

Working Remotely: Notes from 2020



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start again

Very special thanks to each and every person,  
both contributing directly and linked via the events,  
who have made this publication possible.

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**FIRESTATION  
ARTISTS  
STUDIOS**



An Roinn Ealaíon, Oidhreacht,  
Gníothaí Reiligiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta  
Department of Arts, Heritage,  
Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs



Comhairle Cathrach  
Bhaile Átha Cliath  
**Dublin City Council**

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## Introduction

These pages provide a chance to reflect on the last year. They loosely trace how we adapted, how we are still adapting and how we have stayed connected with each other along the way.

You will see a loose pairing of events, some behind the scenes and others front facing, all of which contribute to the central armature of support for one another and for everyone who is part of our community.

Weaving between other events are a series of moments that took place between Helen, Florence, David, John, Chris and myself, based loosely around the *Desert Island Discs* programmes.<sup>1</sup> It was in these moments that we found out what it was like to work remotely, and to start building up a sense of hope about what it will be like to return to working side by side with each other and all of the artists whom we support.

Jennie Guy

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<sup>1</sup> *Desert Island Discs* is a BBC Radio 4 programme ongoing since the 1930s where guests (known as ‘castaways’) are invited to select eight tracks and describe their reasons for choosing them and how they relate to their lives. Castaways are also asked to describe what luxury item and book they might bring to their desert island.

## FIRE STATION ARTISTS' STUDIOS

### DESERT ISLAND DISCS

During the first lockdown from March to July 2020, the staff of FSAS took to doing a DJ slot for one another once a week, inspired by the long-standing radio show *Desert Island Discs*.

### LOCKDOWN 30 MARCH 2020

Castaway: Helen Carey

1. Françoise Hardy — ‘Tous les garçons’
2. Leo Sayer — ‘When I need you’
3. Thin Lizzy — ‘Dancing in the moonlight’
4. Police — ‘Every breath you take’
5. Blondie — ‘Union City Blue’
6. Malcolm McClaren — ‘Waltz darling’
7. Terence Trent D’Arby — ‘Sign your name’
8. Wagner — *Tristan and Isolde*: Prelude

Luxury item: a pen and paper

Book: *War and Peace* by Tolstoy

## LOCKDOWN 6 MARCH 2020

Castaway: Cris Neumann

1. Talking Heads — *Remain in Light*
2. Laurie Anderson — ‘Big science’
3. Kate Bush — ‘Hounds of love’
4. Jimmy Cliff — ‘The harder they come’
5. David Bowie — ‘Heroes’
6. Tom Waits — ‘Heartattack and Vine’
7. Miles Davis/Gil Evans — *Sketches of Spain*
8. John Coletrane — ‘My favorite things’

Luxury item: Keith Medlin Appalachian lap dulcimer  
(and unlimited supply of strings!)

Book: *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*  
by Douglas Adams

## LOCKDOWN 20 MARCH 2020

Castaway: Jennie Guy

1. THE THE — ‘Uncertain smile’  
(Matt Johnson): *Soul Mining*
2. Violent Femmes — ‘Blister in the sun’
3. Philip Glass — *Songs from Liquid Days*, No. 4
4. Saint Etienne (Moirra Lambert)  
— ‘Only love can break your heart’: *Fox Base Alpha*
5. Clint Eastwood & General Saint — ‘Stop that train’
6. Maybelle Carter (Mother Maybelle)  
— ‘Wildwood flower’: *The Winding Stream*
7. Crookers, feat. Yelle — ‘Cooler couleur’
8. Magnetic Fields (Stephin Merrit)  
— ‘With whom to dance?’: *Get Lost*

Luxury item: herbs, because they will make me live forever with all the fish I am going eat, for when I am discovered dancing on the island

Book: *The Essential New York Times Cook Book*  
— *Classic recipes for a new century*

‘Productive Work’ highlights the concept of ‘productivity’ from diverse perspectives and makes clear that it should be discussed in terms of structural and ideological conditions and qualities.

Vienna-based curator Anamarija Batista and guest Iris Laner examined how productivity is defined and is the result of social ideas and convictions. Artists Sheelagh Colclough and Fiona Reilly were invited to join as active listeners and develop a reflective text.

This online session took place on 24 September 2020 and was aimed as a prelude version of what will eventually re-emerge as a longer programme of engagement in our 2021 Summer School.

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Welcome notes – excerpts

Welcome, everybody, it’s great to see all of you!

FSAS provides vital living–working accommodation for artists in Dublin’s northeast city centre. FSAS has been here for twenty-seven years — it is the only example of this kind of resource in Ireland.

Our main focus is to support the artists who live here and who have residencies here. We also manage a vibrant programme of events and workshops during the year and commission new writing.

Because FSAS is both residential and a place of work, you can imagine we have had to adapt very quickly during the pandemic.

As part of our programme every year we organise a curatorial summer school. The invited curator proposes a theme that we evolve together; this year we are very excited to be working with Anamarija, who proposed the theme Productive Work.

Originally, Ana would have been coming here in person with Iris for a four-day summer school, but we have adapted this year's school into a single session with the hope that we might continue this into a longer-format event in the future.

So, today's event is going to work like this. We have two sessions, each followed by a short discussion. There will be a five-minute break after the first part.

During the sessions, you can write your comments or questions into the notes facility and we can pick up those during the Q&A sessions. If you wish, you can also use the 'put up your hand' function so that you can be unmuted.

This is an interesting subject but we don't have a huge amount of time, so in order to help manage our Q&A sessions we have invited artists Fiona Reilly and Sheelagh Colclough, who will also respond or interpret the presentations as needs and help synthesise questions as they are coming through.

So now we are going to give you a quick introduction to Ana and Iris and then hand over to Ana to announce and introduce the core theme and start the presentation.

Over to you Ana.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Anamarija Batista will be leading our 2021 Summer School, Work Places and their Future Stories. The school will focus on important questions: how can we think about the places of work in the near future? How can we relate them to the ideas of exchange and production? The workshop will discuss these questions in the context of serial working conditions, collaboration, knowledge production and art education. All enquiries to [artadmin@firestation.ie](mailto:artadmin@firestation.ie)

## LOCKDOWN 27 MARCH 2020

Castaway: David McConnell

1. Giovanni Palestrina — Missa *Aeterna Christi Munera*
2. Seán Ó Riada — Mise Éire
3. Marilyn Monroe — ‘Diamonds are a girl’s best friend’ (Styne/Robin)
4. Mícheál MacLíammóir One-Man Show — ‘The Importance of Being Oscar’
5. Jean Sibelius — Symphony No. 2
6. Percy French — ‘Are ye right there, Michael, are ye right?’ (Sung by Brendan O’Dowda)
7. Frank Sinatra — ‘My way’ (Paul Anka)

Luxury item: upholstered adjustable sitting-room chair, with foot rest

Book: *Escape from the Anthill* by Hubert Butler

## Surplus Energy Fiona Reilly

I wipe I sweep I chop I stir I cook I wash I feed I talk I  
wipe I feed I wipe I hold I tickle I kiss I play I wipe

\*

I'm sitting in my kitchen after a two-hour talk by Anamarija Batista and Iris Laner on the topic of 'productive work'. COVID-19 meant what should have been a two-day summer school became a two-hour presentation and discussion. In reimagining the summer school format, Jennie Guy asked me to attend as an active listener and contribute a short text on the topic.

\*

I wipe I wash I dry I wipe I clothe I cuddle I push I rock I  
feed I wipe I play I sing I wipe I clean

\*

I'm nervous. It has been a while since I have tried thinking more formally about the topics of productivity, time, value and art making. It has been a while since I have done this kind of formal cognitive labour and I wonder if I'll be able.

The presentation given by Ana and Iris was dense, the contributions put forth by participants rich. By the end of the two hours I have several pages of hastily scrawled notes but before I can decipher them my one-year-old daughter is returned to me, irritable and in need of my attention.

\*

I pay attention I hug I kiss I clean I feed I walk I rock I  
hug I kiss I wipe I sing I feed I clean

\*

I wonder if Mladen Stilinović was a parent when he made  
*In Praise of Laziness*

\*

The experience of care-giving and the experience of art-making are similar in many ways. Both require continuous mental, emotional and physical labour, the results of which can be difficult to recognise. Work begets work, is undone and re-done, we regress to progress and outcomes can be intangible.

\*

I wait I hope I doubt I start again I look I find I try I fail I  
lose I doubt I trust I seek I listen I look

\*

Similar to a day spent in the studio, days spent caring for my daughter bring a familiar nervousness about how I should spend my time. Maybe I should do this. Maybe I should do that. I am answerable to no one but her and yet this insidious idea of using my time 'well' is present. What is productivity as a parent?

\*

I plan I organise I collect I find I think I order I wipe I  
rock I walk I hold I talk I plan I organise

\*

As a parent I know more than I thought I knew but that knowing is impossible to articulate. If I try to name it, try to describe it, it disappears. The knowledge can only exist through action. This is not unlike making art, when decisions seem to make themselves and you can't quite explain how a work ended up as it did. When you can't articulate something, how can you measure it?

\*

I'm taken by Georges Bataille's theory of 'surplus energy'.  
What is the surplus energy of parenting?

\*

I rock I rock I rock, I sing I sing I sing, I wait I wait I wait,  
I hold I hold I hold, I shhhh I shhhh I shhhh

\*

*As artists we are constantly extracting from ourselves.*

This sentence was a contribution from one of the participants in the discussion. It haunts me as I go about my day. To extract is to mine, to take from, to dig deep and unearth. Since my daughter was born I have been trying to maintain some form of daily art practice. Extracting from the experience of mothering to produce something.

Why is this?

\*

I wipe I wipe I wipe I wipe I wipe, I feed, I wipe I wipe I  
wipe I wipe I wipe I wipe, I feed, I wipe I wipe

\*

Like care-giving, much of art-making is unpaid labour. The love involved is expected to act as sufficient return for your efforts. Artists operate in a reputational and cultural currency, within which productivity and visibility hold a high value, and so we must make visible our efforts wherever possible in the public realm. What is the currency of care-giving?

\*

I clean I wait I wipe I love I lift I hold I soothe I wipe I  
care I worry I plan I listen I wipe I teach I wipe I sweep I  
chop I cook I stir I hold I tickle I kiss I feed I play I wipe  
I pay attention I wash I dry I wipe I kiss I clean I sweep I  
dry I walk I feed I rock I hug I kiss I plan I organise

\*

I wonder if you could bring your child to  
Black Mountain College?

\*

Fiona Reilly has exhibited throughout Ireland and abroad and is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Arts Council of Ireland Next Generation Award (2016), the Fire Station Artists' Studios Residency Award, and Common Ground's Citizen Artist Award at Studio 468, Rialto, Dublin 8. She works using a combination of performative and event-based actions and the production of objects. Site, context and circumstance are of fundamental importance and works often emerge in response to personal and social situations.

## LOCKDOWN 6 APRIL 2020

Castaway: John Beattie

1. Jimmy Hendrix — ‘Hey Joe’
2. Jimmy Hendrix — ‘Little Wing’
3. Led Zeppelin — ‘Gotta whole lot of love’
4. Pixies — ‘Debaser’
5. Joy Division — ‘Love will tear us apart’
6. New Order — ‘Blue Monday’
7. Ennio Morricone — ‘The mission’
8. Nirvana — ‘Smells like teen spirit’

Luxury item: Platinum #3776 Century black 14c  
gold trim Japanese fountain pen

Book: blank bullet journal

## **Active Listening: Unravelling Productivity** **Sheelagh Colclough**

Here follows a response to Anamarija Batista and Iris Laner’s online talk ‘Productive Work’, hosted by Fire Station Artists’ Studios on 24 September 2020, at which I was an active listener. This piece is an attempt to selectively and partially unravel some thoughts about the ideas and ideals of productivity and where art production fits in.

### **The value of thought production**

The basis of what exactly counts and has counted as productive work, and for whom, is first explored by Batista through economic and labour theory, which she then connects to art and culture as a means of reflection on existing economic and social processes shaped by concepts of productivity.

The fact that everyone produces thought as part of the quotidian practice of being human but only some of us can claim those thoughts as productive work professionally, due to the social and economic structures we inhabit, is for me at the heart of who, what and where we are right now. Current debates about the nature of productive work and worth in the midst of a global pandemic — what is essential, necessary or superfluous — remind us that both economics and culture are social systems with abstract, unfixed values.

In her opening reflections, Batista moves from the physiocrats to Silvia Federici, neatly dovetailing forms of natural reproduction, via such thinkers as Adam Smith and Karl Marx, highlighting key points in the historic development of Eurocentric, socially constructed meanings of productive work.

Batista cites Max Weber's analysis of attitudinal shifts from pre-capitalism towards a modern centring of ethics with productivity and worldly profit, which, I would argue, still permeates much of our thinking today, particularly in modern dichotomies of striving and skiving. Weber's Calvinist-heavy spin on the evolution of Northern European capitalism lends productivity an individualist morality which demands a devotion to one's calling, indelibly welding human worth to profit and loss. Regardless of causality, religious underpinning of productivity still has hangovers within secular capitalism: internalised guilt and shame wedded to the feckless social irresponsibility of unproductivity in seemingly timeless tropes of the individualised undeserving and deserving poor, for example.

Within Weber's work ethic as moral identity, there is an uncomfortable resonance with the infamous Auschwitz slogan, and in earlier thinking behind panopticonic workhouses. We now live in a world where certain types of creative work, or Weberian vocations, are sold to us as forms of self-actualisation. As sociologist Angela McRobbie points out, self-exploitation is central to the creative industries.<sup>3</sup> The saying 'Choose a job you love and you will never work a day in your life', which Google's algorithms inexplicably attribute to Confucius, belies our continuing cognitive dissonance with the realities of Marx's use versus exchange value: in what we produce, and, by extension, what worth we have for the neoliberal structures we inhabit.

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3 Angela McRobbie, 'Re-Thinking Creative Economy as Radical Social Enterprise', *Variant*, Spring 2011, <https://www.variant.org.uk/pdfs/issue41/amcrobbe41.pdf>

## **Aesthetic (re)production**

As Batista points out via Pierre Bourdieu, power relations within economic socio-political strata are mirrored and often reproduced by similar dynamics operating within culture. While Bourdieu's concepts of what productive forms of cultural capital consist of may have shifted somewhat (from immersion in and familiarity with high culture to that of the cultural omnivore),<sup>4</sup> his observations of those operating in the field of art practice – parlaying their cultural capital in the ongoing cycle of critique and (re)positionality, mediating the rise and fall of artistic avant-gardes – retain a contemporary currency.

The limitations of such types of cultural guard-changing are further complicated by Batista's reference to Theodor Adorno's notion of art as playing out a sense of illusory autonomy within its aesthetic struggles, affording a kind of irresolvable inside-out reflectivity on the social.

Laner picks up on the productive potential of art as a socially adjacent yet imbricating site of resistance via Jacques Rancière, positioning aesthetic experience as a means of reshaping socio-political perception which can be practically embodied through forms of education. Via Rancière's refusal of the dualism of productivity and unproductivity purely in terms of economic logic, Laner points us towards Friedrich Schiller's notions of embracing the ideals of aesthetic education as a form of socio-economic liberation, stressing the importance of the experiential in itself.

In their presentation of Bauhaus and Black Mountain College as experimental forms of aesthetic education, dissolving socio-cultural hierarchies and centring humanist principles, Batista and Laner draw the contrast with modern-day education as the inculcation of neoliberal ideals of productivity in new generations of labour, underscoring our wider loss of the holistic understanding of life as a permanent process of immersive education.

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4 Richard A. Peterson and Roger M. Kern, 'Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore', *American Sociological Review* 61, no. 5 (1996): 900-7, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2096460>

What, then, is the potential of art and artists, self-exploiting acquisitions of cultural capital for vastly different kinds of markets and purposes, but to what productive end? Batista highlights a range of practices which play with notions of productivity, the paradoxes and perfections of laziness, market value inversions, and reflection on alternative ideological investments and rates of return, in the work of Mladen Stilinović, Alicja Rogalska and Dušica Dražić.

As a field, art production encompasses both privilege and precarity and therefore is bound up with our economic value systems; in a sense, our present crisis represents the existential problem of productivity when there can be none within the world of work. Without full employment, does a society cease to fully exist? Current arguments about the finite practical utility of art and culture, versus its infinite power to heal and endure, versus its pre-pandemic potent economic power, and so on sidestep the issue of how we view (in terms of our work and our lives) what is necessary and how we might facilitate that in our social and economic structures post-pandemic, and for that matter in any post-work future.

More than a century after William Morris pitted ‘useful work’ against ‘useless toil’,<sup>5</sup> predicting that in the future work as toil would take up less and less of our lives, its existential and cultural presence still looms large, while Cokaygne remains out of reach.<sup>6</sup>

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5 William Morris, *Useful Work Versus Useless Toil* (London: Hammersmith Socialist Society, 1893), <https://libcom.org/files/William%20Morris-%20Useful%20work%20versus%20useless%20toil.pdf>

6 Simon Mair, Angela Druckman and Tim Jackson, ‘The Future of Work – Lessons from the History of Utopian Thought’, CUSP Working Paper No. 13 (Guildford: University of Surrey, 2018), <http://www.cusp.ac.uk/themes/aetw/wp13/>

Work is at once a yoke to be strained at and a bringer of status, meaning and utility. Art and aesthetic production as reflective space in which to posit and critique both utopian and dystopian work is as productive an arena as we allow it to be. Beyond the work currently necessary to maintain our existence, the future potential of what productive (aesthetic) work could be is emerging (again) through grassroots organising, cultural and social action, activism and more, permeating the gallery and beyond.<sup>7</sup> What might be different for these parallel sites of immersive, lived, aesthetic education is that this time there are ever growing numbers of the precariat.<sup>8</sup> If we can step out of our silos, there is expedient productive potential to redefine and recreate how we live and how we work together.

Sheelagh Colclough is a Belfast-based artist with a research-led practice grounded in her experience in arts education and participation; she presents, publishes and exhibits in the UK and Europe. She is currently undertaking PhD research through practice at Belfast School of Art, examining participatory art practices in Northern Ireland.

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7 Greg Sholette, 'Public Art, Protest, and 21st-Century Politics, Part II', *Medium*, accessed 13 November 2020, <https://medium.com/more-art/greg-sholette-public-art-protest-and-21st-century-politics-part-ii-f68b15783a88>

8 Guy Standing, 'Why the Precariat Is Not a "Bogus Concept"', *Open Democracy*, 4 March 2014, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/why-precariat-is-not-bogus-concept/>

## LOCKDOWN 20 APRIL 2020

Castaway: Florence Harmelin

1. Billie Holiday — ‘The man I love’
2. Bob Dylan — ‘I want you’
3. IAM — ‘La saga’
4. Television — ‘Marquee moon’
5. Planxty — ‘The west coast of Clare’
6. Toots and the Maytals — ‘Funky Kingston’
7. Ray Charles — ‘I got a woman’
8. Leonard Cohen — ‘The partisan’

Luxury item: my guitar

Book: *Joy of Man's Desiring* by Jean Giono

As the weeks rolled by we continued into the unknown with readings to one another. The following short anthology represents six more weeks of weekly readings following FSAS staff meetings.

‘The Thought Fox’ by Ted Hughes  
– Selected by Helen Carey (Director)

‘Constantly Risking Absurdity’ by Lawrence Ferlinghetti  
– Selected by Cris Neumann (Workshop Manager)

‘On His Blindness’ by John Milton  
– Selected by David McConnell (Accounts Manager)

‘Interval’ by Vona Groarke  
– Selected by Jennie Guy  
(Programme and Operations Manager)

Extract from, *Angoisse a Ankara*, (1978) by Geneviève Le Dilosquer – Delta No. 10, October 1988  
– Selected by Florence Harmelin  
(Office Manager and Administrator)

Four lines on Nietzsche’s teacher/student relationship with Schopenhauer  
– Selected by John Beattie (Digital Media Manager)

On 18 November 2020 FSAS presented A Zoom of One's Own, initially aimed to be a socially distanced screening event in our courtyard with the objective of opening up exchanges with other institutions in our Dublin 1 neighbourhood. Participants sent in a short video in response to our invitation:

'Given that we have spent the past eight months seeing and working with each other digitally, this is an invitation to make a 5-minute video on your mobile phone/laptop or iPad. The aim is to show us who you are and what you do in your working life, beyond the zoom! We want to meet up in person and share our experiences of local community life, as it operates in self-isolation.'

Due to lockdown Level V we moved the live event ironically back to the Zoom forum.

Participants were Laura Fitzgerald (artist and co-producer), Ann Maria Healy (artist co-producer), Jennie Guy (co-producer for FSAS), Melvin Jumungall (artist / SWAN Youth), Nadia J. Armstrong (artist), Maria Maarbjerg (artist), Marcela Parducci (Five Lamps Festival), Roisin Lonergan (Five Lamps Festival), Helen Carey (FSAS), Aaron Connolly (artist / SWAN Youth) and Stanisław Welbel (artist / visiting curator).

These videos were screened during a collaborative event with prizes from local Dublin 1 businesses.

Cloud Café, 43 N. Strand Rd, North Strand, Dublin 3  
Da Mimmos, 148 N. Strand Rd, North Dock, Dublin 3  
Eat Tokyo, 4 Talbot Street, Dublin 1  
Dall'Italia Pastabar, 95 Talbot Street, Dublin 1  
Laine my Love, 38 Talbot Street, Dublin 1  
O'Brien's Hardware, 66 Talbot Street, Dublin 1  
The Roasted Bean, 53 Talbot Street, Dublin 1  
Shaka Bike Shop, 44 Amiens Street, Dublin 1

Not least of the prizes was also a limited edition t-shirt designed in collaboration with David Joyce from Language with artwork gifted generously by artist Laura Fitzgerald as seen on the cover of this publication.

