

URBAN ORGANISMS



Saturday 16th May - Saturday 13th June, 2015
The NewBridge Project, Newcastle upon Tyne



Magdalena Starska, 'For Calming', 2012 © photograph Dominik Ritszel

*"The chief function of the **city** is to convert power into form, energy into **culture**, dead matter into the living symbols of art, biological reproduction into **social creativity**."*

Lewis Mumford

Introduction

Sustainability refers to a basic need to maintain and nurture the conditions upon which life depends. It has capacity to endure over time and cover all aspects of life and its environmental, economic and social dimensions. Sustainability encompasses the care and the responsible management of resources.

Urban Organisms examines and creatively explores food sustainability within cities. Using the holistic approach developed through *Circles of Sustainability** as a conceptual starting point, the project explores ecological, cultural, political and economic aspects of food production and consumption in the urban environment.

Connecting the global issue of food security in an ever-increasing world population with the local context of food poverty in the North-East of England, the project questions how we can best use the earth's resources. Urban Organisms seeks to explore this through a cross-contextual approach - connecting creative, community and academic approaches to offer an analytical view on urban food sustainability where participation and collaboration is deep, critical and embedded within the everyday.

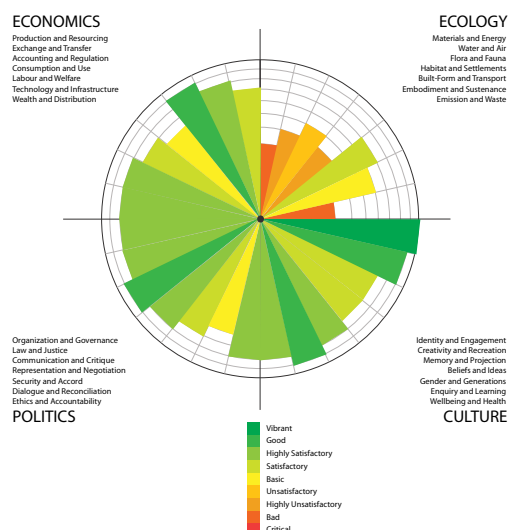
The essays presented in this publication help to contextualise some of the concepts relating to the project, marrying local issues with a global discourse on urban food sustainability. They bring forth questions around the production and consumption of meat, the potential of urban space for food growing and highlight the challenging effects of our current food practices.

Articulating these issues through the creative approaches inherent within the artists' vision is at the core of Urban Organisms. The NewBridge Project acts as an artistic hub encompassing an exhibition featuring new works by Magdalena Starska, Mikey Tomkins and Julia Wilmott, with existing works by Fernando García-Dory, Caitlin & Andrew Webb Ellis and artist collective N55.

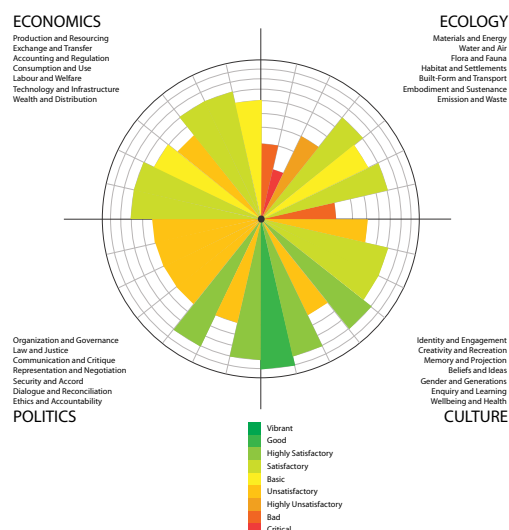
The project is therefore a creative glimpse into this subject matter: we don't see this project as providing the answers, but rather it is an evolving space where debate and conversation are encouraged and ideas are welcomed.

Lauren Healey, Julia Heslop and Sabina Sallis, May 2015

MELBOURNE



TEHRAN



**Circles of Social Life* is an approach that guides engaged and collaborative practice in making our cities, locales and organisations more sustainable, resilient, adaptable and liveable. As part of this overall approach *Circles of Sustainability* provides practical tools for creating sustainable cities and communities. For example, instead of designating a pre-given set of indicators, the approach sets out a process for deciding upon indicators and analysing the relationship between them.

Urban Sustainability in Theory and Practice: Circles of Sustainability; Routledge, London 2014. www.circlesofsustainability.org

Mikey Tomkins invites residents to take a walk through Newcastle, exploring how the city centre could be transformed to support multiple food growing practices, including aquaponics, beekeeping and vegetable growing.

THE EDIBLE MAP

My area of research and practice is Urban Agriculture (UA). The term describes the practice of growing food in cities, closer to where it is consumed, reducing transportation and increasing the resilience and sustainability of urban centres. Through research and art practices, I wish to examine how cities might become agricultural in nature, developing local food production as part of an overall transition away from fossil fuels. My work is concerned with both the necessity to produce food in cities and also the need to produce a new urban space for that food. Through using participatory methods, I argue that this new edible city will be one that emerges incrementally through the creative involvement of residents within their everyday life, as well as through the work of professional designers.

UA can be defined as the practice of growing food in and around cities that builds local economies, utilises urban resources and gives food harvests back to residents within the same city. The specific term UA has emerged as academics and policy makers have begun to engage with the critical issue of urban food supplies in an era of rapid global urbanisation. Yet as a practice it is nothing new; cities have always grown part of their own daily food, often using intensive and more advanced methods than extensive field agriculture. UA, however, should not be seen as a drive for urban self-sufficiency, but as something that makes part of rural growing obsolete; namely the transportation of foods that can be grown in and around our neighbourhoods, that benefit from being freshly picked.

The need for the vision of an edible city comes from the idea that cities can, and should, grow part of the food they consume. This reduces their dependence on imported food, creating urban spaces that are more resilient and autonomous, transitioning away from fossil fuels for food production.

The urgency to develop our understanding of UA, its implementation and culture, stems from the need to acknowledge that all over the world we are becoming an urban species. This means a species of consumers based in cities, separated from forms of production, in this case food production. Alongside this is an underlying understanding of the environmental damage caused by industrial food production (wherever it is located), because of its processing and packaging, refrigerated distribution and waste disposal.

Yet, living in cities does not mean being devoid of action, innovation or resources that could help mitigate these issues. Indeed, the city has always been at the epicentre of cultural development and many European cities established intensive market gardening systems right up to the steam age, capable of contributing to their daily food supplies. As early as 1608, the

city of London set out a royal charter for the formation of The Worshipful Company of Gardeners. The Worshipful Company supported a spade-based urban food-gardening practice that it defined as distinct from plough-based rural agriculture. Food-gardening used “planting, grafting, setting, sowing, cutting and arboring, that take awaie the dunge and nysomnes of the cittie”.⁽¹⁾ This waste (‘dunge and nysomnes’), in the form of horse manure – the gold dust of high cultivation market gardens – and night soil from London’s domestic cess-pits, was used to create what would now be defined as organic closed-loop local agriculture.

Latterly, we have been returning to the idea of re-localising production in many cultural quarters, and food has not escaped this trend. One can also link this localisation to the idea of the neighbourhood, where we return to the etymology of the word ‘neighbour’, coming from ‘nigh-bout’, or ‘the man who till the soil next to me’.⁽²⁾ However, while there are ever-emerging examples of urban food growing evolving within the UK, we are still trapped by the idea that UA equals a type of allotment culture or small community garden plots. Our own ability to vision urban spaces as productive is also constrained by the dominance of post-war top down planning. This hegemony developed the notion that the modern city is pre-made for us; designed and planned professionally for us to inhabit, and not something we take an active part in.

I have therefore developed the Edible Map as an art practice to help extend our understanding of how we might produce urban food, and also produce an urban space for food. I explore this through participatory mapping, drawing and walking, linking academic research and art practice. As Katharine Harmon writes, “Geographers submit to a tactic agreement to obey certain mapping conventions ... artists are free to disobey.”⁽³⁾ The Edible Map presents an obvious distortion and interpretation of the space mapped (in this case Newcastle), relative to specific situations of a spatial practice (food growing), where the streets, roads and pavements are effaced as if it had snowed. This opens up new spaces in our imagination, normally contained by those who pre-plan our routes between buildings or expected uses of space.

The Edible Map which I have drawn for Newcastle has two sides. One side presents the everyday story of food growing in Newcastle as it might appear in an imagined future, where rooftops, grassed spaces and tarmac have been transformed into food gardens. Here, I have imagined the everyday life of a city, one that is generative of food narratives, new creative spaces and sensory interactions – the smell of compost, the sound of bees and the taste of fresh local food. The reverse side (tinted green) counterbalances this, presenting a more quantifiable discussion on food-growing, exploring conceivable harvests and practices

PIG IN THE CITY

As urbanisation increases globally, the bodies of animals become more alien to us even as we consume more of their meat, writes Alex Lockwood

The pig hangs motionless, caught in mid-air at ninety degrees to the ground. She looks as if she is running down the side of the truck from which she has just jumped, although she has leapt a little way out, a diver worried about rocks. The sky behind her is a cool blue with white, summery clouds. It is a wide, urban street with broad, thick trees along its pavements. If it is rush hour, then it is a relaxed rush hour in an unnamed town in urbanising China. Alongside the truck is a silver mini-van. It looks as if both vehicles have been waiting at a junction; an earlier photo, where the pig is clambering onto the top edge of the truck's side, has more traffic. It is not clear in that picture that the criss-cross pattern over the top is barbed wire, to keep the pigs from escaping. In the second picture, when the pig is outside and falling, the barbed wire is more prominent; as is the face of a second pig left behind, looking back at the anonymous photographer in their car. Now our escapee is heading towards the tarmac, snout first, but head up, ears back, legs in a strangely relaxed, dressage pose, as if savouring her freedom. If joy comes not in the great achievement of plans but in the momentary awareness of one's existence, then our pig is experiencing, most likely for the first time, this wonder of the present without a thought for the future. Not how hard the ground will be underneath her trotters. Nor what might happen once she has landed, if the truck driver realises he has lost one of his units. In this instant - caught in the thin air of a summer's day - she has a glimpse of a different life. Autonomy over her body. Freedom, even if it lasts only a moment.

I first saw the picture of this pig escaping from a transport truck at the beginning of 2014 on the *Metro* newspaper website.⁽¹⁾ It came at a time when pigs had become central to my understanding of the similarities and connections between humans and nonhumans. It was not the Year of the Pig, nor was I born under that sign in the Chinese Zodiac. The image came at a time when I was thinking about images, and their role in my journey towards animal advocacy. For some, images are as close as we get. Yet it is not the image that is important, but what the image leads us to; it is the very real, corporeal presence of bodies that allow us to "think through the body" to combat the current crises we face as species together on this planet.

And not least the crisis of climate change. The image of this pig, suspended in air, caught for a moment breaking out of the invisible agri-flows of meat through our urban spaces, arrived in my social media stream at a time when I was thinking about the relationship between animals and air, or more precisely, climate, this thin layer that if we scooped it all up into one pot has the same volume, give or take, as the Mediterranean Sea. The life-giving air we breathe, our atmosphere, is a slip of vapour into which we pump around 60,000 teragrams of greenhouse gas emissions each year, the lion's share of which, we are beginning to realise, comes from our

agricultural practices, especially intensive animal agriculture.

Do we ever see pigs in the city? Rarely, if at all. They are not creatures with whom we share much of our spatial reality. But it was not always the case. As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have put it, the pig occupies a special place in the symbolic topography of early modern European culture. Before intensive animal agriculture put the pig into warehouses, the pig would be kept on smallholdings, even in the home and fed on swill and scraps, and became the "creature of the threshold" that, they say, "overlapped with, and confusingly debased, human habitat and diet alike. Its mode of life was not different from, but alarmingly imbricated with, the forms of life which betokened civility."⁽²⁾ Our storytelling reflects our relationship with nonhuman inhabitants. As theorist Susan McHugh argues: "Narratives of meat animals [...] posit shared human-animal lives in these conditions as points of access into public life, anticipating how the future of such creatures in agri-food flows hinges on perceiving as much as transfiguring collective agency forms."⁽³⁾

This is more so for the pig than any other farm animal: think *Animal Farm*, *Babe*, and perhaps, to come, the documentary *Locavore: Pigs in the Park* (screening, 28th May). The film documents the way in which Reuben Chesters, who runs ethical grocers Locavore in Glasgow, raised two Gloucester Old Spot pigs in a city park. Their eventual slaughter for meat raised protests from locals who had grown used to seeing the pigs. But Chesters has no regrets of their slaughter. "A lot of people are now thinking about where their food comes from and how the animals are treated," he said.

The pig is the most eaten land animal. Although by number more chickens are killed each year for food, in terms of the amount of meat product consumed the pig tops the list. (In terms of totals, marine animals are by far and away the most exploited.) On the earth at any one time, around a billion pigs are being processed to deliver over 100 million metric tonnes of meat each year. The number of pigs is growing, mainly because of the increased affluence and development in China, Asia and South America. Half of the world's pigs are found in China, which produces around fifty million metric tonnes of pig product for consumption. At the moment, China's pig farming is relatively traditional, with grazing and mixed means of processing through smallholding farms. But with China's growth, they are moving to a more industrialized system - the term employed by the UNFAO for indoor processing with waste containment systems, what many simply call factory farms - of turning pigs into pork. While pigs in Europe are spared some of the worst abuses - the gestation or farrowing crate was banned across the European Union in 2013 - they still suffer many horrific "industry standard" (and therefore legal) practices globally. The manipulation of the pigs' basic genetic existence is part of what Karen Davis, founder of United Poultry Concerns, an advocacy and rescue organisation, calls the "Procrustean solution

to animal identity",⁽⁴⁾ where the nonhuman victim is always made to "fit the bed" of its human oppressor.

The relationship between urbanisation and the place of the pig in our culture is critical to larger questions, beyond animal welfare or rights, of how we produce food to feed a growing global population. There are many, including the World Health Organisation and even the US Government's dietary advisers, who are suggesting a diet vastly reduced in meat, on environmental grounds.

That's because animal agriculture is now understood to be the world's largest contributor to anthropogenic climate change, which is likely to see global temperatures rise by more than two per cent in the next hundred years. The feedback loops these rising temperatures take us toward are known, perhaps infamously, as tipping points, beyond which things will rapidly and chaotically speed up without hope of reversing, such as the melting of the Greenland ice sheets and the rising of our oceans, leading to mass extinction of flora and fauna on land and in the seas, mass "climate migrations" from countries that are subsumed underwater, or grow too arid, and the rapid collapse of ecosystems such as the Great Barrier Reef from acidification. If we do not rapidly reduce our fossil fuel emissions to somewhere around ninety per cent of current levels, and begin practices to adapt to and mitigate the damage that is already irreversible, then the global community will experience orderly or disorderly declines - or a combination of both - into radically altered social relations between individuals, communities and countries. Our urban world will not exist as we understand it socially or culturally, and certainly not environmentally. This is the "collapse" scenario that even conservative and traditional commentators from George Soros to E. O. Wilson now entertain.

Back in 2006, in the UNFAO's *Livestock's Long Shadow* report, animal agriculture was responsible for around fourteen to eighteen per cent of all greenhouse gas emissions. In 2009, the Worldwatch Institute put the true figure at fifty-one per cent. Most current estimates put animal agriculture at around twenty per cent, not including emissions from transport to move agri-food flows globally. In the battle to blame someone or something for the drought afflicting California, almonds have been made the scapegoat, while animal agriculture, which consumes forty-seven per cent of the state's water, is excluded from water saving legislation. If one fifth of all your bodily ails were coming from a single bad habit, would you want to do something about it? But we already know that what ails the body isn't always something we can rid ourselves of so easily.

Habits are hard to break; and consuming animal products seems the hardest of all. Yet all evidence points to the fact that as a human species we need to move towards a plant-based diet if we want to ensure a stable environmental future. According to the economist Richard Oppenlander, consuming animal products creates ten times more fossil fuel emissions per calorie than does consuming plant-based foods.⁽⁵⁾ Or to put it another way, producing one protein calorie from cows requires eighty calories input of fossil fuels, while one protein calorie from soybeans requires just two calories of fossil fuels. Nearly ninety per cent of soy grown globally is fed to nonhuman animals in agriculture, while overall around half of the planet's crops are fed not to humans but to nonhumans, considered by some a crime against humanity while over a billion people go hungry every day. It is also massively inefficient. When we feed grains to nonhuman animals, we lose up to ninety per cent of the protein, ninety-eight per cent of the calories, and 100 per cent of the carbohydrates.

Nonhuman animals need to eat huge amounts of food every day to produce just one body that will be rendered into meat products for we humans and our companion animals. Some

scientists are attempting to fit the animal to the system by, for example, breeding chickens without feathers so they don't waste calories growing unessential body parts. Even most of the world's fish catch is fed to animals in agriculture - nearly eight-million metric tonnes a year.

Animal agriculture is also the largest use (or waste) of freshwater, the largest single reason for rainforest destruction (to graze cattle and grow soy to feed the cattle), one of the globe's major polluters of land and water tables, and creator of sea dead zones, areas of the ocean so polluted by animal agriculture run off that nothing grows there, as bad as or even worse than the fossil fuel industry's major spills such as the Deepwater Horizon Disaster, but played out every single day.

An image makes the individual for a moment visible; a counter to the incomprehensible tally in which we breed and slaughter farmed animals, their capacious invisibility, the de-animalization of the animal self. The individual animal disappears for us under or behind the sheer amount of bodies that are killed. "Numbers help us to stop thinking," say the scholars Despret and Porcher⁽⁶⁾. When an individual breaks out of the mass, it helps us think again. As British geographer Henry Buller puts it: "you do to a pig in an intensive farm what you would never do to a pig if you had only one or two of them."⁽⁷⁾

When we see pig bodies, if we see them at all, they are often hanging in this fashion of this image I saw of the pig in thin air, escaping the slaughter truck, at ninety degrees; but usually they are already dead. Slaughterhouses and abattoirs and smallholding farms were, before mass industrialisation and urbanisation, part of people's everyday lives. In some parts of the world, abattoirs are still found in urban centres. Not so much today in the UK. Whereas we used to have a closer understanding of the animal body that we were eating, now the idea of the pig survives only in rarefied air, a breaking out of an invisible flow of animal bodies through our food systems that we no longer see. Do not want to see. When we do see the animals, via projects such as Reuben Chester's pigs in the park, many of us become attached. Our view of them, as bodies and individuals, changes. But how many of us look?

⁽¹⁾ *Metro* newspaper 6th June, 2014

⁽²⁾ Peter Stallybrass & Allon White, *Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 1986

⁽³⁾ Susan McHugh, *Animal Stories*, 2009

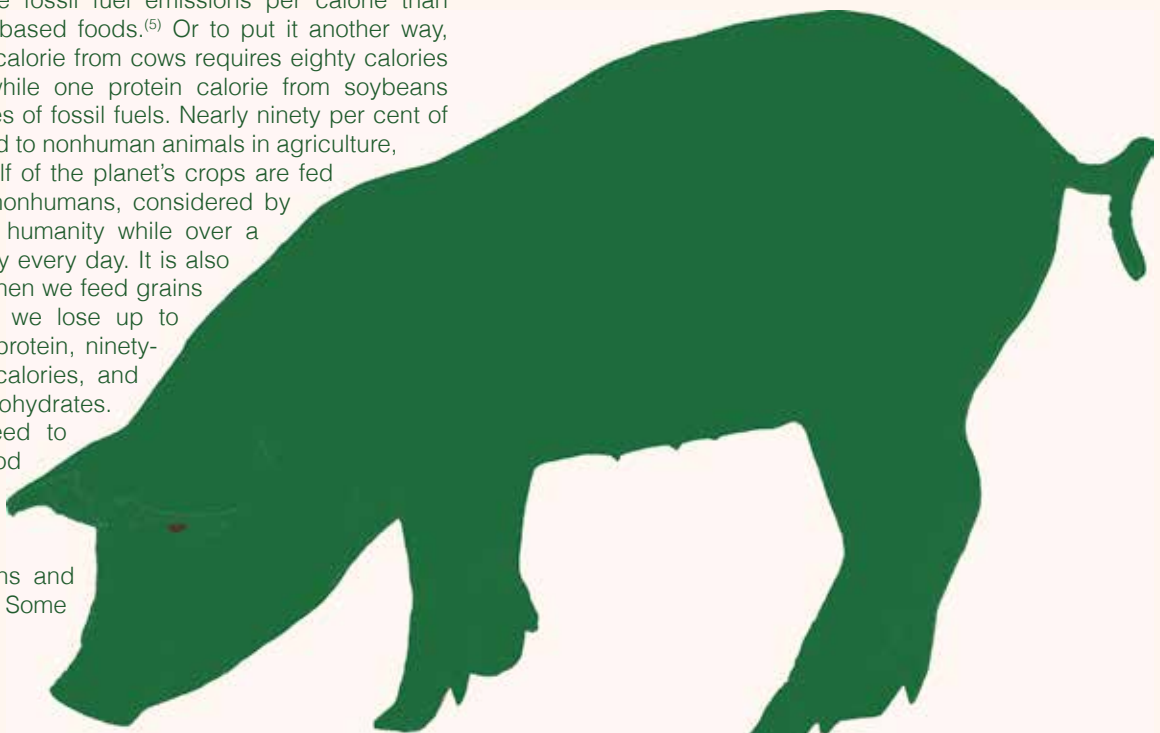
⁽⁴⁾ Karen Davis, Ch.1 in *Critical Theory and Animal Liberation*, 2011

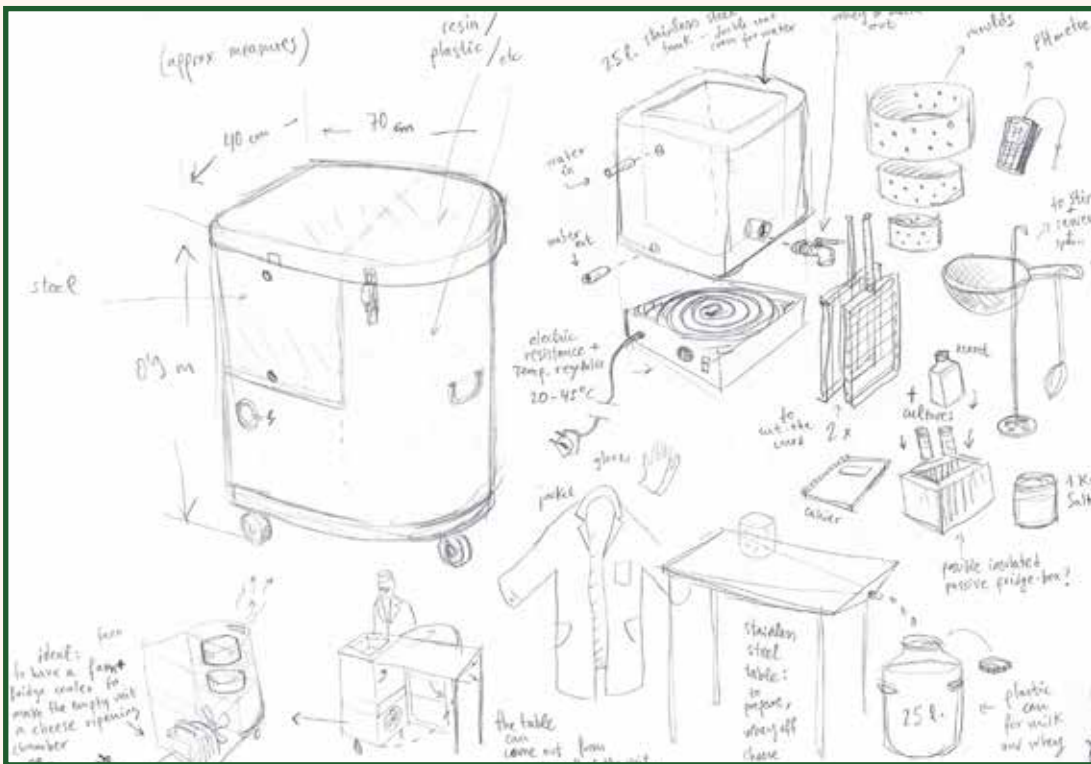
⁽⁵⁾ Richard Oppenlander, *Comfortably Unaware*, 2012

⁽⁶⁾ Vincianne Despret & Joyceline Porcher, *Bêtes et Hommes*, 2007

⁽⁷⁾ Henry Buller, *Individuation, The Mass and Farm Animals*, 2013

Dr Alex Lockwood is a member of the Centre for Research in Media and Cultural Studies at the University of Sunderland, and is writing a book about animal agriculture and climate change.





Top: Fernando García-Dory, *Cheese Production Mobile Unit (CPMU 3)*, 2014. Photo © Maria Benjamin

Middle: Julia Wilmott, *Rural Export*, 2013

Bottom: N55, *City farming plant modules*, 2003

Far page: Caitlin & Andrew Webb Ellis, *'Garden of Rubbish'*, 2011-2012







Pollinaria

In the summer of 2014 Beth Ramsay took part in an internship at Pollinaria, an organic farm and artist residency programme in rural Abruzzo, Italy

Top right: Walking down the track for the launch of the *Consortium Instabile* at Pollinaria, 2014.

Bottom: Interview with Ali at Tapa Organic Bakery, Glasgow. Interview for *Granum Caledoniae*, 2015. www.tapaorganic.com

Left: Giulio Petrinio's farm in Gran Sasso, Italy. Interview for *Seeds of Straw*, 2015.

Below: Straw brick made and used by architect Gianfranco Conti at Case di Terra Cruda / Borgocapo, Italy. Interview for *Seeds of Straw*, 2015. <http://www.caseditera.it>

Photos © Daniela d'Arielli



Context: Abruzzo, Italy

50% of the region is being explored for oil by ENI, Petroceltic, MOG, Edison & Shell. Home to pristine nature parks, shorelines and several endangered species, this area is in extreme flux. In the winter of 2013, Atilla, a fierce force of wind and rain devastated many farms and permanently changed the landscape – orchards and vineyards were blown down and new creeks were cut into the land.⁽¹⁾

My reasoning behind undertaking the Pollinaria internship was to find out how Pollinaria itself operated both as a functioning farm and an artist residency programme. I wanted to learn more about the way in which artists through Pollinaria engaged - or didn't engage - with issues of regeneration especially in an area threatened by lack of prospects in rural life and work. What is the role of artists in this context? And what did the local community think of the artists' projects? I wanted to know whether the younger generations were continuing to work on their family farms, perhaps establishing farms of their own, or leaving the countryside altogether to pursue lives in the cities, as I had seen happening in many other rural communities.

Background

Up until this point I had worked on a number of different farms across the UK, Europe and America. I had gone on to complete a Permaculture course, volunteered on numerous community growing projects, city farms and went on to employment as a baker. I had also worked on *Make Space*⁽²⁾, an Artsadmin Summer Project for young makers which explored contemporary performance making, framing research and ex-



perimentation around the river Thames and its systems. I wanted to work on longer-term projects which invested in and responded to place and community.

This drive brought me into contact with Pollinaria's work through the GALA network (Green Art Lab Alliance).⁽³⁾ GALA explored artistic and cultural responses to climate change and sustainability, bringing together 19 partners from 12 countries. Over two years partners held a range of practical workshops and artistic labs, focusing on how environmental sustainability can be interpreted within artistic and organisational practices. Many of the projects have continued to develop beyond the GALA commission.

Making Tracks

At Pollinaria I spent the first part of my internship building a track through the forest in the farmland. This was originally a project that Gaetano Carboni, the Director of the farm, had in mind over seven years prior to my visit. I wanted to take on this work as a way to contribute something to the farm and as a way to understand how the land was cultivated, what it looked like, what grew there, who worked and lived there. The track was designed in collaboration with Gaetano and with farmers Luciano and Gabriella. Further tracks will be developed in the future as a way to physically connect up existing farms in the area.

The track also provided a way to connect to a tree house built by artists Futurefarmers who were undertaking the GALA residency at Pollinaria developing the project *Consortium Instabile*.⁽⁴⁾ For the launch of their project I led a walk down the track with farmers and residents of the local community.

Consortium Instabile

Consortium Instabile (C.I.) is experimental architecture, radio, research and public programming within the rural context of Abruzzo, Italy. The project has emerged from sustained engagement with this region. Building on the momentum of a project produced with Pollinaria in 2010 (This is Not a Trojan Horse), C.I. connects a geographically-dispersed network of agrarian protagonists in the region. A fantastical architectural intervention within an oak grove, a treehouse, serves as a physical meeting point, broadcasting base for Radio Instabile and a growing archive of content related to rural regeneration and the growing instability of this region. Radio Instabile is a tool, a pathway and a resource that relates both to the physical space of the rural environment - farmed fields, wilderness and even streets and squares in local villages - and to the ethereal space created through the radio means. When transmitted through the radio channels, this content becomes a material that connects the spaces of people's daily lives; homes, tractor cabins, shepherds' caves, blacksmithing shops and kitchens. A network of geographically-dispersed spaces become a meeting place and means to sustain connectivity between people and practices.⁽⁵⁾

The internship led to further artistic research and involvement with Pollinaria and Futurefarmers' *Consortium Instabile* project.

We established *Seeds of Straw* in collaboration with GALA partner Creative Carbon Scotland in January 2015. *Seeds of Straw* continues to explore issues of sustainable agriculture this time focusing on the by-product of cereals - straw - often forgotten or undervalued as a resource. The project consists of a series of encounters and interviews with farmers, makers, designers, artists and architects in Abruzzo. Research focuses on both producers and users of straw and how these relationships bring together unexpected ecologies, for example between farmers and artists. The study uses straw as a starting point for looking at how relationships and communities of practice can emerge and what is needed to sustain them. It investigates how these connections might lead to greater resilience of practice, livelihoods and therefore the sustainability and regeneration within the territory of Abruzzo.

In addition to focusing on the local context, the research will continue to contribute to a broader conversation within the GALA project around arts and sustainability. The information and recordings gathered will be broadcasted internationally and distributed on the *Consortium Instabile* radio along with other contributors.

This gathered momentum for the research trip *Granum Caledoniae*⁽⁶⁾ which I am producing in collaboration with Pollinaria across Scotland. *Granum Caledoniae* focuses on current methods of cereal based agriculture in Scotland and ideas about the future of this cultivation. I am specifically interested in the impact of climate change upon local food systems, which affects the work and lives of farmers and bakers. I want to know more about the different productions of wheat (cultivating, harvesting, milling) and then how bakers support these systems in relation to the future of wheat cultivation in Scotland. The project is made up of a series of encounters and radio interviews with organic and biodynamic farmers, experimental bakers, millers, seed keepers and exchange initiatives.

I am also currently collecting content in the North East of England for the *Consortium Instabile* radio broadcasts which will take place 2015-16. Follow at www.consortiuminstabile.wordpress.com.

⁽¹⁾ www.futurefarmers.com/consortiuminstabile

⁽²⁾ 2013-14

⁽³⁾ GALA was a two-year project (2013 - 2015) acknowledged by the European Commission, which co-finances GALA in the framework of the EU Culture programme 2007 - 2013

⁽⁴⁾ 2014 - ongoing

⁽⁵⁾ www.futurefarmers.com/consortiuminstabile

⁽⁶⁾ March 2015 - ongoing

Beth Ramsay is based in Newcastle, UK. She attended Newcastle University receiving a BA in Fine Art and studied at Jutland Art Academy, Denmark in 2012. She completed a Permaculture Certificate Course focusing on public growing campaigns and has training in "Natural Change" facilitation with Natural Change Foundation.

www.futurefarmers.com/consortiuminstabile

www.greenartlaballiance.eu

www.pollinaria.org

www.creativecarbonscotland.com

why examine food sustainability?

Why ask questions about our food system, where food comes from and our attitudes towards it, wonders Ruth Hayward

Surely our food system works really well - we can buy whatever we want, whenever we want, from supermarkets at a low cost. On the surface this looks to be the case; however, if we look more closely, the impacts of our food system become clearer - on our health, the local economy and on the environment.

A successful food system should deliver the highest levels of public health possible. Our modern food system, post World War Two, has reduced deficiency-related ill health. However, we now have diseases of excess. In 2008, nearly 25% of adults in the UK were classified as obese,⁽¹⁾ and that figure is rising. Other chronic illnesses are also linked to obesity. Many of the tasty, easily available and energy dense foods we eat are lacking in the vitamins we need. We have a paradox of abundant food and ill health.

The supermarket price wars force food manufacturers to look for cheaper and cheaper ingredients. This has an impact on farmer's livelihoods: 50% of UK dairy farmers have gone out of business in the last 13 years.⁽²⁾ This also has an impact on the environment as farming practices deteriorate in order to cut costs. In the UK

costs are borne by wildlife. The collapse of our bee population and other insect pollinators is due, in large part, to the use of certain agricultural chemicals. None of these external costs⁽³⁾ are included in the price we pay at the supermarket checkout.

97% of the nation's food bill is spent at the major supermarkets⁽⁴⁾. Company profits do not stay in the local economy; the number of people supermarkets employ is reduced to a bare minimum, with automatic checkouts reducing the need for check-out staff. However, research by the New Economics Foundation has shown that for every pound spent in a locally-run enterprise, three pounds is generated in the local economy. The Campaign for the Protection of Rural England estimates that money spent in local food networks contributes £6.75 billion of total value to local economies.⁽⁵⁾ The North East of England needs to be benefiting from this.

This is a brief summary of why we need to ask questions about our food system. We should challenge the idea that what is needed for a healthy nation is to reduce food prices further. We already spend the least proportion of our income on food out of all European countries, with the exception of Luxembourg.⁽⁶⁾ What is needed instead is a living wage so people can afford to buy good quality food, produced with care for our environment.

Finally, we need to ask ourselves: do we want thriving local economies, family farms, a healthy soil, a countryside that is full of wildlife and a healthy nation? Because if this is what we do want, we need to work actively towards it. Every day we all eat food and we all buy food. The choices we make have an impact.

The collapse of our bee population and other insect pollinators is due, in large part, to the use of certain agricultural chemicals. None of these external costs are included in the price we pay at the supermarket checkout.

we are seeing an increase in planning applications for large-scale meat and dairy production facilities. The intensification of farming practices has led to soil erosion, water pollution by fertiliser run off, the collapse of the bee population, and a massive loss of wildlife.

What we eat also has an impact on environments abroad. Virgin rainforest in Indonesia is being cleared at a phenomenal rate to grow palm oil, which is now present in nearly all the processed food we eat. Examine the ingredients of a chocolate bar, hot cross buns, stuffing mix, gravy mix - the majority will contain palm oil.

Trying to rectify damage to the environment falls to public agencies, the cost of which is ultimately borne by the taxpayer. Other

⁽¹⁾ *Urgent Recall*, 2014. Published by the New Economics Foundation

⁽²⁾ *The Guardian* 12th Jan 2015

⁽³⁾ See sustainablefoodtrust.org

⁽⁴⁾ *From field to fork: Hexham Mapping the local food web*, 2012. Published by the Campaign to Protect Rural England

⁽⁵⁾ *From field to fork: The value of England's local food webs*, 2012. Published by the Campaign to Protect Rural England

⁽⁶⁾ *Urgent Recall*, 2014. Published by the New Economics Foundation

Ruth Hayward is based in North East England and works as a freelance environmental organiser, researcher, teacher and network facilitator.



Images © Fair Food Carlisle



Lauren Healey is an arts project manager and producer based in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. Within her practice she has particular interests in urban spaces, politics, sustainability, food, community action, architecture and the geographies and histories of places. She is Project and Development Manager for Northern Film & Media; works across a-n The Artists Information Company's Communications & Partnerships and Programmes teams; and is also a member of the NewBridge Project Programming Committee.
www.laurenhealey.co.uk

Sabina Sallis is an artist currently based in Newcastle upon Tyne. Sallis' practice explores multifaceted aspects of sustainability and nature-culture continuum. Sallis experiments with the relationship between imaginary and factual, combining narrative and symbolic elements to create contemplative visual philosophies. "Sallis' works form a turning world with no centre or edges, no beginning or end, a new way of seeing things." Sallis gained her Masters from University of Arts, Poznan in Poland.
www.sabinasallis.com

Fernando García-Dory's (b. 1978) work engages specifically with the relationship between culture and nature now, as manifested in multiple contexts, from landscape and the rural, to desires and expectations concerned with identity, through to (global) crisis, utopia and the potential for social change. He studied Fine Arts and Rural Sociology in Madrid and Amsterdam, and is now preparing his PhD on Agroecology. Interested in the harmonic complexity of biological forms and processes, his work addresses connections and cooperation, from microorganisms to social systems, and from traditional art languages such as drawing to collaborative agroecological projects, actions, and cooperatives. He is currently working and preparing exhibitions with Casco Projects Utrecht, Cambridge University, Casa Gallina Mexico City, and HIAP Helsinki. He will be presenting his main current work, INLAND.org at this year Istanbul Biennale, and recovering an abandoned village in the mountains north of Spain as headquarters for the project.
www.fernandogarciadory.com

N55 is a Copenhagen-based art collective founded in 1994. N55 works with art as a part of everyday life. N55 has worked in the cross field of art, design and architecture for the last 20 years. N55's core message is about mobility, the dissipation of ownership and not disturbing your environment. N55's 'manuals' range from topics such as land, rooms, shop, factory, work, to snail shell systems, small fish farms, and hygiene systems. N55 freely distributes these schemes and instructions through their website; written work is available through the downloadable N55 Book at <http://www.n55.dk/>.

Julia Wilmott (b.1986) is a multi-disciplinary artist based in the North East of England. She has a BA in Fine Art from the Glasgow School of Art (2009). Her current work examines the impact of an ever-growing dehumanisation of the food industry and investigates the socio-political value ascribed to food by both small communities and the global food market. Previous projects include 'Rural Export', which explored the social fabric of a contemporary Lakeland landscape, shaped by tourism and the hospitality trade as much as traditional farming. It was developed over a period of six months with the community, and involved the invention of a cheese, made from the iconic Herdwick sheep.
www.juliawilmott.com

Julia Heslop is an artist and writer based in Newcastle upon Tyne. She is undertaking a PhD in Human Geography at Durham University examining participatory housing methods in Albania and translating these practices to a UK context. The potentials for deep participation in creating and recreating the urban environment are at the heart of her practice which spans large scale architectural installation and video. Her commissions include cross art-form performance for Chester Performs, architectural installation for the Maison de la Culture in Amiens, France, and a sound piece for the Lisbon Architecture Triennale. In 2014 she won second prize for 'The 100 Gram Cycle' in the cross-European project REcall, which re-appropriated a site in Rome with a 'forgotten' history. Her most recent video work, made in collaboration with a composer, examined the psychological gap between the 'informal' and 'formal' neighbourhoods of Tirana, Albania.
www.juliaheslop.com
www.unofficialculture.wordpress.com

Mikey Tomkins works as an academic researcher, artist and consultant in the field of urban sustainability and urban agriculture. His PhD researched food growing in community food gardens on London housing estates. Currently, he is working as a consultant in the US and Uganda, developing urban agriculture projects in under-resourced communities, specifically refugees. Previously, he worked for Sustain as a project officer, developing community beekeeping in London as part of the Capital Growth food gardening project. He has developed the Edible Map project to help bridge the divide between academic and policy work around food and cities, and the everyday lived experience of cities from the viewpoint of the resident.
www.mikeytomkins.co.uk

Magdalena Starska was born in 1980 in Poznan, Poland, where she lives and works. Starska is an artist who seemingly works without a plan; open to changeable reality, she is at all times ready to carry out an unexpected project. Starska consciously positions herself as a medium in between what's internal and individual and what belongs to the social and common realm. The rituals she is interested in come close to everyday reality, and those she wants to create are city-bound, modern and inspirational.
<http://galeriastereo.pl/en/magdalena-starska>

Webb-Ellis are British/Canadian artist filmmakers working largely in film, installation, and performance. They are currently resident artists at Crescent Arts in Scarborough. Their recent work investigates the problem of representation, the act of perception, and the boundaries between self and other.
www.webb-ellis.org

Urban Organisms examines and creatively explores food sustainability in cities. It includes film screenings, participatory workshops, walks, talks and an exhibition featuring artists **Fernando García-Dory, N55, Magdalena Starska, Mikey Tomkins, Caitlin & Andrew Webb Ellis and Julia Wilmott.** Exhibition open Tuesday – Saturday, 12-6pm.

MAY 2015

- Sat 16th 5-11pm Preview as part of the Late Shows with performance from Magdalena Starska; a live trading bar to 'win' drinks; plus edible food walks outlining potential food growing spaces in Newcastle city centre with Mikey Tompkins. Walks at 5pm and 7pm, booking essential, includes a limited edition map.
- Sun 17th - Sat 23rd Edible food walks with Mikey Tomkins. Various times, booking essential. £3 plus booking fee, includes a limited edition map.
- Fri 22nd 6-8pm Talk by Danish artist collective N55 and artist/researcher Mikey Tomkins.
- Sat 23rd 11am - 1:30pm N55 city farming planters in Newcastle City Centre, plus free drop-in planter-making workshop.
- Sat 23rd 2-4pm Cheese-making and tasting demonstration using artist Fernando Garcia Dory's Cheese Production Mobile Unit (CPMU 3) with artist Julia Wilmott and cheesemaker Liam Wood. Free, but booking essential.
- Thurs 28th 7pm Film screening: *Cowspiracy + Locavore - Pigs in the Park* hosted by Cinema Politica with discussion led by Dr. Alex Lockwood. Suggested donation of £1. Book in advance.

JUNE 2015

- Fri 5th 4-7pm Stu Brew student brewery. Free drop-in demonstrations and beer tasting. Over 18s only.
- Sat 6th 1-6pm Stu Brew student brewery. Free drop-in demonstrations and beer tasting. Over 18s only.
- Thurs 11th 7pm Film screening: *The World According to Monsanto + Carolyn Steel – How food shapes our cities?* hosted by Cinema Politica with discussion. Suggested donation of £1. Book in advance.

For all bookings and full programme please visit: www.thenewbridgeproject.com/urban-organisms/

All events at: The NewBridge Project, 12 NewBridge Street West, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8AW
/ admin@thenewbridgeproject.com / 0191 232 8975 / www.facebook.com/urbanorganisms

Urban Organisms is a collaborative project developed and curated by arts producer Lauren Healey, and artists Sabina Sallis and Julia Heslop, through NewBridge Programme Committee.

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