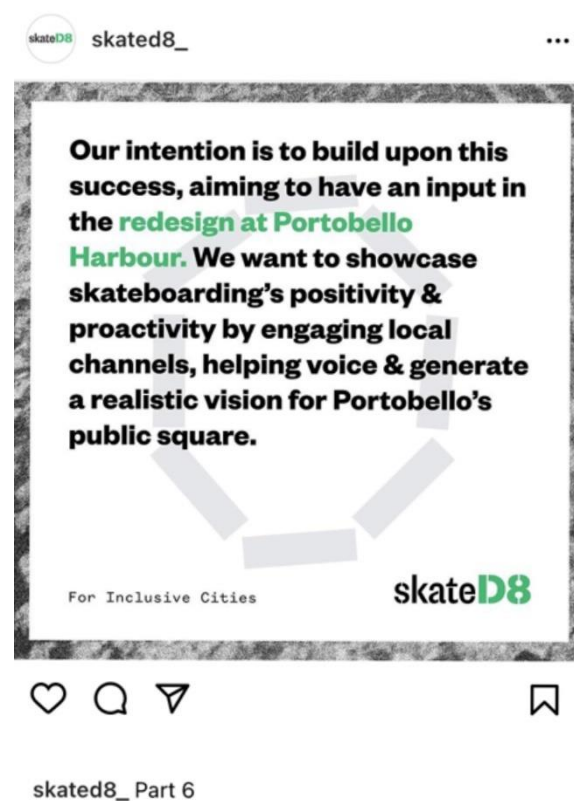


Figure 11 Print screen Instagram @skated8_ 2022

Reclaim our spaces is also an organization which appears to be constituted by a collective of young Dublin residents, artists and intellectuals that are engaged in promoting debates over the subject of public development human-centered, appealing to gender equality and democratic practices. *What could it be?* is one example of a project they developed inviting people to imagine a different feature to buildings that are abandoned, reclaiming public spaces that work for the community.



Figure 12 . Print screen Instagram @reclaim_our_spaces

The fact is that the wood hoarding has been already seen as a significant measure of closing the Square to the public. Two years from now there is going to be a significant impact on its regular everyday use. Even afterwards, the consultation process for the revamp of the Square is uncertain, as it all depends on the communication and engagement between all the interested parties, meaning the residents, the public, authorities, and private companies.

II.III Common ground

Redeeming all those aspects that constitute the space, people's perceptions play a significant role in how they actively interact and live. Between then and now, from where I see it, the square represents a plural space.

Remaining a public space or not, the truth is that the Square has witnessed and supported many ways of connections and interactions and encouraged activities such as playing, gathering, dancing, skating, and many other experiences, both collective and individual. In its essence, the public space, as Carey (2021) points out, is a scenario for social interaction to happen, to sustain a sense of community, bonding,

and belonging that also helps mitigate the pressure of daily routine and yet is a space to wonder.

The spectator can read the square as a city gasp, where ordinary practitioners are on their journey. A journey that might take a few seconds, enough to cross the square, or to others it would take a couple of hours even. De Certeau (1988) called it practices of everyday life, I call them all *minimal narratives*. I have these pictures taken, a couple of notes and an immense room to wonder.

From my window, I have seen warm days from September becoming chill as autumn arrives and makes its way to winter. On sunny and rainy days, mild or cold, the square remains a place for everyday life to happen.

Perceiving this specific context, Portobello Square became a fertile subject of investigation. It allowed me to see life in a certain roughness, and strangeness that also carries a sense of repetition, and pattern. Strangers turn into faces I started to recognize. The counterclockwise sound is made of the steps of children walking to school telling me It is 9 am.

You can consistently see a wide variety of people at the square, and all generations, especially if you consider time frames along the day. During the morning, for example, there are mainly two groups: adults and children. Adults are divided between the ones that are going to work, exercising, and walking their pets or children.

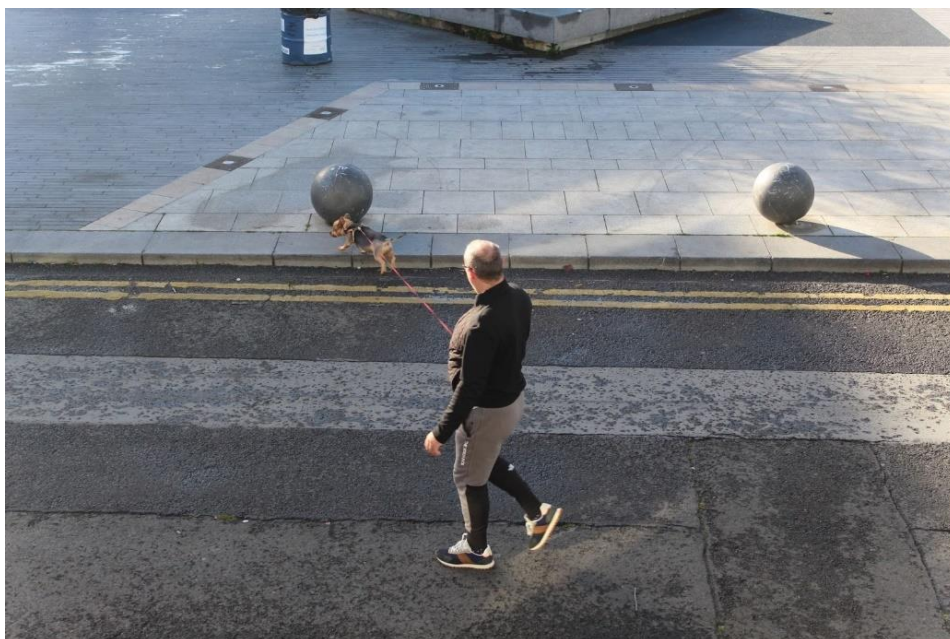


Figure 13 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2021

The simple act of walking, as reflected by De Certeau (1988), represents: “a process of appropriation of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian” (p.97). Walking as a everyday practice, also explored by Careri (2009), is a form of perceiving space, registering the surroundings and producing meanings, that, in turn, transformed the space. Even though the architect is exploring *walking* as an aesthetic instrument of art and architecture practice, inevitably it constitutes an everyday practice for anyone who is willing to infer their surroundings.



Figure 14 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2021

By afternoon the square becomes a gathering area when people are likely to be seen having food, between them mostly young adults, students, and workers. Because it is lunchtime, you would often see food delivery workers around the area waiting while on call. Preschool-aged children would come across them eventually, on their way back home.



Figure 15 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2021

As the afternoon comes along, skaters appear, and they are likely to stay until evening time. The skater's community is one of the most significant groups from the public that uses the area. Despite the sign of prohibition to skate, they are constantly there and have an expressive contribution to the dynamic of the square, contesting the disciplinary structures, that, in its turn, reflects the contradiction pointed by De Certeau (1988) between the structures of power and everyday practices, where the present conjecture is a conjugation of collective and individual modes of reappropriation.

They normally come as groups, but not exclusive. Either way, their presence produces other spatial relationships, when other people would not necessarily leave if the skaters are there, on the contrary, together they create a dynamic, fragmenting the space in a way that everyone has a place. Sometimes I can see the dynamic written on the floor, on ground level, with lines drawn by the friction of the skate wheels, or I spotted parents reminding their children to not interfere over their spot.



Figure 16 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2021

An accumulation of narratives that repeatedly produces a space. There are many ways to explore perception and imagination in the context of everyday life and public space. Experience, from Tuan's (2001) perspective is a wider form for a person to construct reality. Combining feelings and thinking processes, experimenting allows people to recognize the spatial dimensions and therefore to acknowledge the space. A simple stretch, mentions Tuan, would draw us into space consciousness, as to move from here to there would give us a sense of direction.

For kids, on the other hand, the space is not much of a place in its extension and location but is more likely to be seen as an object, where they would interact regarding their own scale. They experience the space as much as we do but in a more polarized way. Close or far, as whatever is in the between does not matter. The existence of things lasts as long as they pay attention to them. Tuan refers that the first "environment" children recognize is their parents and as they grow their sense of space gets more complex.

The difference I see between adults and children is that children's interactions are more intense and spontaneous. They carry a certain curiosity while exploring things in a non-functional way. Their imagination is related to their activity, as stated by Tuan (2001).



Figure 17 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2021



Figure 18 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2021



Figure 19 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2021

Space is a set of countless intersecting repetitions related to the same context, into perpetual interaction and even relative to one another, suggests Lefebvre (2004). One can only cycle to work, if one replaces the bike hack.

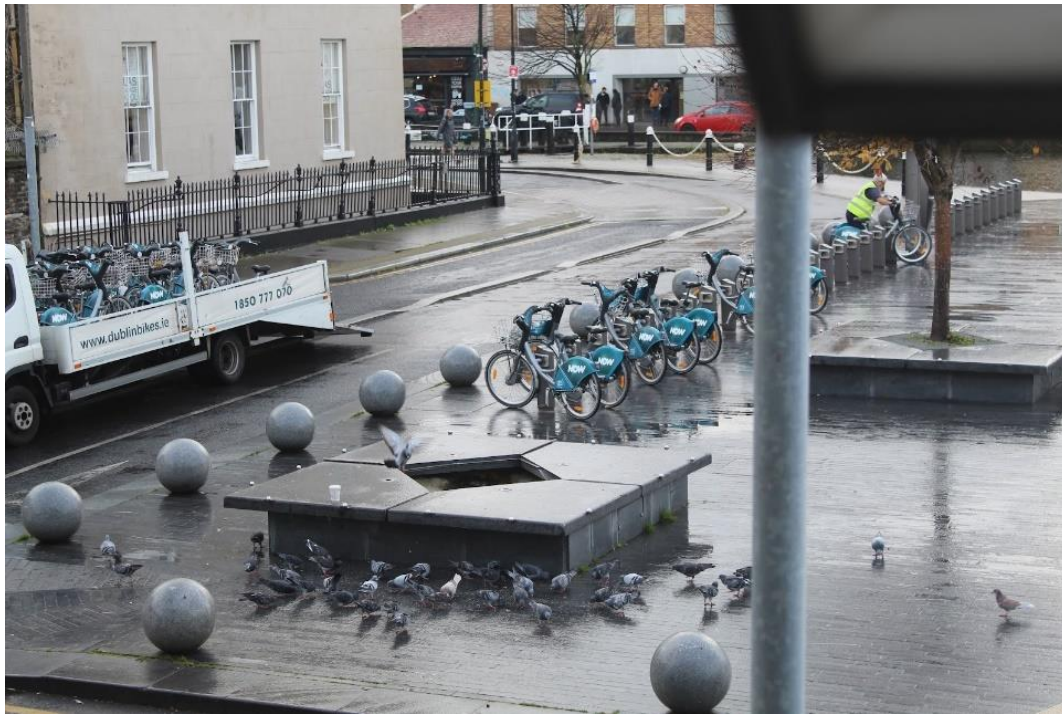


Figure 20 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2021

II.IV Public Consultation: Portobello Harbour Refurbishment

Is the end of May when it is brought to my attention that a Public Consultation for the Portobello Square is being planned. The *áit Urbanism + Landscape Ltd* is taking the lead in the refurbishment design for the square, commissioned by the Dublin City Council. They describe their work approach to be considerate of human beings, seeking solutions for people, considering the physical geography and human culture, and assuming social and ecological responsibilities, to deliver, what they described: *functional robustness, interactivity, human comfort, joy, visual delight and longevity*.

A previous project developed by them is *Weaver Park*. Located in Dublin 8, as Portobello Square is, the park was a form to respond to the lack of outdoor recreational options for the community inquired from a petition and developed by consulting local residents, businesses, councillors and skateboarders.

The Portobello Square, considering its proportions, geographical condition and particularities, raises the same demand: a site in need to accommodate its multiple users. The debate towards the right for public space was always there, but the

hoarding wall seems to be outlining the issues even more, and now, by convenience or not, it became a promised land.

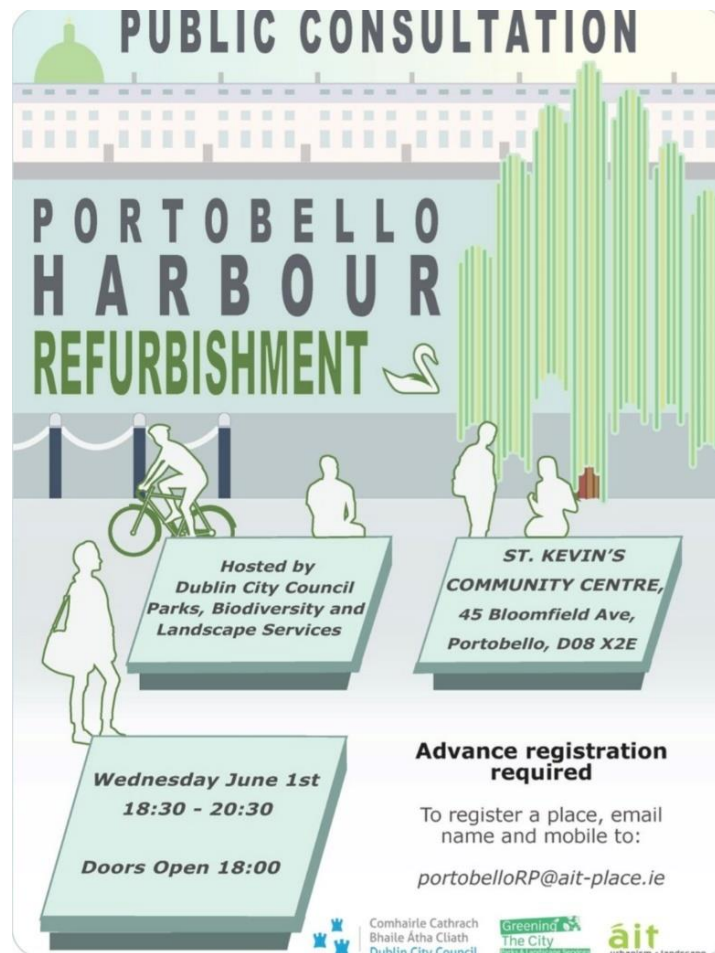


Figure 21 Public Consultation marketing image, 2022.

The public consultation took place at Kevin's Center Community. Attendance required previous registration. It started at 18h30 and was mainly conducted by Margaret Egan, landscape architect. The consultation's agenda started with a brief site analysis, two tasks in groups, a coffee break, feedback from the tasks and the next steps.

As soon as I arrived, I looked around, trying to find familiar faces. We were invited to take a seat. Chairs were disposed of around ten tables, which people could choose from. The seat would determine the group you are part of, therefore the people you would interact with during the session. I sat at the very first table at the front, number seven. By that time, it was the one that still had a few seats available. A few minutes later we were a full group: me, an elderly couple, an architect mother of three, a public counsellor and one of the head managers of the hotel construction.

For the first task, we were invited to list three things we like and do not like about the square. Each person had a paper sheet to do so. From that moment ahead I understood that the public consultation, for me, was an opportunity to listen to verbal communication of what people think of the space. The things they like, or dislike are reflected on how they experience the space. What is considered highlights or issues is based on each person's needs and forms of living.

The canal, the element of water, the natural light, the swans, the multiplicity of users, and the location were the most recurrent elements people liked. On the other hand, the lack of security, the concrete features, the noise, the litter, and the antisocial behaviour were stated as the least liked.

After that, we were asked to combine our expectations for the square and display them using visual elements over an A2 print of the square. Markers, prints of graphic elements such as benches, grass and tree and transparent sheets were supplied so we could incorporate our ideas for the square. After the coffee break, each group had a few minutes to share their design with the others. The feedback from the second task was a bit more complex. Suddenly, an entire square has been refurbished by a group of different individuals, with different demands and experiences, over more and less than 40 minutes, using a few materials and their desires for the place. After that, each group narrated their ideas through a spokesperson.

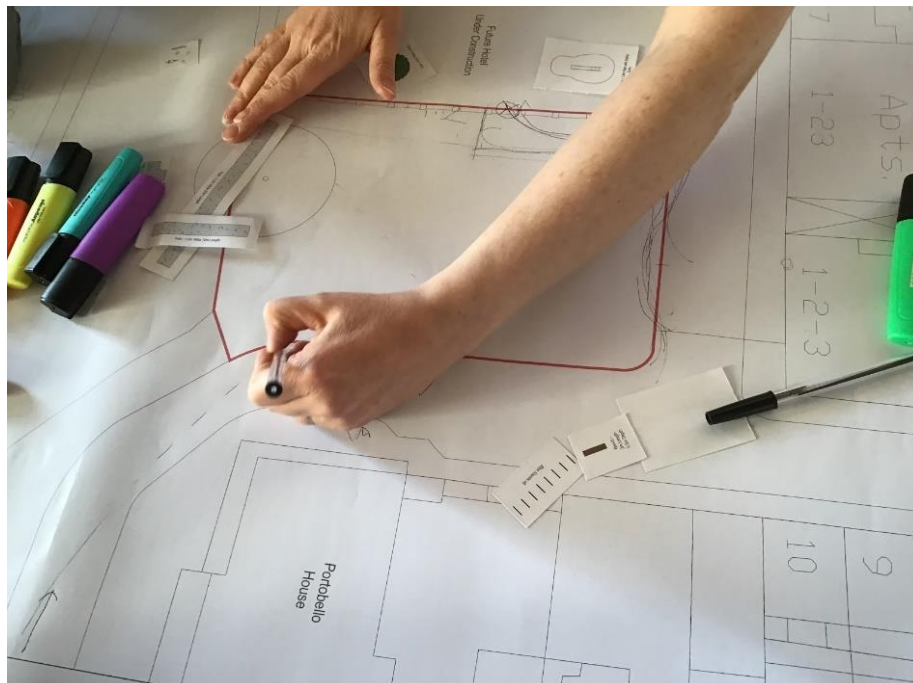


Figure 22 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2022.

A plurality of perceptions and opinions were drafted into that room. From reducing the footprint in its maximum and focusing on noise cancellation to build a small amphitheater to encourage spontaneous performances. A process that reflects what constitutes the dynamics of public space considering Lefebvre's analogy of space as a product.

“The desires of other groups, other individuals, other classes, together with the violent power of the state, laws about property, and the current jurisprudence on rights all have a role to play in stymieing, channeling, or promoting the "taking" and "making" of public space and the claim to representation” (Lefebvre, 1996, p.35).

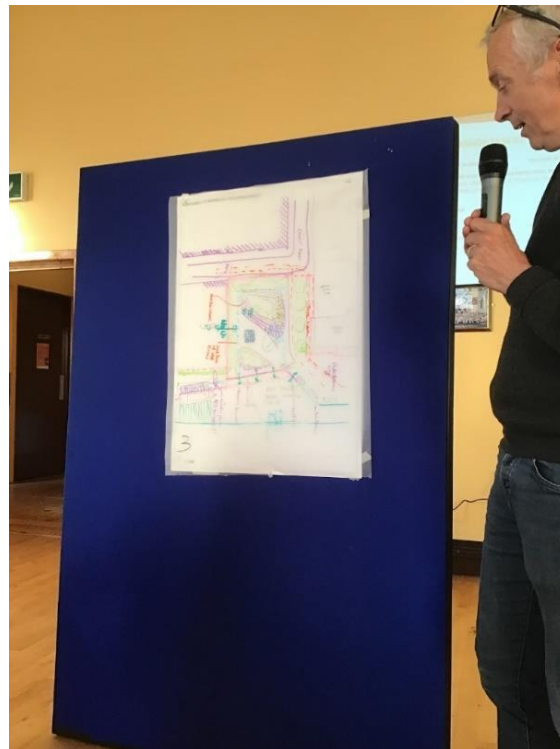


Figure 23 Author's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2022.

All the data produced by the public attending was taken by the *áit* and will be used to source the research and project development, as they say. At this stage, there is no design planned whatsoever, therefore the public consultation takes place into the early stage of the process. Maybe the square is facing the “theory of moments”, developed by Lefebvre (2004). Where, from time-to-time things could significantly change, and be altered, often because of a moment of crisis.

Being part of the public consultation, as a resident, gave me the impression that the community is being taken into consideration and we are being heard as we speak.

I cannot predict how, in the long term, this is going to be addressed in their design plan, however, it is definitely a turning point for portobello square.

Attending the public consultation as a researcher, on the other hand, was a fertile experience to enhance my understanding of the space. To observe and take notes of the narratives as they speak, that otherwise, I would observe from a distance. Integrating the consultation was almost like bursting a bubble. I had to come down from the privilege of constantly looking at the square by my window and face the uncertainty of human interaction. Dealing with the divergence of opinions as they speak. Which immediately will reflect on the composition of my illustrations, raising different perspectives and controversies.

Listening to them effectively contributed to the clarification of how forms of social engagement and shared experiences can contribute to effectively understanding space and its phenomenology. The variety of needs, deprivations and expectations in one, ever-changing, complex space.

III. Chapter three: Creative Practices

Resist its contention and defend a world that prioritizes human relationships, subjectivity, and imagination. Being aware of our surroundings, as Brookfield (1987) suggested, reflects in how we create and re-create aspects of our own lives, the workplace, public space or political lives.

How can observation, notes and a file filled with photos compose a book about a specific place, without being descriptive or merely speculative? This chapter describes the process of looking into ways of presenting the location to the spectator. Its current context and its functional infrastructure while, at the same time, engaging to the imagination, repurposing its structure, and proposing new associations.

I started illustrating. An image, defends Bachelard (2014), is a “product absolute of the imagination, owes its entire being to the imagination” (p.185), “it is also one of the specific phenomena of the speaking creature” (p. 185).

But how to make the illustration overflow the public space? They asked.

What If I combine illustration, writing, and photography? “We are very much creatures of the surface, condemned to superficiality even in imagination and thought”. (Tuan, 2002, p.1). I guess, even if I dive into the canal that surrounds the square, I will not be further down than four meters in its highest depth.

Whereas reading and writing are linear forms, illustration, and photographs, on the other hand, require a certain visual perception that can be apprehended in various ways.

III.1 Spatial attempts

Aiming to experiment and interact with the square, which I call *spatial attempts*, my first idea was to bring an abstract object and place it around in different areas and forms. It was an early stage of the research when I was still getting familiar with the square. I intended to explore ways of looking at the landscape, to recognize and create a repertory of its lines, corners, and dimensions. As I walked around, positioning the object, I also intended to provoke a sense of weirdness in people who were there, disrupting the convenient ways of walking around the space.



Figure 24 Spatial attempt: object on the square, 2021



Figure 25 Spatial attempt: object on the square, 2021



Figure 26 Spatial attempt: object on the square, 2021



Figure 27 Spatial attempt: object on the square, 2021

At a different moment, I experimented with drawing on the floor. Using chalk, I simply drew organic forms until there was no chalk left to be used. The drawing per se was quite random as I did not plan beforehand, but I was interested in where I decided to draw. I have noticed that people tend to cross the square on its diagonal. Those short ways become desired lines, even though there is no mark, line, or any element that indicates that route. With that spot in mind, I drew. Expecting to interfere with the spatial practices of walking and crossing the square.



Figure 28 Spatial attempt: Drawing on the square, 2021



Figure 29 Spatial attempt: drawing on the square, 2021

Overall, I observed that adults are less likely to notice the intervention, especially compared with children. The ones who realized tend to deflect, walking beside it. Children, on the other hand, would promptly interact with the drawing. Jumping from one color to the other, to a form to another.



Figure 30 Spatial attempt: object on the square, 2021

Later, when the hoarding was already placed at the square, I experimented measuring the walls with my body. The hoarding circulates an area of 630 square

meters. A measure hard to describe in its proportion. Standing there, using the width of both arms outstretched I contoured the wall. A measure I called social distance, in reference to the guidelines we were taught during the pandemic to keep safe distance between each other.

The idea was to explore the size of the hoarding, as well as testing forms of interacting with the space and its new arrangement that ultimately provokes new forms of interactions and spatial dynamics.



Figure 31 Spatial attempt: measuring the hoarding, 2022.



Figure 32 Spatial attempt: measuring the hoarding, 2022

These small spatial attempts served me, for instance, to recognize the space and have a sense of its dimensions. I did not seek further interactions or public engagement. Even though I believe that would bring an interesting layer for the research, my approach tends to be more speculative. I like to explore the reality and the immediacy of relationships and interactions, not necessarily engaging but observing. A form of pursuing space, combined with imagination and suppositions.

III.II Minimal Narratives, Portobello Square: Zine.

Minimal Narratives, Portobello Square. Zine 1 is a project created to explore content, form, layout, and distribution, which could partially anticipate some understanding that would necessarily come across the book-making process.

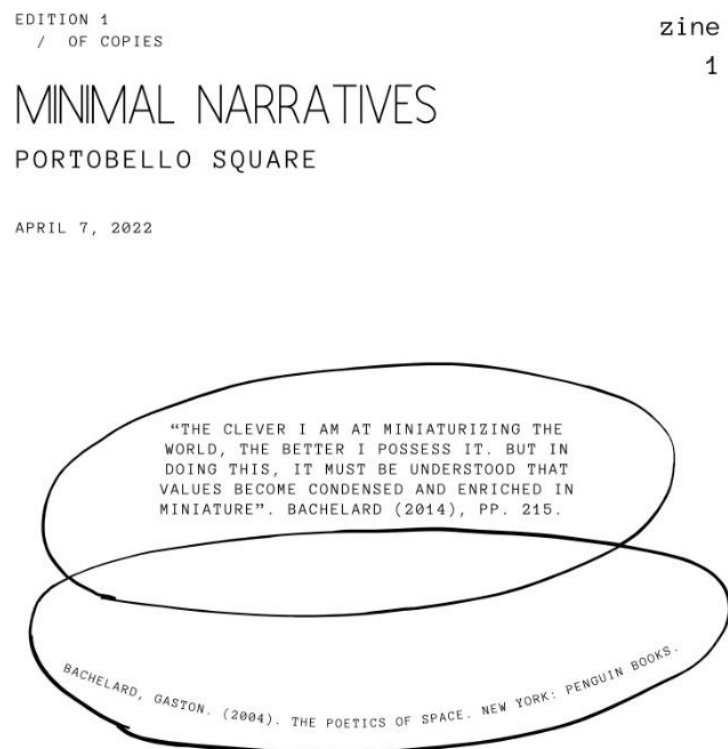


Figure 33 Minimal Narratives: Portobello Square. Zine 1, Cover layout, 2022.

I find myself living across the road to a square that has kept my attention. The opposite side of my home, little by little, becomes this immense room to wonder, a reasonable set for a social scientist and art researcher to create.

As I unfold the several narratives that are drawn before my eyes, my curiosity is turned into an investigation

“A man teaches his dog how to beg. What is noteworthy about that? Yet the image sticks in my mind and insists that I make something of it. The same goes with other minor happenings, such as seeing an overweight woman struggling with her shopping bags, or hearing a child at Minnesota Zoo asking a middle-aged man (me) “Where is your mommy?”” (Tuan, 2002, viii).

The same has happened to me, I can no longer avoid it. The man that holds a piece of paper, standing by the canal, has my full attention. For about half an hour, he walks side to side, repeating words I cannot either listen to or premise, and yet I stare.

Looking at all dynamics in this space, exploring multiple perspectives and perhaps unfolding a poetic world, the zine, “Minimal Narratives. Portobello Square” is the first edition of a publication that experiments in illustration, photography, and writing.

The first edition needed to be slightly introductory and give notions of: What are minimal narratives, after all. Who is behind? What is the main content about it? How to address the location? How to provoke engagement with the public?

Interested in introducing ways of experiencing space, as you unfold the zine, you can first see a photograph, suggesting this empty space, followed by a text reflecting on the ways to explore perception and imagination in the context of everyday life and public space based on the concept of experience from Tuan’s (2001).



Figure 34 Author 's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2021

An empty space instantly filled with imagination:



Figure 35 Author 's Photo Archive. Natalia Panis, 2021

I set the camera to record ordinary stuff, but I keep missing it, I write. Reminding me of Hayahisa Tomiyasu that first set his camera expecting to shoot a fox, and for the next four years he found himself staring out of his window, from the adjacent view from his bedroom, taking photos of everyday life that happened around a ping-pong table.

Next thing you see is an illustration. I chose one that has the same element of the pictures: the concrete bench. With this element I intend to instigate the connection between the place itself, to this imaginary illustrated world. Addressing the illustration to its specific context. At the same time, both images play around with the structures in the square and its rigidity. One rolls a concrete sphere, the other makes a concrete bench float in the sky.

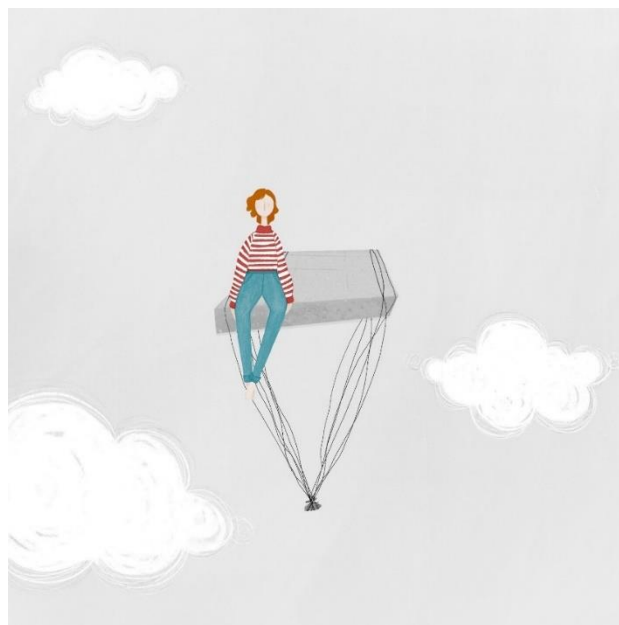


Figure 36 Minimal Narratives Illustration Series, Natalia Panis, 2022.

Unfolding the other half page, the reader can see a sentence based on a game of spotting things around: “I spy with my little eye, something beginning with the letter...” but with a slight twist I write: “I spy, with my little *weird* eye.”

With that phrase I am assuming that I immediately tend to see things in a non-expected way as a form of practicing imagination and subjectivity. In general, all the writing presented in the zine is quite discrete, in a small size font. The idea is to provoke the spectator to engage with the publication in a close relationship, whereas unfolding, reading, and looking at the zine, leading to a more introspective experience.

Finally, on the other side of the page I propose a public consultation, describing the current closure of the Square. A wooden hoarding that has been built around 630 square meter of public space in Portobello Square, as the result of an agreement between a private developer, MKN property group, and Dublin City Council.

How would you imagine this SPACE? I ask. The layout leaves a specified area for people to draw or write their ideas for the space, inviting them to share it with contact details written underneath. The idea behind the “public consultation” was to create an opportunity to interact and communicate with the public, and also encourage them to acknowledge what is happening to that location and wonder about other possibilities.

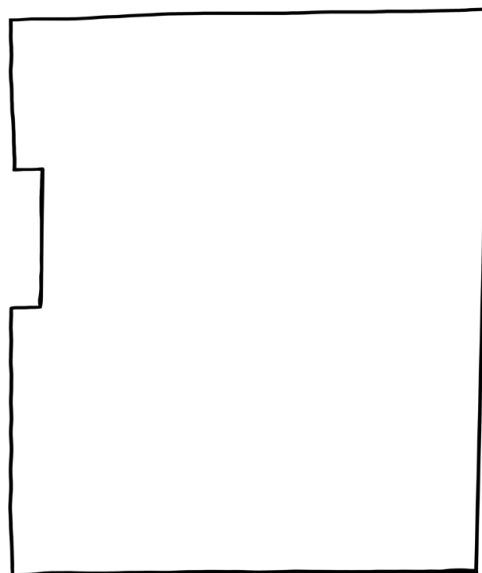


Figure 37 Hoarding Space, Digital Illustration, Natalia Panis, 2022.

Overall, the zine proposal met the expectations of combining visual thinking strategies to compose a publication, but the highlight of the experience was the opportunity to practice how to communicate the main ideas of the investigation in a

few words with outsiders, meaning the public that had no previous acknowledgment of the research or its process. Another aspect to emphasize is the interaction resulting from the possibility to choose the color; it also improved the engagement and reinforced the need for practices that explore a playful approach that takes into consideration the spectator.

III.III Book: Minimal Narratives, Portobello Square.

Considering the research carried so far, the book: *Minimal Narratives, Portobello Square* presents the square through a series of illustrations, photographs and writing pieces. Not preoccupied in describing the space and its dynamics, but to think about it, to imagine, to play, to poetize, to question, to wonder.



Figure 38 Set of two images: digital sketching on photography, 2022.

The book explores the space considering the observations from September 2021 until June 2022, but quite often falls into its past, or wonders upon its future. The book is divided into two chapters: one. *a sense of beginning* and 2. *anything but a*

hotel. The chapters explore the different phases of the research: the start, with all the expectations, possibilities, and enchantment towards the space, followed by its maturation, taking into consideration the way in which people end up using the place, the dynamics that contoured the square, its phenomenology, by all means.

At this stage one of the references, I am looking at is *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (2010), a novel by Salman Rushdie. A book that explores the issues of society but using analogies that proposes a playful interpretation. Unfolding a story of this sad city, so sad that it has forgotten its own name, the author creates imaginative narratives reflecting on political, social, and economic dynamics that constitute the environment:

“There was once, in the country of Alifbay, a sad city, the saddest of cities, a city so ruinously sad that it had forgotten its name. It stood by a mournful sea full of glum fish, which were so miserable to eat that they made people belch with melancholy even though the skies were blue” (Rushdie, 2010, p. 9).

I am also looking at *Invisible Cities* (1972) by Italo Calvino, inspired by how the author evokes playfulness, but also a certain melancholy to describe the cities, time and the humanities. These invented dialogues between Marco Polo and Kublai Khan are often unrealistic but yet represent people’s perceptions and desires, as well, his storytelling reveals urban phenomenology, representing its social, political and cultural interpretation:

“In Raissa. life is not happy. People wring their hands as they walk in the streets. curse the crying children, lean on the railings over the river and press their fists to their temples. In the morning you wake from one bad dream, and another begins. At the workbenches were. every moment. you hit your finger with a hammer or prick it with a needle. or over the columns of figures all awry in the ledgers of merchants and bankers. or at the rows of empty glasses on the zinc counters of the wineshops. the bent heads at least conceal the general grim gaze. Inside the houses it is worse. and you do not have to enter to learn this: in the summer the windows resound with quarrels and

broken dishes. And yet, in Raissa, at every moment there is a child in a window who laughs seeing a dog that has jumped on a shed to bite into a piece of polenta dropped by a stonemason..." (Calvino, 1972, p.148)

Considering other references apart from literature, I am also influenced by projects in the context of city planning and development. *If Kids Built a City. Possibilities for Play*, for example, is a collaborative proposal between two institutions, *Trying Together, Playful Pittsburgh Collaborative* and Grable Foundation. They are looking into developing strategies to perceive the space considering the urban development taken into account children's perception, creating cities that are considerate to their needs. The project resulted in a booklet that represents the urban quotidian based on participatory consultation with children, using illustrations and narratives to enhance their understanding of how to build a city "Trains would go up and down, not just forward and backwards. and everyone could draw on the walls" - *If Kids Built a City. Possibilities for Play, in Pittsburgh, PA, 2018*, p. 6).

I am also constantly reviewing Hayahisa Tomiyasu work, TTP (2011), in which the Japanese photographer becomes obsessed by looking out the window to a ping-pong table that has become a set-up for many stories. For five years, he spotted different people, at different times, using the table in all sorts of manners, "...including a sun bed, a laundry counter, a kids' climbing frame, an exercise site, a family lunch spot, a refuge from busy streets, among various other uses – except table tennis" (Mackbooks, 2020).

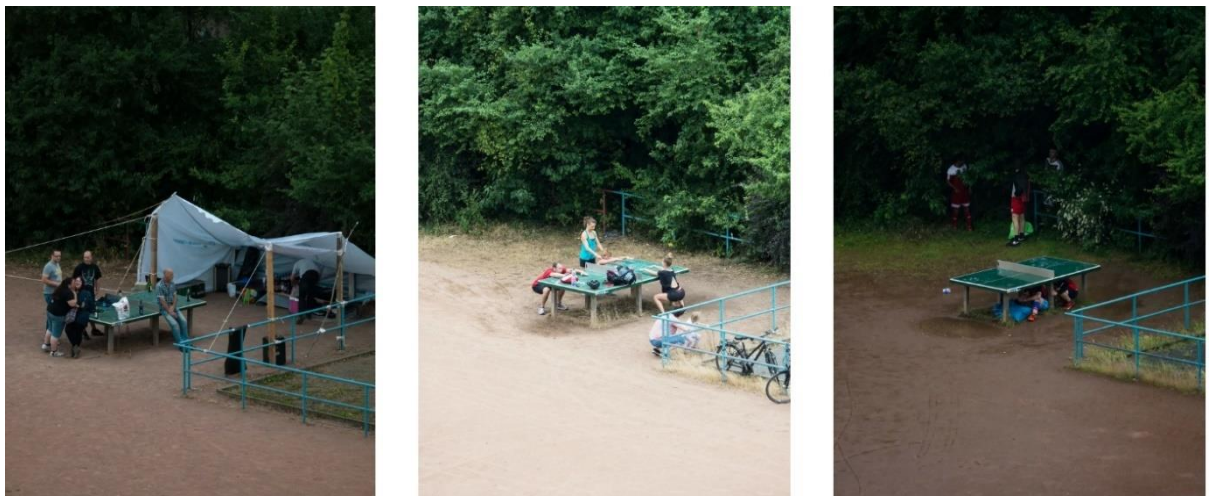


Figure 39 3 images: Hayahisa Tomiyasu, TTP, 2011. Published by We Present, 2019.

Looking into literature, art or even city planning initiatives it helps the narratives to develop creative settings, exceeding the academic perspectives, and, eventually, enhancing an understanding of the space in a more imaginative way.

The communication between illustrations and photography are the main practice that composes the book, a combination of playfulness, reality, and fiction.

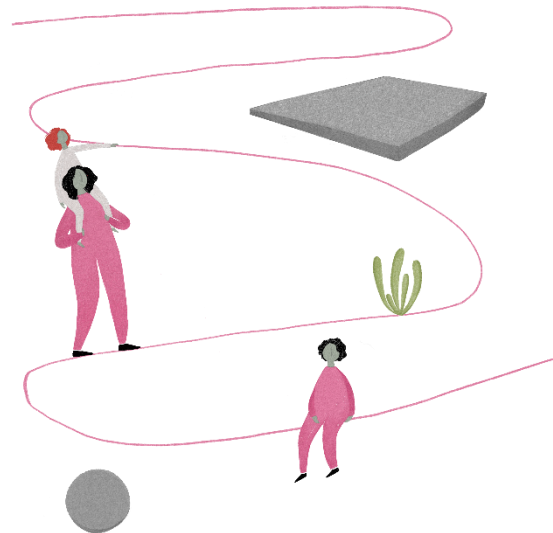


Figure 40 Digital Illustration, 2022.

Text is also explored into the composition of the book. Combined with inspirational quotes from the literature, creative writing from my own perceptions and loose sentences overheard from observations. In time, photographs, text and illustration highlights the figurative elements of the location, exploring forms of narrating and reading public space.

A sense of beginning, yet, I feel like we've met before. A few square meters of a critical stance made out of concrete.
From my window I see everyday life practices. The ones that make up the geography of space, the ones that appeared on my imagination.

Figure 41 Fragment of text, Minimal Narratives Portobello Square, Natalia Panis, 2022

Motivated initially to explore interrelationships between space and people's everyday life practice, at this point the book it also became a way of substantiating an environment where we reliant on: public space.

IV. Erasmus+ Placement Art & Research Collaboration MA: Intersections

During this last year the Erasmus+ Placement have facilitated the development of my practice into an environment of experimentation and interdisciplinary research. I have participated in tutorials, critiques, lectures, and external projects, and also engaged with all the modules that constitute the first year of ARC's program: Art Research; Project Plan; Professional Development; External Collaboration and Production.



Figure 42 Group critique photo register, Natalia Panis, 2022.

ARC is a project-based master's program for those who engage with art thinking and art practices. Its curriculum explores experimental, imaginative and interdisciplinary enquiry into art. The program takes place in IADT Dun Laoghaire campus, at the Lab Gallery in Dublin City Centre and most recently online, due to Covid-19.

In the following subchapters I will highlight the intersections that I consider to be more relevant in terms of the learning outcomes that are immediately related to the research.

IV.I Project Statement: Functional Writing

The program provides inputs to think about our research considering economically sustainable practices, where functional writing plays an important role, from a project statement to source an application for seeking funding.

To further explore the subject the program included a laboratory section, ministered by Seán O'Sullivan writer, curator, and visual arts adviser to the Arts Council of Ireland. At that opportunity we were invited to enunciate our research in an effective communication through written.

Functional writing is a task-based practice that articulates objectives in a set of rule-led challenges and at the same time, it must be original and meet the research propositions. Making simple, but impactful narratives, experimenting with your own writing techniques, and understanding to whom you are speaking were one of the few tips explored by Seán that shifted the way I started to understand my research.

Apart from writing an artist statement and project statement to be published on the ARC website, the laboratory helped me to shift the way I perceive my own project. With self-reflected intersections and intimate perspectives being recurrent in my practice, the writing should reflect that. I immediately started writing in the first person.

Assuming that allowed me to explore the idea that there is a narrator's perspective to be acknowledged. A narrator that alternates description, analysis and their own personal motivations. Looking to speak closely to the reader, and, in time, resound with their thoughts.

IV.II Off-Campus Exhibition: The Narrow Gate of the Here-and-Now, IMMA

Another relevant activity was a day visit to IMMA, Irish Museum of Modern Art. Before engaging with the current exhibition, we were first introduced to the Museum itself. Looking over its installations and understanding the different ways that the Museum engages with both modern and contemporary art, either from its exhibitions, residences or research program. A place to discuss and evaluate ideas.

Through the exploration of the Museum's building, we were introduced to the Exhibition: *The Narrow Gate of the Here-and-Now*. The exhibition showcases the 30 years of history of the Museum, from 1991 to 2021. Divided in four chapters: *Queer*

Embodiment, The Anthropocene, Social Fabric and Protest and Conflict. The exhibition reunites two hundred artworks reflecting the main issues we face in the European context.

Claire Walsh, curator of the chapter *The Anthropocene* and Georgie Thompson, curator of the chapter *Social Fabric*, individually talked us through the exhibition, summarizing the curatorial process and essential insights.



Figure 43 Visit to IMMA Photo register, Natalia Panis, 2022.



Figure 44 Visit to IMMA Photo register, Natalia Panis, 2022.

We are often engaged with our practice and the self-directed motivations that reflect the subject of investigation of our research, while the museum seems to be a platform that enhances the artwork. Over the course of the visit, we were able to reflect the space of the museum as a place for exploration by itself. How does the building, the program, people, materials and even the public become sources to art research and inquiries.

IV.III Project Development: Exhibition

The project of the Zine, described previously, *Minimal Narratives: Portobello Square Zine 1*, was created in the context of the organization of an event, *Prefactory*. Event organized by researchers of the Art & Research Collaboration MA program and their contributors. The event planning took about three weeks, and we literally started by brainstorming our ideas over group meetings and simultaneously drafting the decisions and delegating responsibilities.



Figure 45 Project Development Session register, Natalia Panis, 2022

The organization involved all the research as well as the tutors of the program, but we also had support from an external contributor, Rosie Lynch, creative director of Workhouse Union. Apart from being at the general meeting for the event, Rosie engaged with us in an individual research critique, which I consider a highlight from the internship itself. She has an extensive background with public engagement, connecting to a broader community. Her inputs towards my project were decisive to me to include photography into my work, as she recognized their importance adding a more accurate sense of space to the illustration.

The exhibition had the main purpose of assessing our research through practical activities and displays. Considering strategies to showcase a work that is currently in construction, seeking ways of facilitating public engagement with the research in progress, where the object of investigation is the process itself, more relevant than the object plasticity.

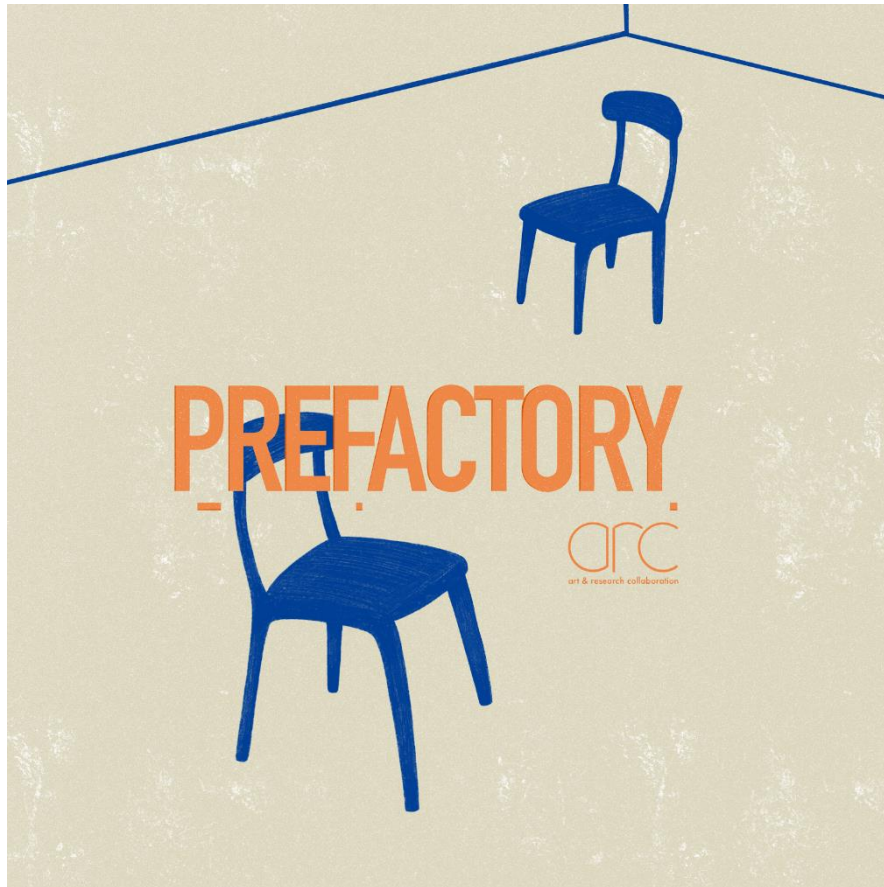


Figure 46 Prefactory marketing image by Natalia Panis, 2022

Fig 52. Prefactory marketing image by Panis, 2022.

Challenged by how to integrate a Zine into the exhibition, the alternative I created was to set up an informal spot at the reception area of the building where the event was taking place. In that way I could approach the public before they enter the exhibition. My words were brief, and it developed by sensing each person's engagement. I would mainly present the general outline of the research and how the Zine incorporates an experimental dimension into the investigation through a practical process of visual communication.



Figure 47 Zine Distribution Set Up: Author 's Photo Archive, 2022

To create a more personalized relationship with the spectator, the zine was wrapped in different options of colored paper band, so I could invite them to pick their color of preference. As simple as that, picking a color became an interesting interaction during the event day. People reacted excitedly about it, and it created a playful dynamic as well a sense of having their subjectivity taken into account as their choice of color would be, somehow, meaningful to them.



Figure 48 Prefactory Event Photo register, Michael Croghan, April 2022.



Figure 49 Prefactory Event Photo register, Michael Croghan, April 2022

The event also pushed the project in different ways of creating strategies such as drafting basic information to be handout at the day, as well as understanding the space and its spatial conditions and limitations, developing ways of communication through different media through graphics and images to promote the event and enhance the attendance.

IV.IV External Collaboration

During the year, I had an opportunity for an external collaboration project, working together with IADT BA Art students in the organization of *Propositions*, a one-day exhibition at IADT Campus that reunites the work in progress of their final year.

This external collaboration allowed me to develop skills on visual communication. Critically reflecting over decisions and criteria, producing methods and techniques appropriate to meet the exhibition plan. I've designed an exhibition guide and graphs elements to resource the spectators with relevant information, including the map of the campus, addressing relevant information, and locating the artwork.

The graph created was a highlight of the process because it allowed me to explore my illustration process, which is often private, into a wider sense. Responding to a specific context in a collaborative process where external inputs are taken into consideration.

The design elements I developed were a synthesis of the exhibition brief. For instance, it was an opportunity to explore the campus and forms of testing and displaying artwork. The geometric elements reflect the campus physical structures, followed by this blue thread that sometimes is tangled, to reflect on the decisions making process, which are not instantly obvious or clear, but quite playful at the same time.

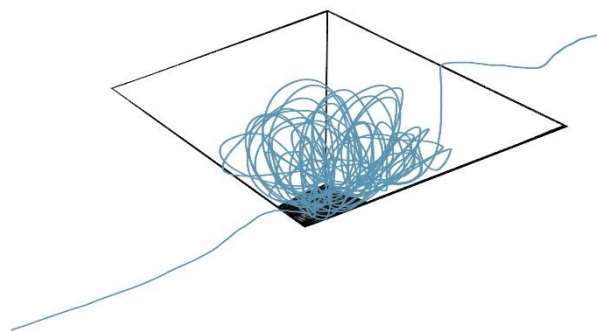


Figure 50 Proposition, digital illustration, Natalia Panis, 2022

PROPOSITIONS

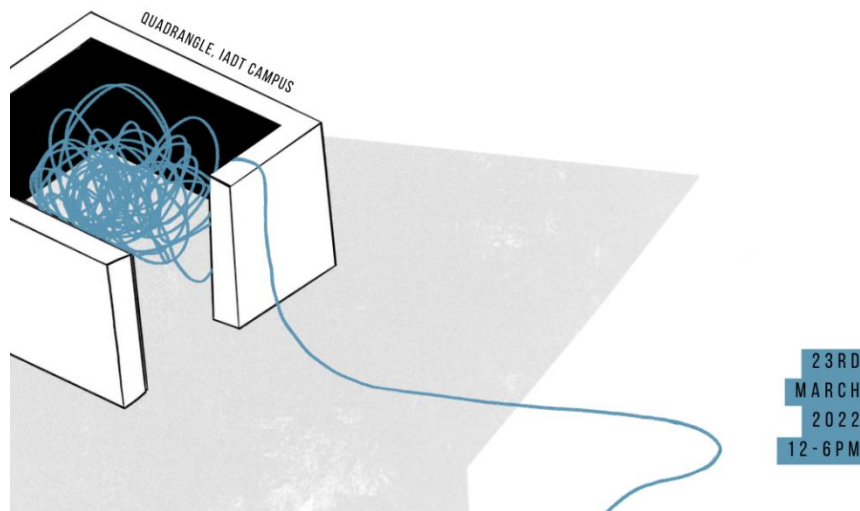


Figure 51 Propositions, marketing image, Natalia Panis, 2022.

Final Considerations

Public space is an important platform where political, cultural, and economic conditions are expressed through ordinary things, driven by the repetition of everyday practices. Investigating it, rather than summarizing all knowledge about the subject, is an invitation to address the possibility of creating and sustaining subjective views.

My concern was never to forge an impossible place, exciting and full of unexpected phenomenon, but to try reading the poetry of quotidian, constantly being written through experiences, spatial and social interactions that makes the geography of space. Therefore, to create a sense of consciousness of the environment.

Exploring space by looking at strangers, observing their identities, their bodies, their directions, and their sounds became a recurrent practice. Although the physical distance between us was never significative, there was always a detach. Perhaps if I

have explored forms of interactions the outcomes of this project would be different, but I couldn't dare to disrupt my personal space and be vulnerable.

The experience of Erasmus+ Placement played an important role along the project development. I was able to contribute to the research work carried out in partnership with the LAB gallery at Dublin City Arts Office engaged with ARC learning outcomes of art thinking and art practices. Enhancing my practical skills in art research project development.

I also attended the modules which was both relevant to my educational and professional development, an important process of improving my knowledge in integrating theory and practice into my self-directed project, engaging with critical reflections and creative practices, implementing methods of production, testing, and exhibiting.

Furthermore, still in the context of the Erasmus Placement, this research will be developed into an exhibition proposal to be submitted in September, that is going to integrate the group show exhibition in January 2023 at The Lab Gallery, as part of the Major Project module from the second academic year of ARC program.

At this stage my proposal entitled "The fabrication of public space" is a metaphor for space as an outcome of many contributing currents, constantly being made, being fabricated. Using a thread to connect an Illustration to photography, exploring storytelling strategies, my objective is to assemble a patchwork of everyday practices.

It consists in two A3 framed images: The first image is a black and white photo of an old lady walking two dogs. The second image is an illustration of a child, wearing a pink jumper in which the thread is coming off. The images are to be placed together, side by side, by eye level. The pink thread is going to be represented by an actual textile intervention, using a pink-coloured thread embroidered on paper. I'm considering leaving part of the thread loose, hanging from the frame until - possibly - the floor.

Minimal Narratives: the fabric of public space is ongoing research, a form of approach reality of the public spaces enriched by imagination and subjectiveness that are not, for instance, visible or tangible in the space. Drawing and writing appeals to its own language and contains the time of its own making, photography, yet, is an instantaneous capture of things, but all, essentially consists our worldview of space, all it takes is the will to perceive it.

A3



A3



Figure 52 Proposal sketch, Natalia Panis, 2022.

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