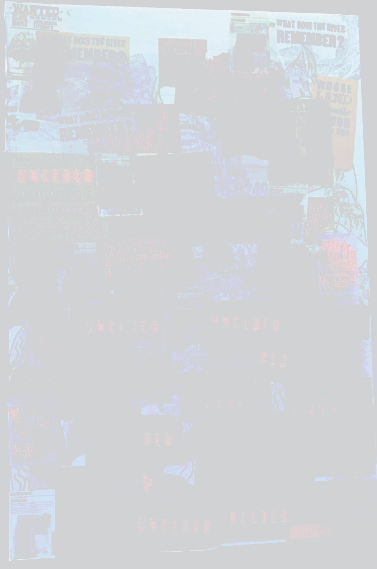


THE LOWER DON VALLEY
A COMMUNITY HISTORY
OF THE LOWER DON VALLEY
FROM THE 18TH TO THE 20TH CENTURY
BY [unreadable]



EXPLORING THE LOWER DON



MARE LIBERUM PRESENTS: IN WHICH WE DRAW A PEOPLE'S MAP OF THE DON RIVER THE ARTIST AS POLICY SHAPER | A GREY PAPER

A WORKING GROUP AND WORKING POSITION

In December of 2020 we hosted a day-long, online working group of artists, policymakers, scientists, academics, and community organizers with the aim of generating a dynamic grey paper encompassing specific and broadly applicable best practices for artists and urban designers working collaboratively toward public art that would also embody just environmental policy.

Our intention was for this workshop to inform our project, as an evolving creative, logistical, and ethical map for our work with Evergreen Brickworks and Waterfront Toronto.

We wanted to pose the following questions to our group:

- What practices and protocols would contribute to ethical and generative policies for artists working in environmentally and culturally sensitive areas?
- How can art shape policy and how can policy help shape spaces that provide footholds for art that engages actively with stakeholders and communities around environmental concerns?
- How can art and public policy join in imagining and enacting better worlds and better futures?
- How can art and policy address and repair issues around sovereignty, territoriality, and toxic legacies. How might policy infused with art practice resist colonial approaches to land stewardship and development?
- What are the limits and constraints of approaches that fuse art and public policy versus "artistic activism" that approaches issues from local, rhizomatic, community, and/or grassroots organizing?
- In engaging with a specific site and community, in relation to such global-local disorders as climate change, a pandemic, etc., how do you make a mark without leaving a trace?

The working group was organized and facilitated by Chloe Catan, Kari Cwynar, Julia Girmenia, Wing-Yee Fung, Annie Vandenberg, Sunita Prasad, Kendra Sullivan, Dylan Gauthier, and participants included Netami Stuart, Sonja Vangjeli, Doug Bennet, Catherine Tamarro, Helen Mills, Celina Su, Kendra Krueger, Shannon Gerard, Kelly Jazvac, Kirsty Robertson, Holly Chang, Akua Banful, and Aurash Khawarзад.

Below, we enumerate some of the findings from the workshop, in no particular order, and with fidelity to the grey paper, with no certain authority.

1. A ROLE FOR ARTISTS IN POLICY SHAPING

Artists have a unique ability to bring people into a place and reframe their sense of it, making them see their local built and natural environments in different ways. by refusing to adhere to primary assumptions about place. Diya Vij contributed during

A PROJECT BY MARE LIBERUM

COMMISSIONED BY WATERFRONT TORONTO & EVERGREEN BRICKWORKS

CURATED BY KARI CWYNAR, CHLOE CATAN, CHARLENE K. LAU

our working group discussion, reflecting on organizing the Public Artists in Residence (PAIR) program for the City of New York: "The fundamental belief behind artist placement in city agencies, as articulated by the Department of Cultural Affairs, is that artists are creative problem-solvers who approach issues and processes differently than other groups and communities." Artists bring a unique set of tools to bear on the disciplinary (or anti-disciplinary) area in which they are working.

Further, while the artist's role is not to "explain" policy or develop visualization tools for policy work, as the poet and scholar Celina Su noted in our grey paper working group, "Policies themselves can be beautiful when their characteristics as double-edged swords are seen for what they are, and they glimmer in the light." Catherine Tamarro offered the following on the role of artists in creating and circularly responding to knowledge around a particular situation: "As an artist sensitizes the public, the artist too is sensitized." These two statements led us to consider the ways that "artistic sensibility" and an engagement with beauty and the aesthetic could be brought into a public project with intentionality.

INTRODUCTION: WORKING IN THE GREY

A "grey paper" represents a form of counter-literature, diverging from the conventional rigor and authority of white papers. Grey literature, by nature, might not adhere strictly to traditional methodologies, peer review processes, hierarchy, or standardized frameworks. Instead, it embodies flexibility, adaptability, and openness to continuous evolution and reinterpretation.

A grey paper can have multiple uses as well. As it is distributed, its composition can change. It is open to restructuring, reordering, and the reprioritization of its ideas. It flows. It is perhaps a little unfinished, and leaves openings for new elements to be added along its journey. Unlike a white paper, which seeks to be definitive, a grey paper wants to hold onto uncertainty. As a mode and a method, it is interested in process and procedure, rather than resolution or strict and succinct presentation. This grey paper serves as a watery, flexible, and buoyant platform for understanding the role of artists in shaping public policy, providing insights and best practices for future interdisciplinary collaborations.

GREY ZONES

Drawing parallels from the concept of grey water—reused, utilitarian, and carrying particulate traces of its past—grey zones in art and policy are areas of intersection and ambiguity. They are the liminal spaces where disciplines converge and boundaries blur. These are spaces for speculation, reimagining, redefinition, and for art-making, assemblage, and collaboration.

The grey zones exist wherever artists position their work alongside scientists, educators, policymakers, and community members. In striving toward interdisciplinary or anti-disciplinary, these collaborations can challenge existing infrastructure, highlight systemic issues, and create new ways of seeing and thinking about our built and natural environments and our relationships to them.

ARTISTS AS POLICY-SHAPERS

Generally trained (self-taught or professionalized) in the arts, artists also embody a kind of fluidity and translucency, a way of seeing through and flowing between things. Artists are engaged with form and process, with becoming and the making of their work. Process is paramount, as is the understanding that research will lead to new shapes for their work to take in the future. Artists mix and match and collage between forms, and in this work, they often come up against limitations of policy.

POLICY AND THE IMAGINATION

When we think of the relationship between policy and the imagination, we might think of policy as a limitation on what might be, a grounds for containing the open imaginary that another world is, in fact possible. But there is more at play these days in how policy is formed, how quickly it is reformed, scrapped, and remade by and for specific communities who come into positions of power, and how much imagination is at play behind the scenes. Policy draws on cultural currents and seeks to codify these currents in a mutually-agreed set of rules. Artists have a role in shaping, defining, visualizing, performing, unpacking, deconstructing, mocking, questioning, and confronting the cultural currents upon which policy is built. To bring them more directly in line with the imagination-based work that policymakers also do is to recognize the artist's role in defining the culture, and to embrace the definition of culture as an essential part of policy planning, implementation, and widespread adoption.

COLLECTIVE CARE, REPAIR, AND FLOURISHING

Art and policy can work together toward collective care, repair, and flourishing by humanizing and deprogramming spaces. As noted by one group's breakout discussion, "rhizomatic art—grassroots, collective art—helps to humanize and deprogram space in amazing ways." Art as a process and engagement tool builds strong relationships between institutions and communities, fostering a deeper understanding of issues and creating a sense of shared ownership and responsibility.

RESISTANCE TO COLONIAL APPROACHES

Policy paired with art practice can resist colonial approaches to land stewardship and development. It depends on the process driving development—whether it is inclusive of many voices or dictated by a few. As Catherine Tamarro emphasized, "Sensitizing the public to Indigenizing the space is a crucial component." This involves acknowledging and incorporating Indigenous perspectives, as seen in the lost mud creek project and the work of the red path group.

REDIRECTING RESOURCES – SYSTEMS CHANGE FROM WITHIN

Artists often face the challenge of creating systems change while working within those very systems. This involves navigating institutional structures and finding ways to subversively redirect resources to support broader community goals. As noted by participants in one group, "How can we redirect resources within these institutions? What is the subversive way of going along with the program, but taking the funds and then creating an action, as disruption, that might be seen as challenging or circumnavigating it?"

COMMUNITY AND THE COMMONS

Inviting diverse participation is crucial for effective collaboration and systems change. questions arise about who gets the opportunity to participate and how to make these processes more inclusive. As Kendra Sullivan asked in the workshop,

"how do we bring more diverse people and practices into this process itself?" Who are the communities we wish to reach? How do we find them and invite them into community with us and with our project?

Art can play a significant role in reactivating community and reclaiming the commons, first by making a broader public aware of the loss of a commons (or potential / impending loss) and second by bringing together what Mare Liberum has previously called "communities of sense" around experiences and interventions. As noted by Akua Banful, "Using art to reactivate the commons... there is a push and pull between art as spectacle and art as commons."

thematic discussions

ethical and generative policies

- practices and protocols for ethical engagement in environmentally and culturally sensitive areas.
- the role of art in shaping policies that foster community engagement and environmental stewardship.

sovereignty, territoriality, and toxic legacies

- addressing issues of sovereignty and territoriality through art-infused policy frameworks.
- repairing and resisting colonial approaches to land stewardship and development.

long-term engagement and light touch long duration

- the concept of long-term engagement in community projects, emphasizing subtle, sustainable interventions over extractive practices.
- the role of artists in long-term community engagement, beyond temporary site visits and short-term projects.

showing up in times of crisis

- strategies for maintaining authentic and meaningful engagement during crises, such as the covid-19 pandemic.
- the importance of local partnerships and the delegation of project leadership to trusted community members.

Case Study: Mare Liberum's Project in the Lower Don River Valley

Mare Liberum's project, "In Which We Draw A People's Map of the Don River" (2021-), curated by Kari Cwynar (Evergreen Brickworks) and Chloe Catan (Waterfront Toronto) exemplifies the transformative potential of art-infused community engagement in urban planning and environmental stewardship. The project actively involved local stakeholders, policymakers, and community members in collaborative actions aimed at reimagining the future of the Don River Valley.

Context and Objectives

The project is situated within the broader and much larger scale (and budget) project of the Don Mouth Naturalization and Port Lands Flood Protection Project (DMNP), a significant urban renewal initiative in Toronto. DMNP aims to enhance flood protection while revitalizing the Don River and its surrounding areas, reconnecting them with Lake Ontario. Mare Liberum's initiative aligns with these goals but adds a crucial layer of community-driven narrative and artistic expression.

Collaborative Approach

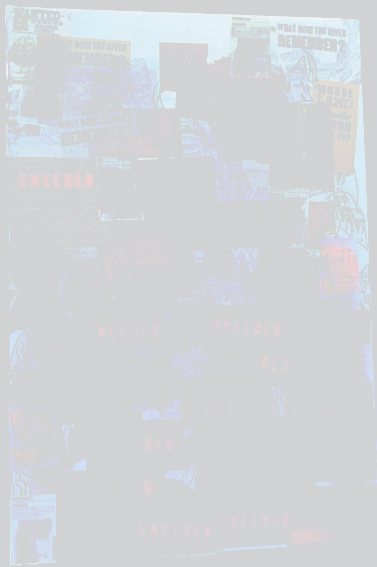
Mare Liberum's approach integrates art and community engagement to democratize urban planning processes, in particular around waterfront use and access. Through workshops, artistic interventions, and participatory mapping exercises, the project empowers local residents to articulate their visions for the Don River Valley's future. This collaborative effort ensures that diverse voices—often marginalized in traditional planning—shape the development trajectory.

Showing Up

Over the COVID pandemic we were forced to reimagine our role as project catalysts and organizers and the ways that we might still show up for each other virtually. The challenge was to find ways to engage authentically and meaningfully with a community and a place from afar. As any organizer knows, rule one of effective organizing is to show up. Showing up for your community means being open and present, sharing resources and time and listening, and trusting a process. But how to identify the community from afar. In our case, restricted from international travel by the pandemic, we found that one way to show up is to identify local partners and to entrust them with shaping and directing the project. We found willing and generous collaborators in Shannon Gerard and Maria Hupfield, and by extension in their students and collaborators. Through weekly meetings and semi-regular virtual class visits, we provided framing and structure, but primarily used these sessions to listen and respond to questions that would arise in the development of the project. In our work building boats, we have often recognized the sharing of roles that can occur when you hand over an oar and a boat and ask people to become navigator-pilot-captains of their own journey. This is an act of trust and empowerment, and it's basic – people will take care of themselves and each other when given the proper tools and training to do so.

Artistic Interventions

Central to Mare Liberum's project was the creation of a "People's Map," a visual representation of community aspirations, histories, and ecological insights related to the Don River Valley. This artistic endeavor not only documented local knowledge but also stimulated public dialogue and consciousness about environmental sustainability and urban resilience.



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