

## Surviving and Experimenting in Times of Uncertainty

If you have attended a NewBridge Project event you may have heard someone talk about 'meanwhile spaces', and when our story is told, alongside artists, artist studios, and experimental arts activity, there will be a large chapter on the use of empty buildings and our precarious place within them.

Now as we settle into our new building - our fourth in eleven years - with new neighbours and new challenges, we invite you to join us as we reflect on our experimental approach to creative practice within the uncertain foundations on which we continue to exist.

Like the porcupine in Ursula K. Le Guin's essay on Utopia\* we hope to shuffle backwards into our past in order to speculate on our future.

'The opening formula for a Cree story is an invitation to listen followed by the phrase "I go backward, look forward, as the porcupine does." In order to speculate safely on an inhabitable future, perhaps we would do well to find a rock crevice and go backward.'

Even in more prosperous times, financially speaking, you will find vacant buildings in major cities, but following the financial crash of 2008 this number surged and many were given over on temporary contracts as meanwhile spaces or 'pop-ups'.

Fast forward to October 2010 and you'll find two young artists, both called Will, enquiring about the temporary use of an empty shop in Newcastle City Centre for a one-off exhibition, then, much to their surprise, being handed the keys for an empty five-story building. So it goes.

This is the beginning of The NewBridge Project, part accident, part resourceful, part visionary, but nevertheless built upon the temporary and precarious foundations of uncertainty.

Living in precarity, or 'the precariat' in individual terms, meaning an existence without predictability, has risen exponentially in recent years. The life of an artist is often defined in these terms, low income, job insecurity, and an uncertainty about the future. But this is by no means exclusive to the arts.

Over the last decade or so precarious work has risen dramatically. In 2008 there were only 1.4m freelancers in the UK, now there are over 5million. We can possibly attribute such a dramatic shift to the long-term effects of the global financial crash of 2008 and the subsequent recession but this does nothing to help us understand how we are to live within this uncertainty, nor how to imagine a path to an inhabitable future.

When we celebrated our 5<sup>th</sup> Birthday in 2015, from the now demolished Norham House in Newcastle's City Centre, we did so under the banner *Do We Need to Grow Up?* Of course, this was a provocative question aimed at addressing our precarious predicament at the time. But it also pointed to a much broader critique of the notion of growth itself, its commitment to capitalist and colonial ideologies, and its stagnant imagination regarding any kind of alternatives.

Now as we celebrate our 11<sup>th</sup> birthday, we invite you to join us, to bring your ideas and your lived experiences to: experiment with alternatives models to growth, to recognise lines of solidarity across imposed borders, to identify doors we can knock on and ask for help, to imagine, experiment with, and to bring into being *our Blazing New Worlds*.

\**A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be*, Ursula K. Le Guinn, published in *Dancing at the Edge of the World* (New York: Grove Press 1989)