

Active Archive - Slow Institution: The Long Goodbye

Project Arts Centre, Dublin, 2019

DEMOLISHING PROJECT 39 EAST ESSEX STREET IS CLOSED

A PROJECT ORGANISED BY MAURICE O'CONNELL 2-14 FEBRUARY 1998

Comissioned and produced by Project Arts Centre



Still from Brian Hand: *Project closing*, 1998 February. Digitized super8 video.
Courtesy the artist and Project Arts Centre, Dublin

NOTES

This two-week event marked and celebrated the re-development of project @temple bar. It was the final event before the reconstruction of the site, and comprised a fortnight of activity, signposting the importance of 39 East Essex Street in housing much of the work Project had done and continued to do.

The events included 'slide shows, videos, a series of installations, performances, roll-calls, rehearsals, a bogus night club, ambient sounds and crude light shows.' People were invited to leave their mark of involvement with Project on the outer walls of the building beneath the title 'And then the walls will come tumbling down'.

Maurice O'Connell was resident artist or, as he called himself, 'artist-in-office', at Project from July 1997, and was focused on developing a project around the closing of the old building. Rather than an author, Maurice saw his role as a project producer: he was there to coordinate and facilitate the making of works with the support of Project staff.

Edit based on the event's press materials, Project Papers, NLI / MS46,226/2.
Courtesy National Library of Ireland, Dublin.

Activities ran from 10am to 10pm each day, with programme details and updates released on an online journal at midnight on the previous night. These online materials have been lost, and only a few artists and collectives/companies have been identified through various news articles and announcements. Participants included visual artists Rachel Ballagh, Rachel Joynt, and Amanda Ralph, and the Irish Modern Dance Theatre (founded in 1991 by Dublin-born choreographer John Scott), who performed excerpts from their pieces *Perfect States*, *Ruby Red*, *Slam*, and *Rough Notes*.

'I will base myself in the project and wish to work with the staff in researching the history and people so far involved in the building. This is not an artist project but a [P]roject project which I will facilitate. It is about and for the [P]roject now and in its future. So involvement of any sorts is encouraged and it is hoped as an aspect to discuss the future possibilities that the [P]roject will hold. All the resources exist within the fabric of the building and in its history. I hope to exploit that with the staff and the extended family (black sheep and all) of the project. (...) As they do on star trek the [P]roject only shape shifting but is still the enterprise'.

From a statement by Maurice O'Connell in the event's press release, Project Papers, NLI / MS46,226/2. Courtesy National Library of Ireland, Dublin.

'Demolishing Project–39 East Essex is Closed takes advantage of the reconstruction phase to parachute a wave of statements / actions stating the obvious but this time for the record. This is not a serious attempt to capture thirty years of activity but to quickly shout about it.'

From the event's press release, Project Papers NLI / MS46,226/2.
Courtesy National Library of Ireland, Dublin

'The whole of demolishing project was a long process a waiting game and mapping... the two weeks of demolishing was the end of a kind of residency... as was not entirely grasped by myself was the vast network of creative community built and productive across platforms. I really sat out the duration trying to understand how the project [Project Arts Centre] operated and also learn about the mass of significant cultural history it was constructed. DEMOLISHING PROJECT WAS A CONVERSATION... I spent a vast time trying to see how the site might break its way into the future given it was intertwined in so many significant practices.'

Maurice O'Connell, email message to Livia Páldi, curator of visual arts,
Project Arts Centre, 21 August 2018

Having worked in theatre, installation, and site-specific performance, Irish artist and performer Maurice O'Connell (1966-2018) continually questioned the role of the artist in contemporary society.

'Maurice O'Connell outlined his vision of an artist as municipal worker: 'The worker is like a postman or road sweeper whose task is to pose questions, make statements and generate a dialogue. The worker does not sustain the conversation but establishes a place for it that is open and informal'

Maria Hirvi, *Saman Taivaan Alla*, Kiasma, Nykytaiteen Museo, Helsinki, 1999.

More readily known by the end of the twentieth century as a performance artist than a maker of objects, O'Connell's commitment to questioning the significance of art in and for society revolved around systemic concerns of how art firstly arrives and is then mediated in the public sphere. (...) Based in Cornwall, O'Connell has worked as an educator and in theatre collaborations with the November Club. Compared to Marcel Duchamp and Joseph Beuys in reviews, O'Connell's take on the artist as a dada-ist or shamanistic figure initially evolved from self-aware assessment of roles commonly attributed to art into a usefully subversive function of artist as trickster. However, in his sustained critique of institutional cultural practice realized through the versatility of his repertoire and range of actions, O'Connell formulated an actively interventionist position as artist-organizer and community facilitator and anticipated contemporary forms of participatory art practices.'

Niamh Ann Kelly, in *Art and Architecture of Ireland*, Volume III (Sculpture: 1600-2000), Ed. by Paula Murphy (Dublin and New Haven: Royal Irish Academy/Yale University Press, 2014).