



Critical
Approaches
to Arts-based
Research

Volume 5
Issue 1
2015

UNESCO
Observatory
Multi-disciplinary
Journal in
the Arts

UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts

Volume 5 | Issue 1 | 2015

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ISSN 1835 - 2776

Published in Australia

Published by
The UNESCO Observatory Melbourne
<http://unescomelb.org>

In conjunction with
The University of Melbourne,
Parkville, Victoria 3010.

UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts

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ABOUT THE E-JOURNAL

The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

Critical Approaches to Arts-Based Research

Guest Editors

Anne Harris

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THEME

Arts based research (ABR), its products, processes and critical theorising have come a long way in recent times. Nuanced distinctions indicate the development of the field, as arts-informed research, arts-based research, practice-led research, applied research, and creative participatory action research all claim different relationships with the art and criticality present in such innovative scholarship. Finally, it seems, we are moving away from a defensive stance regarding arts based research and its 'validity', and toward a celebration of this proliferation of diverse ways of knowing, theorising and doing research. This 'coming of age' is evident in this special issue, which urges readers to move beyond binarised notions of scientific 'versus' arts based research that still at times dominates academic research environments and conversations, and outmoded practice/theory divides. For we co-editors and for the authors here, theorising is indeed a creative practice, and goes hand-in-hand with the epistemological and ontological potential of arts-making methods. This issue celebrates the opening of new doors in theorising innovative arts based research from a range of global contexts, theoretical and epistemological frameworks, and inter/disciplines. We avoid any attempt to codify or limit the parameters of what contemporary arts based research is or can be. Indeed, we seek the opposite: to highlight its ever-expanding possibilities.

The essays here aim to encourage critical analysis and dialogue about the objects and subjects of arts based research for contemporary times, poststructuralist, posthuman and other critical approaches to arts based research, and the interdisciplinary application of performative and practice-led research in transferable methodological models. We are pleased to be able to include digital assets with many of the articles in this special issue. Indeed, the layered and multimodal complexity of arts based 'outputs' or artefacts is one of its rich distinguishing features, and it requires commitment from editors and publishers to not always demand a 'reduction' back into text-based forms, a diminishment of many forms of ABR. For this we thank the UNESCO editorial and production team, and hope you enjoy this contribution to the critical development of the arts based research field.

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Making Gothic: A/r/tographic attempts to integrate theory and practice

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ABSTRACT

Teaching theoretical subjects within the creative curriculum is a challenge for educators, with many students reluctant to engage with text-based disciplines which they see having little or no relevance to their studio practice. For the last three years I have carried out a/r/tographic research with fine art students in the context of a Gothic seminar series in order to straddle this divide between theory and practice, and to re-invigorate theory by placing it in a practical context.

My proposed research will build especially on work by Feinstein (2005) and Sederholm (2005) who have explored alternative and participative methods of teaching Gothic literature. However, there has been no significant work carried out in relation to the use of participative and practice-based pedagogies in teaching the Gothic within the fine art curriculum; it is this gap that my research hopes to address, both in terms of investigating how students learn through participative work and to outline

a possible model of practice in teaching the Gothic in the fine arts curriculum.

The central hypothesis of this proposal is therefore a research and practice-based enquiry into the use of practice-based pedagogies in teaching the Gothic in the fine art curriculum. This is illustrated using collaborative work carried out by art collective 'Gothicise' and the use of online curated exhibitions of Gothic art work.

KEY WORDS

a/r/tography, Gothic, fine art, art-based research, pedagogy

BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Tracy Fahey is Head of Department in Fine Art and Head of Centre of Postgraduate Studies in Limerick School of Art and Design, LIT. She has previously worked as Head of Department of Humanities, IT Carlow and Head of Faculty of Design, Griffith College Dublin. She currently sits on the Board of Directors of the Limerick Printmakers, and is a member of the advisory boards of the Centre for Research in Popular Culture, AUT, Auckland and the Centre for Studies in Otherness, Denmark. In 2013 she established the LSAD research centre *ACADEmy* (Art, Curatorial, Applied Design & Education research centre) which currently runs a Creative Europe project in printmaking. Together with Prof. Brien (Central Queensland University, Australia) she is co-convenor of *CAIRN*, the Creative Australasian Irish Research Network (2013).

Her main area of research is Irish Gothic and the Gothic nature of domestic space. She has published chapters on this subject in *Living Gothic: Histories, Practices and Legacies* (Palgrave), *The Gothic Compass: New Directions in Scholarship and Inquiry* (Routledge), *International Gothic in the Neo-Liberal Age* (Manchester University Press) and *Imagining Irish Suburbia* (Cork University Press). She

has also published in the areas of medical Gothic, transgressive art, contemporary Gothic art, design education, pedagogy, contemporary design practice and sustainable design. She is a founder member of the Gothic Association of New Zealand and Australia (2013) and the Irish Network for Gothic Scholars (2013). In 2010 she founded the collaborative fine art practice, Gothicise, who work on site-specific projects related to ideas of site, traces and narrative and who have received Grants Under The Arts funding for their projects *Waking St. Munchin* (2014) and *Death Café Limerick* (2015). She also writes short fiction that focuses on folklore and the uncanny, and is published in thirteen UK and US anthologies.

“The Gothic has always been a barometer of the anxieties plaguing a certain culture at a particular moment in history” (Bruhm 1999, p. 260).

Teaching theoretical subjects within the creative curriculum is a challenge for educators, with many students reluctant to engage with text-based disciplines which they see having little or no relevance to their studio practice. In most art schools today, lectures in theoretical disciplines such as art history, contextual studies, complementary studies or critical theory exist as a separate entity to studio work in the creative curriculum. Since 2010 I have carried out a/r/tographic research with third year fine art undergraduate students in the context of a Gothic seminar series which forms part of their critical and contextual studies modules. Through teaching this seminar I have tried to both straddle this divide between theory and practice, and to re-invigorate theory by placing it in a practical context. This study illustrates and evaluates these efforts. The article will be constructed in a roughly chronological fashion, as this a/r/tographic component to the programme was built up incrementally, from iterative experimentation, reflection and alteration. It will focus on two main course components – an assignment on making Gothic artefacts and contextualising them which eventually resulted in online curated exhibitions of Gothic artwork, and a site-specific group project illustrated using collaborative work carried out by art collective Gothicise.

This article will build on the theoretical bases of art-based research (Eisner 2006) and a/r/tography (Irwin 2004, Springgay, Irwin & Wilson Kind 2005). It views a/r/tography itself as a Gothic, liminal concept; it considers a/r/tography to operate in an in-between state, between the three roles of artist, researcher and teacher and what arises from their interplay (Irwin & Springgay 2008). It examines how artists/researchers/teachers focus “attention on the in-between where meanings reside in the simultaneous use of language, images, materials, situations, space and time”, and where they evolve “[T]he circumstances that produce knowledge and understanding through artistic and educational inquiry laden processes” (Irwin & Springgay 2008, p. xix-xxvi). It is also based in part on pedagogical research carried out by Feinstein (2003), Morreale (2003) and Sederholm (2005) who have explored alternative and participative methods of teaching Gothic literature. However, there has been no significant work carried out in relation to the use of participative and practice-based pedagogies in *teaching the Gothic within the fine art curriculum*. It is this gap that my research hopes to address, both in terms of investigating how students learn through participative work and to outline a possible model of practice in teaching the Gothic within this context. The central spine of this article is a reflection on the effectiveness of practice-based pedagogies in teaching the Gothic in the fine art curriculum. It is informed not only by debates on research, pedagogy and a/r/tography, but also by primary research carried out with students. This article also seeks to evaluate the contribution this study makes towards fine art teaching, and teaching the Gothic.

GOTHIC IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE 2010–2012

Firstly, some background information on the context of this article. In 2010 I devised a seminar class for third year fine art undergraduate students at Limerick School of Art and Design in Limerick, Ireland - ‘Gothic in Contemporary Culture’. This

class was designed for students (as the course description made clear) with a desire to understand the context of Gothic, within modern culture and within their chosen medium of fine art practice. Gothic, for our purposes, I have defined here broadly as the study of the Other, the marginal, the liminal and the in-between. I wanted to ensure students on this seminar programme developed an integrated approach to theory and practice that would lead to both to informed making, and to the formation of theoretically sound artist statements.

As an active Gothic researcher and founder of art collective Gothicise (www.gothicise.weebly.com), I was curious to explore any a/r/tographic possibilities, where my roles as artist, researcher and teacher would intersect and cross-pollinate. The term 'culture' in the seminar programme title was important to ensure that the programme spanned a wider remit than merely fine art context – as Hennelly states “In the spirit of eternal return, perhaps cultural studies establish the most contemporary relevance and continuance of the Gothic” (Hennelly 2001, p. 84). Equal care was given to the composition of the course. Providing a clear context for the subject matter was important; I devised thematic classes based around contemporary Gothic in the contexts of gender, media, space, experience as well as an introduction to the common Gothic tropes of the monster, the uncanny, the vampire, the haunted house, the zombie. I also wanted to incorporate guest lecturers, as 'expert learners' (Glaser 1990) who would give students specialised knowledge, and visiting artists who students would relate to from their own position as 'peripheral practitioners' (Lave & Wenger 1991) in the fine art community.

To create a forum for information and interaction, I set up a designate web-site for the programme, which can be viewed at www.gothiccontemporary.weebly.com. I also included several activities – a reading group, a psychogeographic tour of the city of Limerick and creative workshops. These teaching and learning strategies were based on my own previous research

constructing a curriculum in a creative context (Fahey 2003) and best practice of working with active learners who respond best to activity-based learning (Bonwell & Eison 1991). In this I was also influenced by Feinstein (2003) who shapes her Gothic literature classes in Southwestern College, Kansas on the scientific model of lab-work and field-work.

My final component in designing the course was to ask the students who had signed up to participate in a simple, open questionnaire that asked them what they expected of this seminar programme (Appendix 1). The results were revealing. Later iterations of this questionnaire with seminar groups in 2011 and 2012 also yielded broadly the same results. Students were responsive to this three-question questionnaire, which asked three simple questions – “I chose this seminar because...”, “My interest in the Gothic is...” and “What I hope to get out of this course is...” The answers to the last question were particularly revealing. Firstly, they wanted to inform their own studio practice. Looking at sample responses from the 2010 class of fourteen students this is clear– “Much of my work is Gothic-influenced, so I’m hoping this class gives me more inspiration, ideas and knowledge in this area”, “I would like to have a better understanding of Gothic art and different artists dealing in this area as I want to bring different aspects into my personal work”, “I hope to find out more about the subject of the Gothic during the course of the seminar and maybe use the information in my studio practice”, “I am really hoping to use what I learn in these lectures to improve my studio work” and “I feel the Gothic runs across most aspects of printmaking, making this seminar useful to my studio work and research.”

These responses emphasise the relevance of the Gothic to contemporary practice; as Williams comments - “The Gothic remains, in sum, as an enduring term particularly serviceable in times of crisis – today as it did in the late 18th century, as an escape valve for the political, artistic and technological crises underway” (Williams 2007, p. 19). It was therefore important

that the students viewed this class as *integrated with* their studio work and not as a distinct and separate body of knowledge. In this I was considering Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of knowledge construction through legitimate peripheral participation. For them "[A] community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge"; knowledge is what learners acquire in order "to move towards full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community" (Lave & Wenger 1991, p. 98). As an artist/researcher/teacher I had the opportunity to help students acquire knowledge by expanding the basic relationship of teacher/student to a more complex one of artist/emerging artist or researcher/developing researcher. This process also ties in with Glaser's (1990) notions of expert learning, and how it functions in an educational context.

For the initial 'Gothic in Contemporary Culture' class in 2010, I constructed a practical component, in order that theory and making could be associated through an activity. I therefore devised a final project which required students to engage with both theoretical and practical aspects of their work. The assignment asked them to take a suitable piece from their active studio practice and to contextualise it in the Gothic tradition through an oral presentation. Oral presentations have previously been used successfully by Feinsten (2003), Wellington (2003) and Sederholm (2005) in teaching a Gothic class. The students participated in this practical project with enthusiasm and produced interesting pieces of work based on themes as diverse as artificial life, body modification, gender fluidity, blood, phenomenology and fairy-tales. As part of the presentations, I asked students to fill in peer review forms, after a discussion about the parameters of these forms (objective criticism only, no personal attacks, mandatory courtesy) which were then immediately available to the students. These feedback forms were not part of the summative evaluation but provided constructive praise and criticism from their peers. During the feedback session in January 2011, four students

told me how they had continued making work along Gothic themes in their studio practice. The students' new confidence in positioning themselves as Gothic practitioners consolidated my determination to ensure that the next iteration of the seminar programme would develop and encourage students to further consider themselves part of the Gothic 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger 1991) in fine art.

Therefore, in 2011, I used the a/r/tographic model, situating myself as artist-curator in relation to the students as artists, and asked the students not only to develop a piece of work along the broad theme of the Gothic but to also write a short catalogue essay about their work in the third person. Using this form allowed students to objectively evaluate their work in relation to that of prominent practitioners in the field. The students chose the title and theme of the exhibition, '*the dark arts*', and I then curated the exhibits together in the form of a simple catalogue and in online gallery on the class web-site. For an example of this work see Kathleen Bartlett's 'Battleground' (Fig. 1), a striking piece based on notions of connection, abjection and mourning rituals. Individual images of the student work are available on the seminar web-site www.gothiccontemporary.weebly.com, at the direct link <http://gothiccontemporary.weebly.com/gallery-2011.html> . The catalogue including an introduction and the individual student essays is also available to download directly from this site.

I did not ask the students to evaluate this specific assignment as part of the course review forms (Appendix 2), but students commented on the fruits of this experience when completing the open statement, '*What I learned about my own practice and its relationship to the Gothic was...*' Students concluded this phrase with the following comments: "That my work is actually quite Gothic in nature, not something I had realised before", "That I do tend to have a Gothic theme subconsciously in my work", "That there have always been elements of the Gothic in my work, however I was unaware of it" and "It helped me to rationalise

my own work in that I had been unwittingly depicting a lot of Gothic themes.” From my perspective as artist/teacher/researcher, this insight they brought to their own practice was an interesting and revealing experience.

Figure 1
Battleground
(2011) Kathleen
Bartlett.
(Photograph:
Kathleen
Bartlett, 2011)



At the beginning of the 2012 seminar class, students could access the 2011 catalogue online before taking the class, which impressed upon them from the start that this seminar class was going to form part of their development as fine artists. The 2011 show had covered many themes: “loss, mourning, remains, gaps, identity, dystopian imaginings, body vulnerability” (Fahey 2011b, p. 1). However, with this 2012 iteration of the assignment, I wanted to bring the experience of the curated show closer to reality. I gave the students a particular theme and challenge – to relate their work to the broad topic of ‘text into art’ within the canon of the Gothic. This challenged students to read and respond to a Gothic text of their choosing, thereby ensuring their engagement with Gothic works. In fact, it was a direct

ploy to encourage students to read works of fiction and theory, as Gothic visual culture is intimately connected with literature, from the Neo-Gothic revival onwards. Again, the results of this project can be viewed at www.gothiccontemporary.weebly.com or by going to the direct link, <http://gothiccontemporary.weebly.com/gallery-2012.html>. This tighter curatorial rein brought this assignment a sense of ‘real’ participation in a community of practice; one of the key functions of my a/r/tographic role in facilitating a learning environment for the students.

DEVELOPING AN IDENTITY AS GOTHIC ARTISTS

However, this assignment presentation (which I had seen as the most important and crowning aspect of the course) was soon eclipsed by an exciting and unanticipated development. This was the bond that the class began to form outside the classroom, inspired by their own sense of themselves as a group of Gothic artists. Once the preliminary lectures had been delivered, the activity-based structure of the class began to create an informal and discursive environment. Shared events created a bond and the use of varying sites stimulated the discussions. Thus the psychogeographic walking tour was followed by an impromptu coffee and a chat about local Gothic stories. The scheduled meeting of the reading group became a party; we met in the dark basement of a local pub, the students dressed in black, we read our chosen texts by candlelight. Inspired by one student’s original contribution of a family banshee story, we followed this with a ghost-story telling session. For Hallowe’en four of the students banded together to create a composite reel of digital video of Gothic art for the local Limerick Printmakers’ Costume Ball. This collegiate atmosphere led inevitably to a greater sense of freedom and democracy among the class, something also experienced by Jan Wellington in her article, “Learning to Transgress: Embedded Pedagogies of the Gothic”, where she

describes the breaking down of student-teacher barriers due to the radical nature of the subject matter;

While we remained aware that we were playing roles, our play was liberating gradually, my Gothic course was slouching toward something like democracy, and I savoured the development with guilty pleasure (Wellington 1991, p. 174).

The study of the Gothic might appear as a solitary and melancholy business, pondering the nature of otherness. However, as a modern manifestation in theory and culture it has roots in 1970's underground culture. Since then, those who share an interest in Gothic music, film, fashion and art, tend to group together to form a subculture of shared ideas and interests. Writers on the Gothic as a sub-cultural phenomenon have included Hodkinson (2002), Goodlad (2007), Voltaire (2004) and Kilpatrick (2004). Indeed, many of my students from 2010-2012 self-identified in their initial class survey forms as active participants in this sub-culture: "I am obsessed with learning as much about Gothic culture as possible... it leads into my interest in my personal Gothic identity", "I have always been outside of mainstream culture. Since a very early age, I've been interested in 'Gothic' themes. I collected skulls, visited ruins etc... I have always been inclined toward Gothic fashion, music etc.", "I was a goth in my teenage years, still have a fondness for it. Anne Rice novels, Neil Gaiman, velvet, black lace. It's something I find interesting and beautiful." On completion of the class at the end of the first semester, I held a feedback class in January 2011 where I distributed assignment feedback sheets (Appendix 2) and asked students to evaluate the class.

INTEGRATING STAFF-LED PROJECTS: GOTHICISE

During this feedback session it became obvious that the students' interest in their own development as Gothic artists

was unabated. One student approached me to, as she put it, “find out what we were doing next.” The obvious answer was that ‘we’ as an entity no longer existed; the class was now over, all of the credits had been attained. However, when others joined in to signify their interest, I mentioned a project that Gothicise, the art collective I had set up, had been asked to work on as part of the Catherine Street Cultural Dig scheduled for May 2011, and presented them the opportunity to become involved. I should point out here that there was a strong precedent for this offer; staff-led projects form part of the teaching and learning methodologies used in the Limerick School of Art and Design. There was also an evidentiary reason for this proposal. During the course of the seminar series, I discovered that it was not enough for my artist role within a/r/tography to play the curator; students also valued the input of teacher as artist.

Over the course of the programme, I discovered how highly the students prized expert knowledge as evidenced by the comments of the class of 2010 when asked to evaluate one of the guest lecturers, Irish Gothic artist and lecturer Aideen Barry:

“Very interesting”, “It was great to listen to Aideen talk about her work as she is one of my tutors”, “Really interesting, loved seeing Gothic in media and art works”, “Fantastic and very relevant to the course. I also thought the timing of the lectures worked very, very well – timing in relation to the course” and “It was good to get another opinion on the topics as well as a sort of behind the scenes look into Aideen’s practice.” Glaser defines expertise as “proficiency taken to its highest level” which can be “used to foster the novices’ progress and, perhaps, to expand the proficiency of the experts themselves” (Glaser 1990, p. 88).

The fact that practicing artists possess expert and specific knowledge is undeniable. The fact that students benefit from the expertise in terms of motivation, insight and admission to the community of practice is equally undeniable. The student comments offered clear evidence of their desire to learn from

experts in their fine art community of practice and to absorb valuable information from listening to them discuss their work. This raised some interesting questions: *How much more could they learn by actually working with an artist? What other lessons could be learned about making work, group working, and collaborative practice?* The next logical step was to involve the students in a group project with my art collective, Gothicise, where I could exercise my triple role as artist/researcher/teacher to facilitate experiences, teach and reflect on lessons learned.

Gothicise, founded by myself as principal director in Limerick in 2010 “adheres to principles of social engagement and is informed by Gothic theory. The membership is a floating membership, dictated by the projects engaged in. Gothicise attempts to make the local universal, through investigating Gothic themes through regional contexts. Gothicise makes myths, artworks, writes and curates experiences using Gothic tropes and themes as a way of exploring the otherness of site, history and experience” (www.gothicise.weebly.com). The creation of Gothicise was activated by my move to Limerick in 2009 and the discovery of like-minded collaborators. I was inspired by the city’s rich cultural, literary and military history; a truly Gothic location. The first Gothicise project had taken place in 2010 – ‘ghostwalk/ghosttalk’ – a collaborative art event where the newly formed art collective dug down into the rich tradition of local legends, the historical and mythic value of the buildings and landmarks and related them through the old Limerick practice of storytelling. Twelve of the fourteen students expressed an interest in becoming involved in this new Gothicise project, and in working as collaborative artists. Within this project I worked as creative director, devising the broad parameters of this project, co-coordinating the individual work and devising ‘umbrella projects’ to draw the activities together into an intelligible whole. My roles of artist, teacher and researcher combined to help, instruct and reflect on all aspects of the project.

Over the weeks that followed, through structured meetings, discussions and e-mails, *'The Double Life of Catherine Street'* came into being. This engagement with local sites was not accidental. When asked to rank where the most significant learning had occurred, the students cited the structured activities engaged in by the group. Of the activities, the psychogeographic tour proved to be the most highly valued activity, with students evidencing a real enthusiasm for encountering Gothic sites and stories in a local and familiar context. This meant that students could build on the basic knowledge gleaned from the psychogeographical tour to further investigate instances and locations of local Gothic stories. Irish Gothic, while conforming to certain aspects of global Gothic is quite specific and often regional in flavour. It tends to derive, especially in the countryside and rural town, from earlier folktales and legends that cling to local sites and to stories as they are told and re-told. I therefore felt it important to encourage the students to see Limerick as a Gothic location, with its strange past and eerie legends; and to view it as a laboratory they are privileged to access. As Feinstein wryly remarks "If, in a town of 10,000 founded in late 19th century Kansas, it is possible to find 'Gothic' locations, then, I suspect, few places would have difficulty doing the same" (Feinstein 2003, p. 236).

"The name itself [The Double Life of Catherine Street] referred to the Gothic notion of the Other, the doppelganger... It was important to the group to reinterpret the spaces on Catherine Street as unheimlich or uncanny in order to create a sense of dislocation, of the familiar grown unfamiliar. In order to stay faithful to the historical roots of the street, a principle was agreed that each invented story would have an element of truth" (Fahey 2011a).

From the large group of collaborators, several sub-groups emerged, each of these creating a different participative myth for this dark doppelganger of the street. I have highlighted two of these projects in this article, but the interested reader can

learn more about the others by browsing the project web-site at www.doublelifeofcatherinestreet.weebly.com.

‘The Magic Bush’ project played with notions of Irish holy wells, curses and local lore, by creating a local legend that to take leaves from the existing bush on Catherine Street would bring bad luck, but to give stories to the bush would bring good luck. Throughout the May weekend of the Catherine Street Dig, the *soi-disant* Magic Bush attracted a steady litany of stories, memories, jokes and petitions (see Fig. 2).

Figure 2
The Double Life of Catherine Street (2011) Gothicise. Local residents participate in The Magic Bush project. (Photograph: Tracy Fahey, 2011)



Similarly, ‘The Masked Ball of Catherine Street’ combined ideas of the carnivalesque with faked tradition to create a contemporary antecedent of an imaginary masked ball. Participants donned masks and danced to a waltz piped onto the street to create a strange and unforgettable spectacle (see Fig. 3)

Figure 3
The Double Life
of Catherine
Street (2011)
Gothicise.
Students, artists
and locals join
in the Masked
Balls flash mob.
(Photograph:
Bock the
Robber, 2011)



This a/r/tographic project provided a valuable reflective experience. As an artist, working with other artists, this had been a deeply satisfying project, where six myths had been successfully established, and an alternative history of the street created and commemorated in a fictive newspaper gazette, plaques and even a guided tour of the new, imaginary terrain. Public reaction had been enthusiastic and participative. The students had also been exposed to the wider world of social practice in fine art; explaining, negotiating, collaborating:

Working with the traders in evolving a shared system of signification; the plaques, the Gazette, the flash-mob, the display of masks in the boutiques, the launch of the film, the guided tour, was an exercise in collaborative myth-making, involving co-creators from outside the art college sphere. This led to additional learning from the different communities of practice working together, and helped foster a new sense of identity in the working group that emerged (Fahey 2011b).

This project saw students begin “to move towards full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community” (Lave & Wenger 1991, p. 29). As a mature practitioner I had acted as a facilitator for this process of acquiring knowledge by instilling in students “an increasing understanding of what old-timers collaborate, collude and collide” (Lave & Wenger 1991, p. 95).

In terms of my role as teacher, I had built on the students’ positive experience of local Gothic sites and stories during the seminar series by continuing to use the city as a learning lab to experience Gothic as a local phenomenon. I had also facilitated the students on the project to continue and strengthen their bond first forged during the Gothic seminars. From the researcher’s point of view, the project provided valuable insights into collaborative Gothic fine art practice. However, in such projects, roles may come together, but may also pose a conflict which has to be resolved. As an artist the ‘*Double Life*’ project was of paramount importance; its performance, its completion, its dissemination. As a researcher I was concerned with documenting and reflecting on the experience. However, as a teacher, my primary goal was the experiential learning of the student. The timing of the project during the second semester meant that it coincided and intruded on the time students had set aside for their final third year projects (with the exception of two students who cannily re-used their *Double Life* projects as studio projects). Despite this, overall the experience had been so positive that I decided that the next iteration of the Gothic in Contemporary Culture seminar class would have the option of an accredited a/r/tographic project as an initial assignment, which would also allow me to evaluate the experience in a more rounded way, using other modes of appraisal including student feedback.

The following class of 2011 were therefore presented with an elective option to take part in another Gothicise project, ‘*A Haunting*’, a project commissioned by Limerick City Council

(see Fig. 3). *A Haunting* (2011) is a simulacrum, a deliberately artificial recreation; the name is a nod to Robert Graves' short story 'A Haunting', based in Limerick. This was a day-and-night-long festival in a Victorian park that dealt with the idea of the inevitable return of the past within the Gothic tradition. *A Haunting* played with ideas of social memory as constituted through commemorative ceremonies and bodily rites (Connerton 1989) and re-enacted through photography, dance, song, walks and other activities. This was a huge project, so large that I appointed a co-creative director, Irish artist Aoife Cox, in order to manage the process. It involved working with the Council, the Civic Trust, park-keepers, tour guides, artists, singers, dancers, quilters, photographers, film-makers, a bus driver and a variety of equipment including a generator, amplifiers and even a smoke machine. The project scale may be seen on the dedicated web-site www.ahaunting.weebly.com where readers can trace the path of the day, read about the events, and listen to the music composed as a soundtrack for the evening projections of Victorian photographs in the park. As with 'The *Double Life of Catherine Street*', the six students who chose the option of the a/t/tographic project were asked to choose and perform specific roles relating to concept, performance, and co-ordination of events. During this period, students were also asked to keep reflective diaries to consider the project and their role within it, and were marked as a combination of a participatory mark and a reflective diary mark. Students were encouraged to research the history of the park and of its Victorian past in order to appreciate the sublimely Gothic location of the project within this historic city (see Fig. 4).

Figure 4
A Haunting
(2011) Gothicise
Photograph: Press
22, 2011, with
thanks to Limerick
City Council



When this project had been successfully completed, I began to evaluate it, as an artist/researcher/teacher. As an artist, *A Haunting* had been an unqualified success; over a thousand people turned up to participate in the activities of the day, and our client Limerick City Council was delighted. As a researcher, the scale of the project and its large-scale engagement with the local community offered fascinating insights into collaborative working and also into possible ways to treat Gothic tropes of memory, nostalgia and re-creation in site-specific practice. As a teacher, my evaluation was mixed. On one level, the project had been successful in facilitating learning. In their reflective diaries kept during the project the six students had written anecdotally of what they had learned in terms of local history, experience of social engagement, collaborative working and working on a large scale project. There was a consistent use of action verbs in their reflective diaries when they spoke of learning, and they

cited specific examples of how they had achieved goals in project organisation, overcome problems with equipment or scheduling, made contacts and friends outside their circle through working with other creative personnel and interacting with the general public on the day. Their experiences were uniformly positive, several describing it as ‘exciting’, ‘engrossing’, ‘terrifying but a lot of fun.’ However, there were some problems with using this project as an educational project. Firstly, the project was scheduled at too early a stage in the curriculum, before students had a chance to sample any experience of collaborative work, and before the bonds of the group had been forged through a series of activities. Secondly, in order to participate in the project, students had to be free on the scheduled weekend of the event; due to the requirements of part-time jobs, some students were automatically excluded from the project. Thirdly, the project had proved too large-scale and too intimidating for some students. These factors led to a smaller take-up than anticipated in spite of a willingness to get involved, several students declaring on their final feedback sheets that they would have liked to have been involved.

During the third a/r/tographic project I decided to let the students experience a small-scale project early in the curriculum to dispense with any fear of engaging in a complex or daunting project. Again, students were given the option to participate in this. The brief was a simple one, to work as a group in conjunction with *Outbreak!* (an annual Limerick Zombie Festival) and to produce participative Gothic work or a Gothic event. This work was to be accompanied by a short reflective diary on the process and ideas behind the project. Six students initially elected to take this option, one student dropping out two weeks later. This time I had decided not to run this as an official Gothicise project, to take a back seat, and let the group direct the project. I contacted the *Outbreak!* organiser to introduce the group, instigated a discussion of possible themes and facilitated their first meeting. However, I had not anticipated the degree

to which the student group would require guidance. I found myself moving from an observational role to an instructional one. It would seem that although a/r/tography itself is an open-ended and rhizomatic discipline (Irwin et al. 2006), a/r/tographic projects need to be tightly structured and directed in order to students to benefit from the experience. After an initial shaky start, the participative project, now titled ‘*Zombi€, Dawn of the Dead Economy*’, began to gain momentum. The project related to the 2008 economic crisis that had dominated Irish society, politics and culture, and which has been highlighted in the work of Irish artists Antony Haughey, Aideen Barry, Elaine Reynolds and Jennifer Haughton and Irish filmmakers Eamon Crudden and Paddy Baxter.

As part of the culture of protest they were celebrating, the group wrote a manifesto which outlined their response to the role of the banking sector in precipitating the economic crisis.

The zombie is a perfect metaphor for modern Irish life and works on a number of levels. We are constantly confronted by mysterious, unstoppable, uncontrollable forces (financial, political, real estate, college fees) and yet we are encouraged to practice a mindless, insatiable consumption – for the good of the economy, of course (Ashford et al. 2012, p. 1).

The manifesto identified a lot of the students with the fate of the zombie:

Zombies are tortured souls, forced to exist in a way they don't want to. Similarly, we as students are at the mercy of the Irish government. It is up to them whether or not we receive funding to study and many of us live in fear of our education being cut short due to further budget cuts (Ashford et al. 2012, p. 2).

The apogee of the project was a site-specific performance at the beginning of the *Outbreak!* zombie walk in Limerick, where the students dressed up as protesting zombies with placards,

a grim, hanging figure of a banker swinging from a tree behind them (see Fig. 5). The student manifesto – and the zombie-students onsite - urged onlookers to “tear apart and feast on the fatty innards of our financial tyrant” (Ashford et al. 2012, p. 2) as embodied in the effigy of the banker. This was the cue for much frenetic activity as the ‘body’ was obediently torn apart by people attired as zombies, who had assembled for the annual *Outbreak!* walk.

Figure 5
Zombi€, Dawn of the Dead Economy (2012)
'Gothic In Contemporary Culture' seminar class of 2012
(Photograph: by justshootme.ie, 2012)



It was an interesting investigation into what happens when control of a project is handed over to students; however, with the additional responsibility of organisation, their reflective diaries were much more descriptive of the work involved, than reflective on the project itself. Despite some truly heroic work in terms of assembling the project, it would have benefited from more of a staff-led approach, or at least from more instructional seminars on project co-ordination. As always, from an a/r/tographic stance, this was a fascinating experiment, providing rich learning for all involved. In fact, during the coming academic sessions, I expect to again run a participative project under the banner of Gothicise, 'Waking St. Munchin', an investigation into local legend, traditional Limerick stories and the Irish tradition

of waking the dead, but this time it will be a wider project focusing on developing systems to run collaborative work with others. This should lend the project additional educational value by facilitating ways of working and hence the potential learning experience for students.

REFLECTIONS ON THE VALUE OF THE A/R/ TOGRAPHIC APPROACH

In reflecting on my experiments in teaching and learning carried out from 2010 to 2012, I can draw some initial conclusions about the effectiveness of these experiments, and point out some possible contributions which this study could make towards the field of a/r/tography, pedagogy of fine art and pedagogy of the Gothic. Broadly speaking, from my own research and my student evaluations, I am convinced of the relevance of practice-based pedagogies in teaching a theory class within the fine art curriculum. In leading students through an introduction to a subject like the Gothic, I have tried to implement teaching, learning and assessment methodologies that are appropriate to how students construct knowledge, bearing in mind the dictum of McCormick (1992) who argues that learning and assessment “must be appropriate to this new world, emphasising problem-solving and the application of knowledge, flexibility, creativity and an ability to continue learning” (McCormick 1992, p. 132). My previous research into active learning strategies (Fahey 2003), my belief in Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theories of ‘community of practice’ and Glaser’s notions of active learning (Glaser 1990) have all led to the research and inclusion of this a/r/tographic element in the teaching, learning and assessment of this seminar course.

Observing the three participatory projects conducted as part of the ‘Gothic in Contemporary Culture’ seminar series – ‘The *Double Life* of Catherine Street’, ‘A *Haunting*’ and ‘Zombi€,

Dawn of the Dead Economy' – some conclusions can be drawn. The overall conclusion is that the a/r/tographic approach to the curriculum within the 'Gothic in Contemporary Culture' course has proved a rewarding one for both teacher and student, extending the roles played inside and outside the classroom to embrace the spheres of research and fine art practice. The success of this running project is evidenced in a material way through the collaborative production of shows, catalogues, and in a pedagogical way through the student evaluations. By assuming the role of curator and artists, students identify the teacher and themselves with their chosen community of practice, and engage with it with enthusiasm. Through class discussion and through formal evaluation, the students continually reveal their new self-assurance in identifying themselves as Gothic practitioners, while their catalogue essays confidently appraise their work in an informed manner, as part of the Gothic tradition. These a/r/tographic projects contain great potential value for the student. This can be discerned from the student reflective diaries. Not only do they learn about making Gothic work in the correct theoretical context, but they gain the experience of working with a wider community of engagement outside the protective bubble of the art school studio. They also learn more about their own development as artists, and experience and reflect on collaborative practice.

Another important outcome is the value of working with a member of staff or senior artist as project director. This allows the students freedom from the ultimate responsibility of the project, and allows them to learn from more mature practitioners. These projects are very time-consuming to run in that they generally involve additional duties such as organising travel to off-campus sites, chairing meetings, facilitating work and creative direction; however, as an artist/teacher/researcher, they are infinitely rewarding in terms of insight, knowledge generation and the joy of witnessing student development.

These experiments in a/r/tography, positioning myself as both curator, artist and teacher in relation to the students have led to the seminar becoming a way to facilitate a community of practice for students to develop in as artists. The participative projects have physically extended the seminar from the classroom to the surrounding city, allowing for additional learning about the regional nature of the Gothic as it exists in local myths, lived practice and historical legends. The exhibition projects have also extended the seminar from the classroom to the studio, and beyond, into the wider world of fine art professional practice. All projects have focused on the facilitated movement of students beyond their status as peripheral practitioners into the fine art community of practice.

A/r/tography is a valid and useful form of educational project that encourages deep learning and application of theory to practice for both students and teacher. Throughout all my experiments with the curriculum I have abided by the instinct that the integration of theory and practice leads to more mindful work that is conscious of how it abuts on the work and research of others, and what it adds to fine art practice. Foremost in my mind has been the reconciliation of theory with practice through active participation in the fine art community of practice, and the desire to help students recognise the relevance and worth of their own emerging fine art practice. As I put in in the introductory essay to *'the dark arts'* catalogue;

It has been a great pleasure to work with all the artists involved, and to see their work emerge from the dual contexts of their critical and contextual seminar and their studio practice, restoring a sense of integration to the sometimes artificial division between theory and practice that can exist within fine art education (Fahey, 2011).

Appendix 1

Gothic in Contemporary Culture – survey form

Name (optional)

I chose this seminar because

My interest in the Gothic is

What I hope to get out of this course is

Appendix 2

Gothic in Contemporary Culture – course review form

Name (optional)

The things I would like to see retained in this seminar were;

The changes I would like to make to this seminar would be;

What I learned from this seminar about the Gothic was...

What I learned about my own practice and its relationship to the Gothic was...

Comments on guest lecturers

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DIGITAL
ASSETS

**Main Gothic in Contemporary Culture seminar web-site
and integrated Facebook page**

www.gothiccontemporary.weebly.com

<https://www.facebook.com/gothiccontemporary>

Gothicise web-site and integrated Facebook page

www.gothicise.weebly.com

<http://www.facebook.com/Gothicise>

Individual Gothicise project web-sites

www.doublelifecatherinestreet.weebly.com

www.ahaunting.weebly.com