A Workshop Commemorating the Limerick Socialist, Pat O'Connor, June 2016

Figure 1. A2 digital collage of Pat O'Connor by Ken Coleman. Commissioned by Make A Move, June 2016.

What is sane and what is insane? What is legal and what is illegal? What does it mean to be qualified and who decides? Is it all one generation's revolt against the last one's definition of reality?

(Ginsberg, 1956)

On 21 October 2016, an event took place in the Pery Hotel in Limerick to commemorate the late Limerick socialist Pat O'Connor (1948–2015). While paying tribute to the achievements of a longstanding socialist, the occasion was used as an opportunity to expound on the theme of organising for 'a society that we want'. The guest of honour and main speaker on the night was the socialist republican Bernadette Devlin McAliskey. She spoke alongside Pat's colleagues while surrounded by posters and material from a socialist archive held by Joe Harrington. The material in the archive documents the history of the socialist struggle in Limerick and references other international struggles that informed Limerick activity from 1965 onwards.

Figure 2. 'Resist' Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, Tyrone 1972.
Source: Anon.

The keynote speech by Devlin McAliskey underlined that those that protested in the sixties and seventies have a duty to pass on the ethos of resistance that is embedded in protest to the present generation; both she and the Limerick socialists present at this event embodied this task. In a carefully curated retelling of her experiences of fighting injustice, Devlin McAliskey stressed

that this retelling was an activist function and not an exercise in nostalgia. Nor was the retelling a chance to reminisce about days when direct protest directly challenged the institutions of power. Instead, her contribution to a commemoration of Pat O'Connor was one that encouraged management of, in her own words, 'how memories come down'. She described this process as 'generational osmosis' and emphasised that discussion on the process of positioning activist history for contemporary ends can be described as 'transgenerational learning'.

As a contribution to this event, the youth-based Make A Move festival presented three printed artworks commemorating the ethos of resistance inspired by the legacy of Pat O'Connor. Poster artwork was produced during a one-day workshop in June 2016 and is now part of the Limerick socialist archive. The workshop was designed to reflect an ethos of street protest and to explore themes that engaged Pat and his comrades as activists. A consideration was how international issues of injustice and resistance are translated in a local context, and the legacy of Pat O'Connor was to inspire new material for a contemporary take on how materialism, authority, and resistance feature in a local environment.

Established in 2012, Make A Move is a Limerick-based festival committed to highlighting the necessity of street-based youth culture as being part of the city's identity. Youth workshops on music, street art, and dance comprise multicultural events annually. The Arts Council, Limerick County Council, and various educational and arts groups, including the Limerick Learning Hub and the Limerick City Gallery of Art, support the Make A Move annual festival.

The intention with the 2016 workshop was to engage young students in a design process that would visualise the subject of resistance without using tropes familiar to popular representations on the theme. Art-based outcomes were to be Limerick-based and should reference past situations of protest. Ideally, outcomes should acknowledge how contentious issues are framed and remain part of the conversation of the street; this is a youth-based conversation on place. The intention of the workshop was to seek artwork that introduced current issues mediated through the lens of what is called history from below. It sought to express how core ideas of protest need to use the vernacular for transgenerational outcomes. Having outcomes in the format of posters continues the legacy of street protest that is held in the Limerick socialist archive. Also, it supports the concept of the street as a place that needs to remain common as new relationships occur.

In June, a call out for the (free) workshop for teenage youth offered a lens-based media workshop including camera work and post-production to be facilitated by the Limerick School

of Art and Design. The call out suggested that outcomes could reference how youth-based protest has been a longstanding factor in Limerick's urban landscape since 1965. The first draft of the brief for a callout strongly referenced traditional paths; it was titled 'Raise the Red Flag'.

> A workshop to create a series of posters to celebrate the Limerick socialist Pat O'Connor (1948–2015) organised by the artist Paul Tarpey and facilitated by the Limerick School of Art and Design will take place on Thursday June 23 from 10 pm until 4 pm. Pat was closely involved in popularising the story of the Limerick Soviet and a lifelong activist for the working class. This workshop is youth based and explores the themes of resistance that engaged Pat and his comrades. Visual outcomes that both commemorate and reaffirm the struggle that engaged Pat and his comrades, particularly in the years 1968–1973, will be referenced. Images from Pat's life and times will be processed involving participants using photography and post-production for a series of posters. The workshop will be supervised by digital artist Ken Coleman who will take the group through the design process of image manipulation.[1]

After consulting with Make A Move, the call for participants was amended to extend the opportunity for a conversation on street marking to form part of the workshop and was retitled 'Changing Place',

> This camera based workshop explores Limerick's visual culture in a project exploring the variety of official and unofficial street marks that are found in graffiti and elsewhere created by the city's youth. This 2 day workshop is led by Paul Tarpey and Ken Coleman, both lecturers in the Limerick School of Art and Design, and artists who interrogate urban space. The workshop in the Limerick School of Art is designed for participants who are 14 years and upwards. It involves sessions in photography and post-production for print. Outcomes will contemplate the marks of Limerick City as seen through the eyes of their young citizens.[2]

Due to circumstances, only two young Limerick women, transition year students, Róisín Ní Dhonabhain and Heather Nash, were available for the workshop but this allowed for a more focused delivery when they were introduced to camera work, mind mapping, and direction for digital art in the Limerick School of Art and Design. This practical workshop also drew on the concept of place-based storytelling, an architectural research strand where the critical basis of exploring urban narratives as a method seeks to discourage an over reliance on preconceived knowledge. Instead, a focus on particular understated stories relating to specific spaces 'encourage an inclusive consideration of the symbolic and physical issues associated with these

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[1] Author Paul Tarpey.
[2] Authors Paul Tarpey/ Shane McCurtain.

spaces.'[3] Practical work was prefaced by a talk on how subcultural elements feature for place in Limerick City, for example, who is the city for and how can it and does it facilitate protest? To underline the project, a story, once told by Pat O'Connor himself, described how his generation dramatically protested the 1972 visit of President Nixon on the streets of Limerick; it was emphasised that this forgotten tale is missing from conventional histories or conversations that discuss the context of place and protest for Limerick City. The introduction concluded with suggestions for the students to consider concepts based on how forums arise when the physical territory of the street combines with the conceptual territory of the everyday.
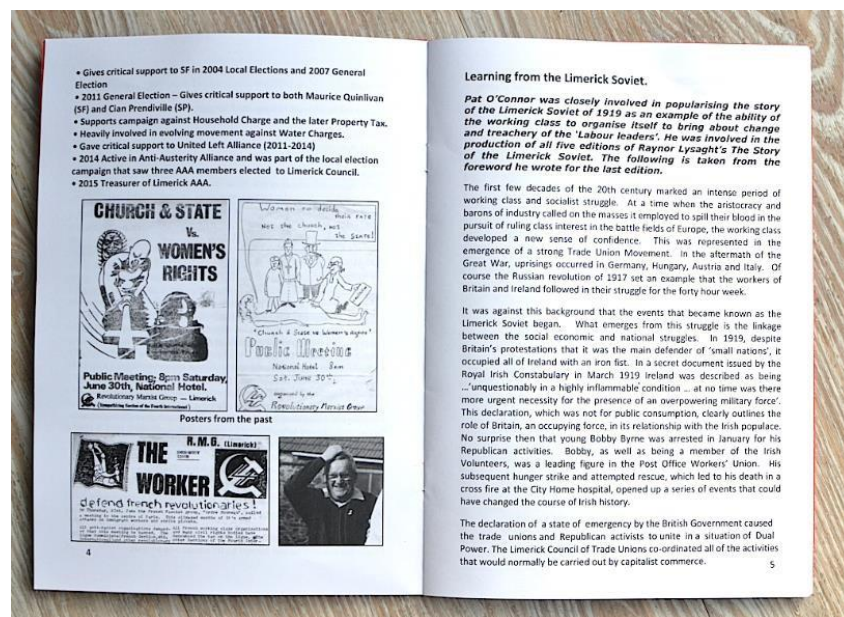

Figure 3. A commemorative booklet outlining Pat O'Connor's life produced by his family, 2015.

The intention behind framing the introduction in this manner was to avoid one-dimensional outcomes where historical material is simply illustrated using visual metaphors (familiar tropes) of protest. Such direct approaches are appropriate, of course, in the proper context and to begin this project, an illustrative approach was taken for a portrait of Pat O'Connor commissioned by Make A Move. Ken Coleman created a digital portrait of Pat O'Connor set against a background of headlines and newspapers relating to his activism. An illustrative approach in this instance was chosen to achieve a monumental look for a printed poster. The final image of Pat was combined with newspapers for what could be received, in simple visual terms, as a Limerick socialist emerging from the 'texture' of history.

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[3] Saul Golden & Liam McComish (eds) (2012) 'Introduction: Concepts: Storytelling and Exploring', in *Machine for Experiential Urban Learning; Interdisciplinary Design Research*. Belfast, UK: PLACE, p. 25.

After presenting the illustrative option and explaining that the workshop was intended to test for new visual strategies, it was emphasised to the students that it was important that outcomes be created using their critical perspective. The workshop stressed that visualising this perspective is as important an outcome as what is produced at the end.

The process began with mind mapping. Working as a team (for a joint outcome) and under direction, they explored themes about how certain social rituals common to their age group (16 years) featured in public space. The dialogue was conceptualised using the working title 'Boundaries'.
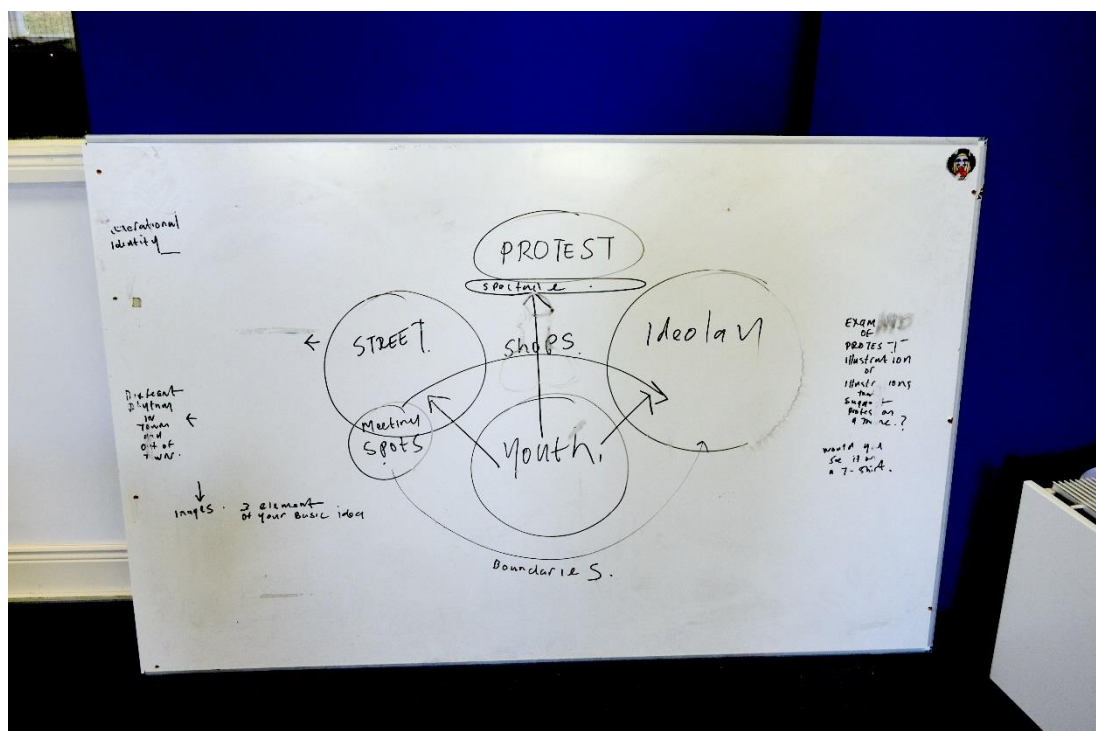

Figure 4. Workshop subject mapping.

After the introduction, a question was asked, 'how does a 16-year-old in 2016 process physical territory via social media?' In regards to becoming aware and finding one's identity, one student interrogated what she saw as the spectacle of materialism being fed by social media determining her behaviour when she visited the centre of the city.

Both Heather and Róisín proposed that social media appears to try and manage the common boundaries of city space by increasingly dictating how the experience of engaging with one's peers happens there. Is city space to be regarded as place co-opted in a bond comprised of social media and consumerism with the public role reduced to facilitating the operation of that

bond? All agreed that the task for visualising this take on resisting the accelerated demands of consumerism should develop imagery that makes the conceit of this bond visible.

The type of mind mapping suggested for the workshop drew on the socially-engaged writing of Nato Thompson. On shaping a process of mapping for activist outcomes, Rachel Daniell (2012, para. 16)[4] says,

> The first element shaping the contours of the map is the selection process itself, the collating of projects at the intersection of art and activism. Then there is the mapping work done through the representation of the projects in the database record (these include)—the short descriptive text, the scant image(s), and the metadata tags that label the practice according to just five principles: 'Methods', 'Topics', 'Setting', 'Duration', and the project's 'Initiator/Producer'.

Using wordplay to sketch conceptual territory, Heather's mind map said that the street signified 'Conformity versus standing out/advertising/communities of people/branding – showing your financial status.' To this, Róisín added that the term 'youth' encompassed issues of 'fitting in, social media, peer pressure, finding a group,' (alongside the Western youth staples of school and exams). Also 'different people', 'street art', and 'street people' versus not 'street people' were to be considered.
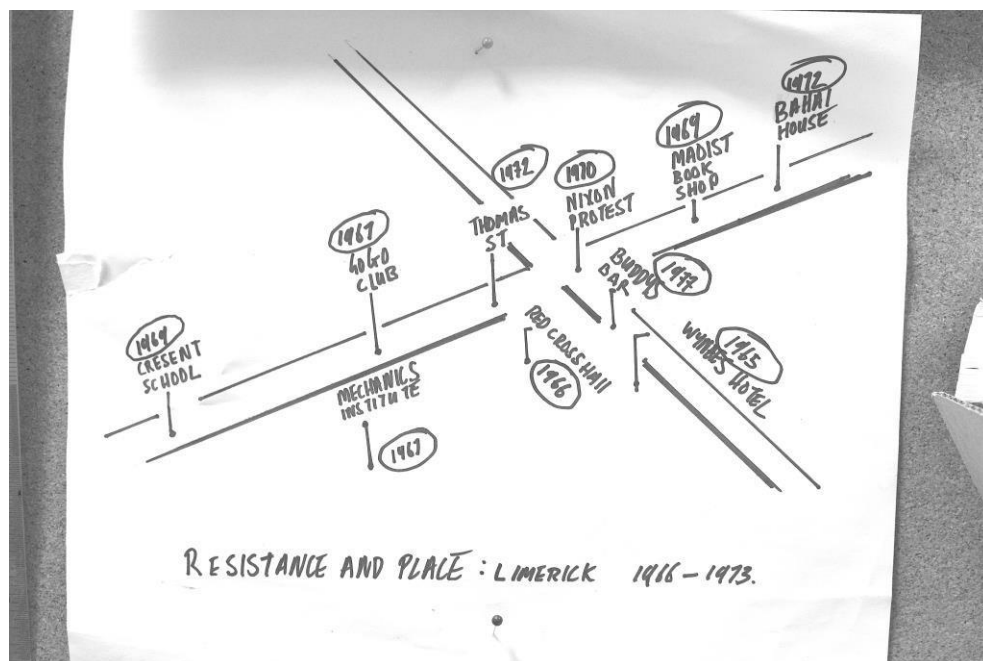

Figure 5. Introduction image for mapping incidents of protest in Limerick City centre circa 1965–1973

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[4] Rachel Daniell (2012) 'Engaging Archival Power: Creative Time's "Social Practices Archive" and the Living as Form Project' *On the Subject of Archives*, vol. 9, issues 1&2 [online]. Available at: https://hemi.nyu.edu/hemi/en/e-misferica-91/daniell [Accessed 24 April 2019].

Issues of materialism and peer judgement resulted in the students' photographing each other's footwear after a discussion of how concepts of identity become associated with possessions. A discussion on how youth branding by corporations plays on identity issues by seeking to influence subcultural strands prompted Heather and Róisín (in an inversion of logic) to introduce the phrase, 'These shoes cost more than my existence', as a pivot for the conversation. The phrase was familiar to them as an ironic take used by their peers as knowing slang when the volume of materialism directed at their generation is discussed. It is shorthand for commentary (both off and online) when they discuss the subject of possessions as representing one's personality.

Figure 6. Photographic exercise to visualise style conflict where teenagers judge each other in regard to fashion.
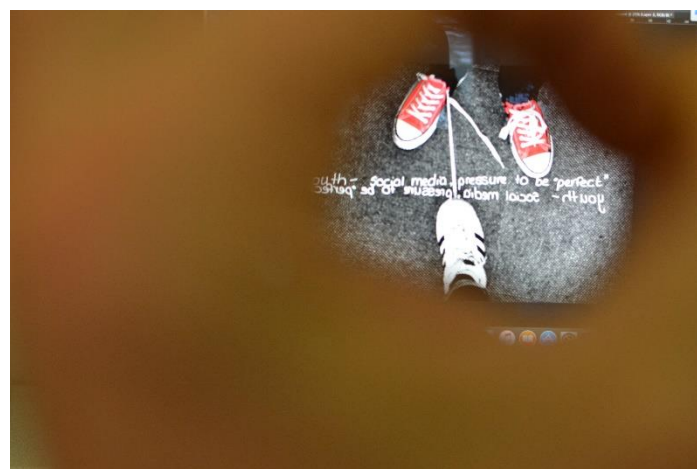

Figure 7. Image from the workshop.

Figure 8. Image from the workshop.

In 2017, slogans that appear to comment on consumerism were co-opted by clothing companies for design and sold cheaply. In recent years, Limerick teenagers congregate and parade each Saturday in established meeting spots in the city centre and can be seen wearing slogans referring the moneyed styles of celebrities encountered online. Many flaunt the idea of possession, wealth, and privilege with slogans such as 'You can't afford this' seemingly to reflect (in a confrontational fashion as fashion) a type of post-capitalist independence. This attitude is disseminated and monetised as fashion, and a negotiating of the city centre in this manner can define the centre as an environment solely manifesting a consumer-focused function. Confrontational slogans specific to female teenage engagement and familiar from the reductive conversational shorthand propelled by social media now increasingly feature on clothing.

Both students suggested that a visual response to the theme of forced aspiration could be tested by visualising the phrase, 'These shoes cost more than my existence', as it appeared to parody the type of advertising that usually accompanies a predominant strand of 'streetwear' and is also indicative of the irony brought by their age group when the subject is being discussed. Corporations often appropriate subcultural tropes to 'essential-ise' (*sic*) their product, suggesting that certain objects, such as footwear, serve to 'complete' one and that style exists as a commodity that is curated for consumption. The entrenchment of this interferes with how the groups congregate with themselves and others.

Figure 9. A shop on William St called 'Cool Limerick', August 2017. Shirts on sale feature slogan-led material, American hip hop, and Muhammad Ali.
Source: Paul Tarpey.

In 2004, the cover story of The American Psychological Association's *Monitor on Psychology* journal was 'Driving teen egos—and buying—through "branding"'. In it, the child psychologist Allen Kenner (2004, p. 60) drew attention to,

> the meta-message that you can solve all of life's problems by purchasing the right products.
> …Teens are inundated with so much marketing about the importance of brands to identity and

image, it has changed the way they socialise with each other, interact with adults and view themselves and the world.

Figure 10. Image of Che sneakers.
Source: Bobsmade cited in Meltzer (2013).[5]

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[5] Meltzer (2013) 'The Extraordinary Story Behind the Iconic Image of Che Guevara and the Photographer Who Took It', *Imaging Resource* 6 June 2013 [online]. Available at: <http://www.imaging-resource.com/news/2013/06/06/the-extraordinary-story-behind-the-iconic-image-of-che-guevara> [Accessed 31 July 2017].

Figure 11. Pat O'Connor commemoration workshop final image.

To address this, digital textures and the colour gold were chosen to work up a final image where the 'cheaper' shoe is tied/hung by the branded shoe above it. On first look, a hierarchy is implied where the one brand dominates the other, but this is negated by the subliminal reference to the possible sweatshop origins associated with both types of shoe. Branding pushes individualism but, as the shoes now suggest, the sweatshop ties all products together and negates any level of quality or worth.

A second image continuing the theme of forced materialism and managed desire used a distressed image of text from Mao's 'Red Book'. The inclusion of this historical reference was a symbolic reference to the Nixon protest described in the introduction. As part of that protest, in October 1970, a copy of the 'Red Book' was thrown at President Nixon. Pat O'Connor had mentioned that a young group of Limerick anti-war protesters managed to hit Nixon with the book (O'Connor, 2013). This dramatic touch underlined the commitment by elements of Limerick youth to engage with international protest making it their own in their own territory.

Figure 12. Clear Channel, an American multinational advertising branding 'CITY LIVING' as an opportunity for advertising. According to their outreach, the city is, 'Where brands meet people'. This adshel is located in Sarsfield Street in almost the exact spot where the 'Red Book' was thrown at President Nixon in 1970.

Source: Paul Tarpey June 2017.

Figure 13. 'We would like to know your opinion on a wide range of Modern Urban Issues.' Advertising image on a bus on Sarsfield St December 2017.
Source: Paul Tarpey.

As a practical and conceptual exercise to allow a reference to the 'Red Book' to be included, a copy of it was opened at random and then photographed. The text used for the poster read,

> Marxist Philosophy holds that the law of the unity of opposites is the fundamental law of the universe. This law operates universally, whether in the natural world, in human society, or in man's thinking. Between the opposites in a contradiction. There is at once unity and struggle, and it is this that impels things to move and change. Contradictions exist everywhere but they differ in accordance with the different nature of different things.

(Mao, 1957, p. 18)

It was decided that a 'stolen' logo of the social media giant, Facebook, was to be applied to the red shoe to reference the issue of how social media commands, and even directs, city space for the youth.[6] A reading of the final image now has the incongruity of a rebranded shoe, both at

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[6] 'Stolen' was the working term used on the day.

one with the image and dominating Mao's text (and making a slight visual reference to Mao's phrase 'Between the opposites in a contradiction').

At the end of the workshop, both participants used their phones to photograph the finished designs. This allowed them to immediately share the images with their peers. This format also provided the opportunity to post the results on social media which all involved did.
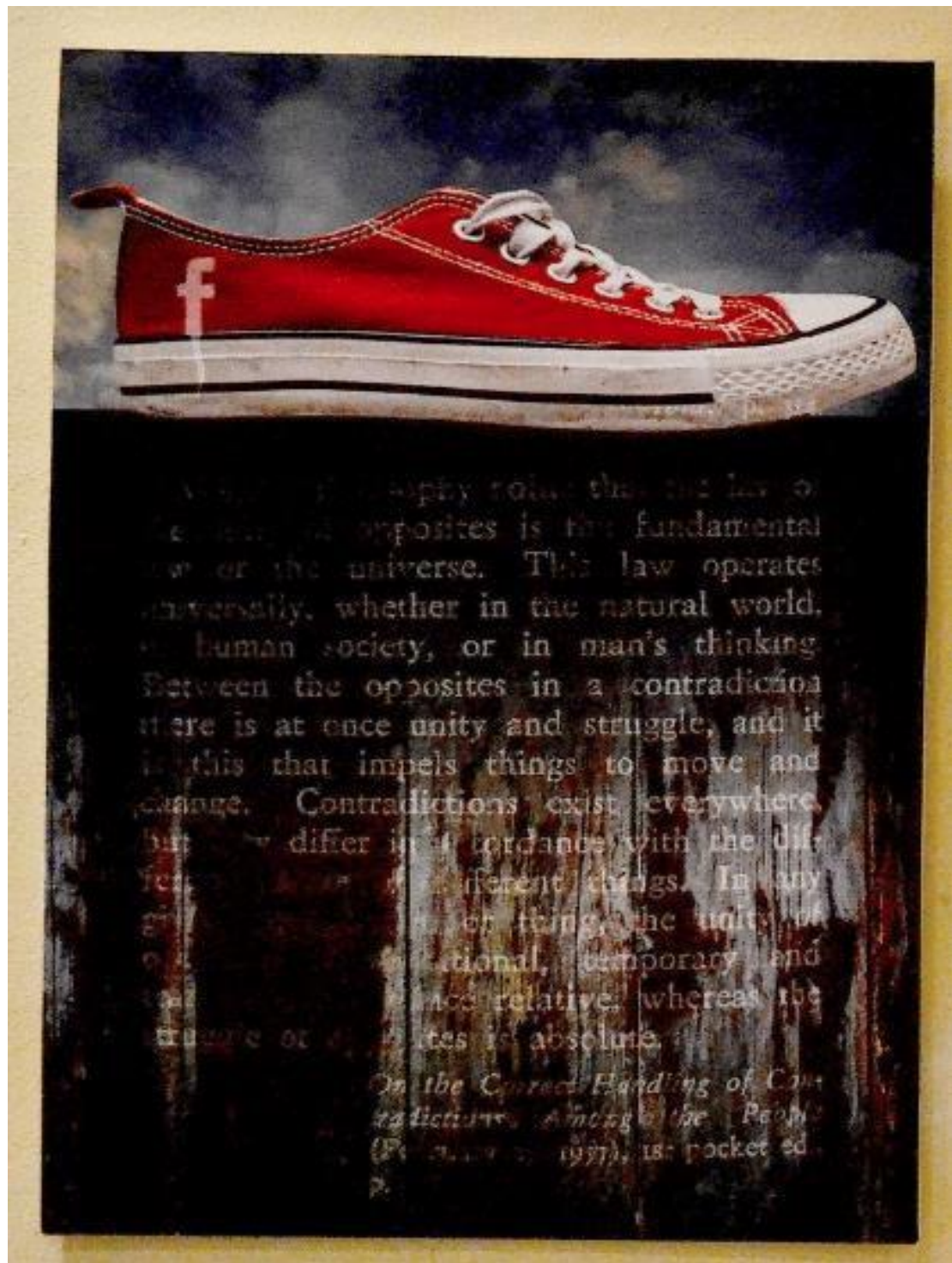

Figure 14. Pat O'Connor workshop image 2.

At the commemorative event, it was intended that the work by Heather and Róisín would flank the portrait of Pat O'Connor. However, on the night, it was decided on site that Ken's portrait would take its place amongst the archive images situated behind the speaker's chair and the sneaker posters and statement would be placed on a side wall with a statement on the project between them.

The statement with the installation reads,

> As part of the Make A Move Festival in summer 2016, a special workshop was held to explore themes of street activism and resistance. The teenage participants were guided in image manipulation techniques and poster production by tutors Ken Coleman and Paul Tarpey of LSAD. The themes that engaged Pat O'Connor and his comrades in the last few decades were used as a springboard for generating discussion about current ideas around political engagement and youth identity in Limerick. Work by Róisín Ní Dhonabhain and Heather Nash. Portrait of Pat O'Connor by Ken Coleman.

Figure 15. Installation image in the Pery Hotel for the Pat O'Connor memorial event, September 2016. Source: Paul Tarpey.

Figure 16. Images from a commemoration of Pat O'Connor, September 2016.
Source: Paul Tarpey.

Figure 17. Bernadette Devlin McAliskey speaking at the commemoration for Pat O'Connor 2016.
Source: Paul Tarpey.

Figure 18. Portrait of Pat O'Connor. Temporary installation at the Pat O'Connor commemoration.
Source: Paul Tarpey, September 2016.

Figure 19. Speculative image proposal for Sarsfield Bridge Limerick. This is the approximate site of where the Red Book was thrown at US president Nixon in 1970.

Figure 20. Speculative image proposal for disused adshel near Nicholas Street, located near the site once occupied by a Maoist bookshop in 1969.

Speculative monuments commemorating socialist traces as 'Culture Jamming'

> What gives Place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus...Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around them, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether it be a street, or a region or even a continent. And this in turn allows a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local.[7]

> (Massey cited in Dean and Miller, 2005, p. 104)

The Space as Political

Art is not political owing to the messages and feelings that is carried on the state of social and political issues. It is not political owing to the way it represents social structures, conflicts, or identities. It is political by virtue of the very distance that it takes with regard to those functions. It is political as it frames a specific space-time sensorium, as it redefines on this stage the power of speech or the co-ordinates of perception, shifts the place of the actor and the spectator, etc. Because politics is not the exercise of power or the struggle for power. Politics is, first of all, the configuration of a space as political, the framing of a specific sphere of experience, the setting of objects posed as 'common', and subjects to whom the capacity is recognised to designate these objects and to argue about them.

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[7] Doreen Massey, quoted in Tacita Dean and Jeremy Miller (eds) (2005) *Place (Art Works)*. London, UK: Thames and Hudson.