# THE MERMAIDS DIVE FOR FREEDOM: VOICES OF FEMINIST COMMUNITY ACTIVISTS PLUNGING THROUGH NEOLIBERAL TIMES

Volume I of II

**Siobhán Madden**

PhD in Adult and Community Education

NUI Maynooth
Department of Adult and Community Education
Faculty of Social Science

Head of Department: Dr Tony Walsh
Supervisor: Dr Anne B. Ryan
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*This thesis is dedicated to John Joe Rabbitte of Dalystown, Kylebrack, Loughrea, Co. Galway.*

# VOLUME I

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***Abstract***

*This thesis is based on a narrative inquiry with three feminist community activists. Its purpose is to provide a resource to support the radical praxis of feminist community educators in a neoliberal context which has appropriated both community education and feminism for a labour market agenda. It foregrounds listening to the voices and stories of women's community education, placing the women's voices at the heart of 'the political'. This involves a critical shift away from a politics of 'gender equality' defined through policy rationalities. This shift is accomplished through a theoretical synthesis of Michel Foucault's neoliberal governmentality and Adriana Cavarero's feminist philosophy of the narratable self. This double analytic is framed through Hannah Arendt's distinction between the discursive registers of 'what' and 'who', linked to Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's poetic imaginary of the mermaid in exile on dry land who must forget about water. Time is a central theme here: the time of 'what is' is the neutral linear time of closure and endings; the time of 'who are you?' is a time of beginnings and becomings, where past, present and future are intermingled. The question posed is this: Whose political voices can become possible through neoliberal times? It brings forward delegitimised critical pedagogical knowledges of narrative processes, in response to the invitation to 'Tell me a story of voice that has some significance to you as a feminist community activist'. Based on these dialogues, the thesis contests state responses to violence against women as part of a disciplinary project of producing neoliberal subjects. The methodology is a critical intervention in the politics of representation, producing a heteroglossic text which interrogates policy rationalities through oral narratives. The thesis provides an account of neoliberal governmentality as enacting ontological, epistemic and political violence. It simultaneously opens onto the mermaid's sea worlds, discovering a fluid world of the 'in-between' which creates boundless possibilities for radical feminist futures.*

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Go raibh míle míle maith agaibh go léir. *Killagoola, Moycullen, Co. Galway*

Chapter 1

# Introduction
# Of All the World's Passionate Women

The question I pose in this thesis is as follows: 'Whose political voices can become possible through neoliberal times?' I ask this question as a feminist community educator and activist in Ireland committed to radical praxis. My thesis is an extended philosophical engagement with the entangled questions of voices, the political, and time, in dialogue with a diverse range of intellectual resources. These resources include my three friends and colleagues, Lady Gaga, Alice, and Clare,[1] along with Hannah Arendt (1958), Adriana Cavarero (2000, 2005), Michel Foucault (1980, 1991), Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), and the Irish language poet, Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill (2005; 2007). Women's community education, the focus of my thesis, is an educational practice developed by and for women on the margins. With an emphasis on voices and stories (Connolly, 2003), its practices are of an oral tradition. As will be demonstrated over the course of my thesis, the language of women creating their own stories has a marginalised status in the canons of 'the political', with respect to both official power structures and community/feminist organisations where policy reigns supreme.

One of the purposes of this introduction is to provide a sort of orientation for the reader by introducing some of the key concepts and the theoretical framework of this project. More importantly however, it also has a purpose of disorientation in the sense of preparing for a move away from some established norms of knowledge production. One expression of this disorienting purpose is that I shift between different voice genres as does my thesis itself. Moreover, these shifts do not necessarily follow a precise linear trajectory, but are more akin

[1] These are pseudonyms.

to different openings of engagement. The purpose of all this is to evoke the spirit of new possibilities which is the affirmative drive of my thesis. This is not to say that my thesis is a happy one. This affirmative impulse is intertwined with one which is quite contrary, and times of despair and anger coexist in my thesis with times of fun, joy and hope.

This introductory chapter sets the scene by drawing on *The Fifty Minute Mermaid,* a bi-lingual collection of poems by the Irish language poet Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, with English translations by Paul Muldoon. The first three poems open up profound questions about the modern human condition, through a feminist post-colonial consciousness. These three poems set the scene for Ni Dhomhnaill's more extended poetic narrative about the mermaid in exile on dry land. This mermaid will be an important figure in my thesis. In the rest of the chapter, a series of my vignettes will introduce Lady Gaga, Alice, Clare, and myself, as well as different aspects of the philosophical, methodological and political commitments of my thesis.

## Between Sorrow and Hope

*Táimse in aimsir ag an mBás*
*eadrainn tá coinníollacha tarraithe.*
*Réitíomair le chéile ar feadh tréimhse is spás*
*aimsire, achar roinnt bliana is lae mar a*
*cheapas-sa.*

*Bhuaileas leis ag margadh na saoire.*
*D'iarr sé orm an rabhas hire-áilte.*
*'Is maith mar a tharla; máistir ag lorg cailín*
*is cailín ag lorg máistir'.*

...
*Is tá sé féin saibhir thar meon.*
*Tá trucailí óir agus seoda aige.*
*Ní bheadh i gcarn airgid Déamair*
*ach cac capaill suas leo.*

I've gone and hired myself out. I've hired
myself out to Death.
We drew up a contract and set the seal
on it by spitting in our palms. I would go with
him to Lateeve
for a year and a day – at least, that was the
deal

as I remember it. When I met him at the
hiring-fair
he inquired if I'd yet
been taken: 'What a stroke of luck,' he
declared,
'when a master who's set on a maid finds a
maid who's set

on a master.'

... He himself has riches that are untold,
coming down as he is with jewels and gems.
Even John Damer of Shronel, even his piles of
gold
would be horse-shit compared to them.

| | |
|---|---|
| *Ó táimse in aimsir ag an mbás,*<br>*is baolach ná beidh mé saor riamh uaidh.*<br>*Ní heol dom mo thuarastal ná mo phá*<br>*nó an bhfhaighidh mé pá plaic' nó cead*<br>*aighnis uaidh.* (l. 12, 14) | I've hired myself out to death. And I'm afraid that I'll not<br>ever be let go. What I'll have at the end of the day<br>I've absolutely no idea, either in terms of three hots and a cot<br>or if I'll be allowed to say my say. (pp. 13, 15) |

The poem, *Mo Mháistir Dorcha/*My Dark Master, opens Ní Dhomhnaill's collection of poems. Its theme of having 'hired myself out to Death' and being 'afraid that I'll not ever be let go' (the line '*is baolach ná beidh mé saor riamh uaidh'* literally means 'there's a danger I'll never be free from him'), provides a rich metaphorical language for the current situation of many feminist and community organisations: having been hired out to the neoliberal state through funding relationships, many of us now wonder if we will ever 'be allowed to say my say'. More specifically, the poem highlights forms of governance which rely on worker identities to enable a fit between neoliberal imperatives and its subjects: 'a maid who's set on a master' looking for 'a master who's set on a maid'. This is a telling example of how the neoliberal subject is produced. The precariousness of the maid's material insecurity contrasts with the master's dripping wealth – 'his realm extends as far as the eye/ can see and beyond' (p. 15). My thesis theorises all of this from the Foucauldian perspective of neoliberal government at a distance and the production of neoliberal subjects (Foucault, 1991). This is the first major theoretical strand of my thesis.

But the gendered terms of Ní Dhomhnaill's poem probe a deeper feminist politics at work beneath surface meanings. The poem is written in the rich Irish poetic tradition of the *caoineadh* or lament. This was a genre associated with women, as documented by Bourke (1988a, 1988b, 1997). Ní Dhomhnaill's own citation of Bourke is important in establishing that the significance of the *caoineadh* for her is that it is also a genre of marginalised women:

> Irish women lament-poets were doubly colonised; they belonged to a society and composed in a language considered inferior and barbarian to those in power; but even within their own society they were an underclass, not taught to write, not admitted to the academy as serious poets, rarely named as authors of their own compositions.
> (Bourke, 1997, p. 144, in Ní Dhomhnaill, 2005, p. 56)

There are interesting parallels to be made here with women's community education. Bourke (1988a) notes that, 'keening' in English suggests 'a high-pitched, inarticulate moaning' (p. 287), and I will argue that an analogous delegitimisation of emotional expression attends

hegemonic notions of the political. With respect to the Irish word *caoineadh* from which 'keening' derives, Bourke (1988a) highlights that it signifies, 'a highly articulate tradition of women's oral poetry. The lamenting woman led the community in a public display of grief' (p. 287). This performance required the cooperation of several women (Burke, 1997). The lament was traditionally composed and sung over the body of the dead person by a close woman relative. One of its functions was 'to stock the community's memory with praise of the dead person' (1988b, p. 13) – almost always a man in the surviving texts. Most groups of lines consist of lavish praise of the dead, and curses on his enemies or the objects responsible for his death. In addition, the keener 'has permission to express the concerns of her own and other women's lives in a vehement and uninhibited way', and can 'demand the attention and support of the community at a time of great stress in her own life' (p. 14).

In lament poems, there is little reference to religion 'and none to the Christian afterlife' (Bourke, 1988b, p. 12). Rather, death rather is regarded 'as final and treated as an outrage' (p. 12). The lament is addressed to the living, including 'the dead person as one of them, but one who is about to defect' (p. 12). Bourke cites van Gennep (1960) that, 'During mourning the living mourners and the deceased constitute a special group, situated between the world of the living and the world of the dead' (cited in Bourke, 1988b, p. 12). The keener is an intermediary between these worlds. At a time of community disruption, she 'helps to define the boundaries of human culture and experience' (Bourke 1988b, p. 13) by moving others to express their grief through her words and her voice.

In the above poem, Ní Dhomhnaill draws on the *caoineadh* genre to evoke the modern crisis of the human condition. The poem is a lament for life itself. Death, personified with a capital letter as the master, has seized control of the keener. But even this separation of personas has collapsed in the last verse. The capital letter is no more; death has now colonised the space of life itself. The anguish and despair is heightened in Ní Dhomhnaill's Irish verse by the lamenting sound of 'Ó' – '*Ó táimse in aimsir ag an mbás'*. With the collapse of the in-between space between life and death, which characterises the traditional lament, is the collapse of the community upon which it is premised. The lamenter is alone and isolated on the hills, leading the master's cows *trí gleannta an uaignis* (through the valleys of loneliness). Now the only conceivable audience is Death, and she does not know if he will allow her to use her voice.

The darkness of *Mo Mháistir Dorcha* seeps into the second poem where it assumes a horrific reality: *Dubh*/Black is about the Sebrenica massacre on July 11th 1995. This day is a litany of gardens, trees, buses, shops, windows, birds, spuds, cabbage, Catholics, Protestants, Serbs, Croatians – all sucked into a uniform darkness. All objects and people have lost distinction. The litany is interrupted by a verse about the politicians 'scuffling about' trying to persuade '*nach fada go mbeidh gach dubh ina gheal*/to look on the bright side'. But the poet will not be persuaded, because she is '*mar ... gach duibheagán doimhin a shlogann ár ndóchas/*like ... every bottomless pit in which we lose all hope' (p. 18-19).

The third poem then shifts to '*An Obair*/The Task'. This is also a poem of deep sorrow, with a verse each for 'my dearest friend slowly dying', 'the face of the Muslim woman from Algeria I saw in a newspaper lately after she was told that the throats of eight of her children had been cut', and 'my own husband who spent six days in a coma'. But, unlike the previous poem, this is a poem of particular individuals who are in, or brought into, a relationship with the poet. And around each individual is a mosaic of unfolding moments, of intermingling times of past, present and future, and of their collisions and dissociations in the space of life and death. Thus, the poet carries in her pocket a photograph of herself and her friend as young women, 'laughing, with no sense of what was to come'. She describes a Serbian commandant: '*an staraí litríochta/a chaith a chuid ama saor lena chairde ag imirt caide le plaosc dhaonna*/the literary historian/who enjoyed an off-moment with his friends, playing ball with a human skull' (Muldoon's 'off-moment' underlining the temporal and human dissociations). And she describes herself looking out the window of the waiting room while her husband is in a coma – at the light going down on the bay, the come and go of the tide, and

*trácht trom ar an mbóthar mar a raibh an saol*
*Fódlach ag rith sall*
*is anall, ag plódú ar nós na nduilleog a bhí ag*
*péacadh ar gach aon chrann[.] (l. 20)*

heavy traffic on the road as the entire
population of Ireland rushed here and there,
countless as bud-blasts from the trees[.]
*(p. 21)*

This is a striking image of a sudden move from the generalised anonymity of the entire population, rushing in the linear time of heavy traffic on the road, to its radical transformation into an image of generative abundance. The transformation is accomplished by zooming in on particularity – the leaves sprouting on every single tree in Ni Dhomhnaill's verse, and the wonderful image of 'bud-blasts' in Muldoon's.

All of this then establishes *an obair/*the task*,* or, 'the work':

| | |
|---|---|
| *é seo go léir a thaibhairt faoi ndeara is*<br>*áit a dhéanamh dó id' chroí gan*<br>*pléascadh …(l. 22)* | to take it all in, to make room in<br>your heart without having your<br>heart burst …(p. 23) |

Ni Dhomhnaill's title, '*An Obair',* is deliberate in connecting heart and history. It is the name of a village in Co. Meath, anglicised as 'Nobber', with a Norman motte and bailey, glimpsed at the beginning of the poem through 'a curtain of trees' as she too (was) '*ag tiomáint thar bráid go tapaidh ar an mbóthar'*/'drove quickly past'. The heart must also find a place for history:

| | |
|---|---|
| *An Obair. Sin í an obair. Sin í an obair*<br>*nach éasca. (l. 22)* | a place called Nobber. That's the<br>task. *An obair.* A task that's far<br>from easy. (p. 23) |

With all of this, we have arrived at the second major theoretical strand of my thesis. For Arendt (1958) too, 'the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting' (p. 9). For her, this constitutes the proper locus of the political. This is why for her 'natality, and not mortality, may be the central category of political, as distinguished from metaphysical, thought' (p. 9). Arendt's ontology of the human condition is one of uniqueness in plurality – the insubstitutability of each embodied *someone* in a web of human relationships. Cavarero (2000, 2005) has worked this into a feminist political philosophy of voice and narratability. She argues that Arendt's distinctive notion of the political, unrealised in political practice generally, finds its expression in feminist consciousness-raising story-telling practices. It is with this notion of the political, I will argue, that women's community education finds its proper home.

Arendt's distinction between the discursive registers of what and who provides the analytical tapestry for weaving my two Foucault/Arendt theoretical strands together. The 'what' is the hegemonic philosophy of the general. It is in this discursive register that I locate the rationalities identified by Foucauldian accounts of neoliberal governmentality. The 'who' is the unique, embodied and relational existent. It is this discursive register which I will argue provides a counter-rationality to neoliberalism. This positions the devalued knowledge, story-telling practices and 'narratable selves' of women's community education as the potential source of a powerful feminist challenge to the disciplinary regime of neoliberal subjectivity.

What then of Ní Dhomhnaill's working out of *an obair/*the task which comprises Part II of *The Fifty Minute Mermaid?* For this difficult task, Ní Dhomhnaill offers us a poetic narrative of the merfolk (*murúcha)* in exile from their sea origins, and forced to live on dry land. To survive, the merfolk must forget about water. This long sequence of poems begins with the lines:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Ar an gcarraig lom seo ar a gcuireann siad isteach an t-am de ló is a ngainní á dtriomú acu* (l. 26) | Barely have they put in on this bare rock than their scales start drying out *(p. 27)* |

In the theoretical landscape of my thesis, dry land is the neoliberal domain of the what. In the theoretical waterscape of my thesis, the sea origins hold the question, 'who are you?' And the mermaid, the central figure of Ni Dhomhnaill's story, holds the in-between of life and death, and the memory of possibilities for *an saol eile* – the other world.

**Three of All the World's Passionate Women**

'How will I describe ye?' I asked Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare, my three research collaborators, one day during one of our meetings together. The question was briefly pondered – the usual research language of categories and roles really wouldn't be consistent with what I was trying to do with my study, would it? I shook my head, newly connected with what I needed not to do. An answer emerged:

*'Three passionate women'*

The refusal to be fixed and categorised which produced this answer already positions Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare in a critical orientation to normative research practices. But the refusal is also a collaborative act of joining with me in a reaffirmation of my own purpose. The declaration of passion transforms the refusal into a more intense affirmation of their own critical purposes. Passion relates to strong emotion. The phrase grounds any notion of 'three' away from abstraction. 'Three passionate women' is a declaration of the embodied presence of *these* three real embodied women. Their concrete exposure, even in this moment beginning something new, constitutes the political as defined by Arendt.

But the answer does not stay still in the moment. As it hangs in the air it sparks its own questions. Might it normalise a separateness from, or a kind of elevation above, other passionate women? The answer now turns into another new answer:

'*Three of all the world's passionate women'*

Through its relational ensemble, the phrase 'three of all the world's passionate women' powerfully lifts Arendt's ontology of the human condition as uniqueness in plurality to a new level of intensity. The two-minute move of these 'three' from the space of the room to the space of 'all the world' subverts and throws open the boundary containments of neoliberalism, implicitly calling into question the carefully bounded notions of territoriality, of nation-states, and the power relations upon which they are built. But this is a matter of effects; one must not here elide the relationality of this second refusal which is the refusal to be separated from or implicitly elevated above other women – a refusal which is not passively *in* but is actively *of* the world. In some ways, it is a plurality in plurality: a turning toward the world in the recognition of all other women in their own uniquenesses, their own particularity, and their own involvements in the world. And the political location from which these three of all the world's passionate women turn toward the world is locally-based, feminist community activism in Ireland.

Of such a ‘living utterance,’ Bakhtin writes as follows:

> A living utterance, acquiring meaning at a determinate historical moment in a socially determinate environment, cannot avoid brushing against thousands of living dialogical threads woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of the utterance, it cannot avoid becoming an active participant in social dialogue. It is out of this dialogue that it arises, as its continuation, as a rejoinder, and it does not approach the object from somewhere on the sidelines. (Bakhtin, 1981, pp 276-7)

In this particular socially-determinate environment, here are the four of us in the women’s centre, sprawled on couches with our cups of tea, scones and apple tart. Around us the walls announce in images and words a world of women’s grassroots community activism: support for women experiencing domestic violence; a meeting place for women who love women; a Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women poster; a 40th anniversary poster for South Africa’s 1956 ‘march against all forms of women’s oppression’; a ‘Flower Power’ poster for women’s community education; a breastfeeding group; a poster for ‘Women of Africa Women of Song’; a notice on the bookcase saying ‘feel free to take’, with a friendly arrow pointing to the shelf below. The room populates our conversation with other women’s voices, stories and presences, and traces of their comings and goings.

**The World is Full of Stories**

When I approached Lady Gaga, then Alice, and then Clare for a research conversation, I had no interview schedule. I had my digital recorder, a notebook, and a single but different invitation for each of them. I said to Lady Gaga, ‘Tell me a story of voice which has some significance to you as a feminist community activist’. And Lady Gaga began by speaking to me of a training session she had co-facilitated with a group of mainly women, and spoke of their anger and rage as they discussed the fixed parameters, questions and agendas of official consultations, and the pretence of voice.

I then turned to Alice with a new request: ‘Tell me a story of voice which has some significance to you as a feminist community activist’. And Alice began by speaking to me about women not having a voice, and how this lack of voice gets labelled as a ‘mental health’ issue, and how this labelling silences the trauma and pain which many women are carrying, as well as history, relationship, systems, and human rights abuses.

I turned then to Clare and asked of her something entirely different: 'Tell me a story of voice which has some significance to you as a feminist community activist'. And Clare began by speaking to me about hearing women's stories and of the silencing of women's voices through the bureaucratisation of everyday life, the desensitisation of stories, and the limited information upon which official decision-making is founded.

The form of each question is obviously the same, and yet the uniqueness of each question turns on its address to an unsubstitutable 'you'. Each unique response therefore invites its own further unique questions from me, and so our conversations unfolded as nomadic narratives in a 'dance between power and desire' (Tamboukou, 2008, p. 285). And because of having heard 'so many stories' from so many women, the voices, stories and knowledge of many many women also entered into the polyphonic story-telling space between us.

## The Story of Scherazade

Insofar as my thesis is a story about stories about stories, it bears a resemblance to the story of Scherazade in the Arabian Nights, of her telling stories to her husband the sultan over a thousand and one nights. Cavarero (2000) writes that, 'the Arabic text is constructed like a game of Chinese boxes – where the characters of the stories told by Scherazade likewise tell stories whose protagonists appear as narrators of subsequent stories, and so forth ad infinitum' (p. 124). She suggests that the story of Scherazade herself is a frame which

> exhibits, flauntingly, the very act of narrating. The frame is therefore the tale that generates the tale, exhibiting without mystery its generative function. In *The Arabian Nights*, this consists in a story that opens and closes the internal proliferation of the stories ... True to the standards of the classical model, the story of Scherazade and the sultan, the frame-story, is not told by Scherazade; rather, it is the story that legitimates the role of narrator that she assumes in relation to the other stories. (p. 121)

But there is another sense in which the story of Scherazade finds resonance in my thesis. The frame-story of *The Arabian Nights* is a story of horrific violence against women. The sultan marries a new virgin everyday, upon which the previous bride is beheaded. He has killed 1,000 women by the time he meets Scherazade, but Scherazade interrupts and stops the killing through her skillful storytelling. In the proliferation of stories generated with Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare, I realised I needed a thematic thread to hold these stories in relationship with each other. With this realisation came the recognition that interwoven into

each one of these complex and nuanced accounts of voice and silence was the issue of violence against women. This is the theme which I address through questions of voice and silence.

But, unlike the frame story of Scherazade, violence against women in my research is an emergent theme and is not the basis for legitimising my role a narrator. My narrating role finds its legitimacy in the ethic of the narratable self: '*tell me a story of voice'*. The generative possibilities of narrative, with its recursive foldings and unfoldings, are already in the iterative structure so that 'voice' is doubly invited as both an embodied *telling*, and as the subject *of* the telling. But here now I have become the teller of these stories. In this one can trace an ontological continuity between all of us tellers of and listeners to stories which is rooted in our shared human condition, and our desires to make meaning out of the conditions of our lives.

**The Words of My Thesis**

My thesis is very long, I know. To you now compelled to read it - perhaps with heavy heart and hand - I feel I owe an explanation. My most ready answer is that it was my thesis' fault and not my own. This may, of course, appear as an irresponsible abandonment of authorial responsibility, and certainly not the sort of pitch of which PhDs are made. And yet, in truth, this thesis has appeared to have a life of its own, of me and not of me. It has accompanied me, one might say, like an adventurous, unpredictable and quite rebellious friend, refusing to accept the rules of how a thesis 'should' be done. And with it running off the beaten path in all directions, I then must follow, and run ahead to clear a way. And then, being, after all, the responsible one in this alliance, I must explain this errant behaviour, and defend it by inventing elaborate epistemological excuses. And write them down. And then my friend gets, well, longer.

You might of course protest: there is a distinction between the process and the disciplined writing of a 'thesis'. And perhaps rightly so. And yet here the voices now interject. And make their claims for body and time and ears; the stories that they tell must grow, and show their own becomings in the writing of the thesis. To which the written word says, 'No! I am space! Not time!' And then I, sighing, caught between these two must then somehow adjudicate.

And find a compromise. And try to put some undiscipline on the written word. And tell it that it must bend and expand to accommodate the voices and the stories.

And so if you perchance have browsed ahead, you may have wondered if you are dealing with some grammatical reprobate, with capital letters shooting up in places they never have, and turning to lower case letters against their proper call. And the 'full stop?' Null and void.

And then these undisciplined words in long, long letters written to Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare.

And then spilling out over the rest of my thesis.

**The Real World**

You might of course further protest: the voices and the stories have their own oral world, and to contaminate the written word like this is just a step *too* far. But I'm afraid this does not help your case at all. In fact it makes it worse. Because it doesn't have regard for the *real world:*

> Siobhán called on her other 'real world' friends to help her save the village. Alice was an artist who painted so beautifully that she often returned to find a damp canvas as her painting wept at its own beauty. The magical strains of Lady Gaga's melodies confused time with their ethereal beauty and she was visited by long dead friends and family who sang along to the airs. And Clare danced! She appeared so insubstantial as she moved that they often had to grab her legs as she floated off into the sky ... As the four friends worked together to save the village, the creativity flowed between them. Alice's paintings took on a fragrant aroma and beautiful melodies sprang from the dishes Siobhán cooked. The notes danced off the music sheets and the long dead elders grasped them as they flew off into the night (from an unpublished story entitled 'A Bit of Nonsense' by Lady Gaga).

Lady Gaga's story announces the real world of flesh and bone women, distinguished by her from the neoliberal pretend world where nonsense has taken hold. This is the Arendtian world of action, a world of initiative – an answer to a call – which emerges from the material world and finds its expression in the creative intangibility of the in-between. The narrative of this action disrupts and confuses the time of linear order and sequence. How many hours, days, months, or years were we four friends working together to save the village? It is not relevant in this narrative. In this swirl of simultaneous happenings, the focus is on the in-between spaces of connectedness, sensual awareness and the emergence of new unimagined possibilities. In these confusions of linear time, the past is not left behind. Rather, the present

is expanded to include the voices of 'long dead friends and family' who join in with the singing.

Now, if you've ever had a story written about you and presented to you as a gift, as Lady Gaga did to me during our second conversation, then you will know the desire to have your own story told, a desire that goes to the heart of Cavarero's (2000) narratable self. And you will also know that it is a desire that you may not have realised you had until it is fulfilled. And that when it is fulfilled, it may call out a response to fulfil the promises of the story – in this case, my newly-acquired culinary reputation.

And so I mix things up in a heteroglossic recipe. I let the voices loose on the voices of authority. And let the whole thing simmer in the confusions of time.

**Thousands of Dialogical Threads**

The phrase, 'of all the world's passionate women', brushes against thousands of living dialogical threads and resonates for me with the voices of women from varied contexts of my life. I did not appear out of nowhere into this room, nor I do approach this study from somewhere on the sidelines. My earliest feminist engagement was with a local women's group in Galway city in the early 1990s. Already involved in left-wing politics, particularly issues of homelessness, tenant's rights, poverty, and state abuses of human rights in Northern Ireland, this was a new and liberating practise of politics for me. We shared and reflected on personal stories, read and discussed feminist texts such as Adrienne Rich's (1980) essay on compulsory heterosexuality. We organised women-only social spaces. We went around the city with buckets of paste and, over the sexist and objectifying posters for a local nightclub ('Sex Kitchen'), we plastered strips declaring, 'This is offensive to me as a woman'. We got involved in the nation-wide Repeal the Eight Amendment Campaign to repeal the (still-existing) constitutional article which equates the life of a woman with that of a foetus. In our discussions about naming ourselves clearly as the Galway Women's Right to Choose Group, I recall one of the women invoking the Irish proverb,*'Labhair í agus mairfidh sí',* which means 'speak it and it will live.' But she drew attention to the feminine form of the article so that the literal translation is, '*Speak her and she will live'*.

Our group was part of a wider 'mushrooming' of locally based women's groups in Ireland in the 1980s and 1990s, a development which has been described – although not without contestation – as marking a new phase in the women's movement (see Connolly & O'Toole, 2005). While our group was composed of both working-class and middle-class women – I myself being middle-class –women's community education has been an initiative of mainly working-class women.

For a number of years, I worked as 'Women's Group Action Facilitator' with one of these groups, a women's centre in the middle of Ireland called Longford Women's Link. In this context, I had a long and sustained involvement with many women, and the stories of their lives. In this context, too, I learned at a deeper level about women's relationship with what gets called 'politics'. In preparation for the local 2006 elections, I engaged in discussions about the possibility of a local election campaign with many women in many different groups. And in their discussion of engaging with local politicians – almost all male – I heard many expressions of anger and many more of apathy. But I could also hear that these expressions were informed by a deep and intimate knowledge – the kind of knowledge which I from my middle-class location did not have – of the failure of local politicians to listen.

So rather than the customary list of demands, our manifesto demand became one for a new recognised structure which might create the conditions for voice, where local politicians would meet with women collectively and listen to what they had to say. And around this demand, hundreds of women mobilised by means of networks and word of mouth. We had large collective gatherings as well, energised through song and dance. And as more women assumed leadership, my organising role receded. The day we met with politicians in a hall packed with women, I sat back and lone parents, migrant women, and so on, stood up, interrogated politicians, and made passionate and eloquent speeches based on their own lives. This experience affirmed for me the power of centring women's knowledge, stories and relationships, and the possibilities for movement when we risk stepping outside of received rationalities – when we 'pivot the centre' (see Mohanty, 2003).

## Setting a New Beginning Through Action

'Three of all the world's passionate women' of course throws open the whole world. The central focus of my feminist activism over many years was with Banúlacht, a feminist

development education organisation which worked with local women's groups in Ireland, linking local and global issues, in solidarity with women in the global South. Our analysis was shaped by an explicit critique of neoliberalism from a feminist and women's human rights perspective.

I first met Lady Gaga as a participant in a two-day workshop which I facilitated for Banúlacht in Dublin. The workshop brought together twenty-two grassroots feminists from Ireland and Tanzania to facilitate a feminist solidarity exchange visit. We called ourselves *Mná Sasa,* joining the Irish word *Mná,* which means Women, with the Swahili word *Sasa,* which means Now. And from words spoken and written during the workshops, we created a multi-authored collective narrative document, the Mná Sasa Manifesto, as an act of solidarity between grassroots feminists in Tanzania and Ireland. We launched the document in Kabangaja, Mwanza, walking, dancing and singing. Our Tanzanian colleagues in the organisation, Kivulini, also arranged for some of us to visit Tanzania and to experience what it was like, for example, to cycle on a dirt track, the only mode of transport to the clinic for many pregnant women, many of whom had to give birth on the side of the road. Meanwhile, structural adjustment programs imposed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund prioritised building roads for transporting goods, ignoring the tracks of pregnant women.

As a grassroots feminist, galvanised through an explicit and collective critique of neoliberalism, my experience of the exchange with Tanzanian women and women from Ireland provided me with a unique sense of purpose for this research. It affirms my hope and belief in the possibilities of feminism as a vibrant social movement when rooted in the stories and narratives of women's lives, and a process of contesting the boundaries of power relations.

Lady Gaga also went to Tanzania. One balmy evening in Mwanza, as we were talking together, she asked me to tell her about my PhD. I cannot recall the particular version of my thesis I was able to offer at that early point – this thesis has had lots of versions. But I recall the earnestness of her response: 'I want to be involved'. So I got in touch with her in due course after our return to Ireland and she suggested that I might also be interested in interviewing her co-worker, Alice, as well as another colleague, Clare, from a different women's network. This is how Alice and Clare came into my life and became part of my story.

To claim this as part of my story, a story made possible by Lady Gaga's question and response, is to also draw attention to the way in which any life-story 'is constitutively interwoven with many other stories' (Cavarero, 2000, p. 124).

> The disclosure of the "who" through speech and the setting of a new beginning through action, always fall into an already existing web where their immediate consequences can be felt. Together, they start a new process that eventually emerges as the unique life-story of the newcomer, affecting uniquely the life-stories of all those with whom he [sic] comes into contact. (Arendt, 1958, p. 184)

But if I am not on the side-lines regarding the political involvements at issue in my thesis, nor are my three collaborators on the side-lines with regard to their epistemological involvements. To return then to the scene of the utterance, 'Three of all the world's passionate women', this is part of a social dialogue which includes more than the four of us. My question, 'How will I describe ye?' invokes the piles of notes, computer print-outs, pages and pages of their transcribed voices, and fragmented incoherentchapters scattered on my desk and floor. It is in a social dialogue with future readers and audiences.

The 'production' of my research is necessarily premised on the imposition of boundaries, signalled by transcribed voices. These are voices that are recorded, bounded by the pressing of a button which declares 'here is the beginning' and 'here is the end'. Yet, my telling of this conversation is not only for the purpose of locating Alice, Clare and Lady Gaga in a positioning defined by them in their own words. It is also to locate Clare, Alice, Lady Gaga and myself in a dialogical chain which spills beyond the boundaries of the on and off button of a digital recorder. Moreover, it is to highlight their centrality as my feminist epistemic community in the process of producing this thesis.

They too are in this social dialogue. With their contingent refusals and affirmations, these three of all the world's passionate women already confound the grid work upon which neoliberal rationalities depend. Mohanty (2003) writes, 'It is not the center that determines the periphery, but the periphery, that, in its boundedness, determines the center' (p. 42). I argue that it is from such a peripheral position that alternative possibilities and rationalities can be generated.

**Epistemic and Political Schisms**

I also come to this study out of an epistemic and political schism between these various contexts I have described above, as well as my experience of academic psychology. This schism also holds some of the history of my engagement in narrative research, and sets some of the conditions for my current engagement. Many years ago, I began conducting semi-structured research interviews for an M.A. in Psychology which explored 'the sense of self of women involved in community'. I developed a set of questions adapted from the interview schedule of Gilligan et al. (1990). I felt that this would ground my study effectively in understandings of women's relational self (Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1991) which was my central theoretical framework at the time. As a novice at in-depth interview research, I also felt more confident drawing on a tried and tested interview schedule, adapting it for my own purposes. My interview schedule used the sections directly from the Gilligan et al.'s (1990) schedule focusing on self-descriptions, gender and relationships, and I added a section on community and social change. The schedule was designed 'to move smoothly through the different levels of self, relationships and community'. Or so I thought ...

The first woman I interviewed was 'Brigid', a Traveller woman and Traveller rights activist, and she threw all these conceptual and methodological notions into disarray. I sat with my list of questions, anxious that I would do it right. But when I asked her a question about self, she responded by immediately narrating her engagement in community issues and social change. There was no smooth move involved here; there *was* no separation. When I asked her a question, she told me a story. And as she claimed a space for creating meaning through story-telling, she called out a response which also came from the familiar territories of my own life rather than the strictures of psychological research designed to facilitate comparisons.

I found myself settling back to listen. Rather than bringing questions in from outside which redirected the course of the interview, I found my questions coming from within the story itself. This was not an atheoretical listening. But I found that instead of asking *about* relationships, I was now opening up the relationalities from within the particulars of the story, for example, "When X said '…', how did you feel?" Opening up these details, in turn, expanded the story in a way that went back and forth through chronological time.

It could be said that both Brigid and I (following her lead) were engaging in what Bruner (1990) in *Acts of Meaning* calls 'folk psychology' – those meaning-making and meaning-using systems that connect the person to culture. This, he suggests, is dismissed by most scientific psychology in its effort to explain human action from a point of view outside human subjectivity – referring to Thomas Nagel's phrase 'a view from nowhere'.

In total I interviewed eight women and developed a line of inquiry about turning points, and then opening up these narratives. And as I engaged in an attempt to analyse the interviews, I noticed that these turning points were typically stories about interpersonal interactions where voice was central, linked to new realisations and knowledge.

Out of such realisations, 'Mary', a woman from a working-class community who now worked as a community development worker, links voice, power and knowledge in her account of 'people who think they know us':

> I mean, you'll get, loads of people, out there, that think they know, what's needed in here. And, they, they don't know us at all ... And I think it's important that the people in the area are able to stand up and say, No, we don't need that. Let us make the decisions, ourselves on what we want to do. And don't be having somebody coming in, telling us what, they think we should do.

In the following extract, I start to summarise some of the shifts Mary has described to me through the process of becoming involved in her local community as a volunteer, and then a paid worker:

> *S:* So you were saying that before when you were in your house, you never knew the situations that people were actually coping with. And that was opened up – one reality in your own community. And then when you were in this position, another reality was opened up.
>
> *M*: Yes. It was like another door.
>
> *S*: Another door.
>
> *M:* Yes. It was like a process, of going through, down a long corridor, and opening, a door. That was the way now I'd look at it. Exactly. You started at the top of a corridor, and, it was a, huge long corridor. And every door you went through was a different experience. But, there was knowledge behind every door. And that's what you gained, as you went through the door.

In response to my 'another reality was opened up', Mary responds by transforming my image into the image of a door. And then she elaborates this image into a wonderfully-evocative and

complex account of the process of her experience through the central image of ‘a huge long corridor’. This is an account of gaining knowledge, but it is not knowledge as immediately given or readily available simply by walking down the corridor; there are concealed spaces behind doors, and thresholds to cross, in order to gain different knowledges.

From conversations such as these ones with Brigid and Mary, I newly learned the limits of my own knowledge, bounded through classed and racialised privilege. But I also learned of a depth of intricate interweavings of knowledge and voice, and the possibilities offered by story-telling in creating meaning. However, I was at a loss to find an epistemological and political space within psychology which could honour the richness and particularity of these conversations, or find an analytical approach which did not depend on tearing asunder their web of meanings and associations.

As I re-interrogated my epistemological commitments, I became increasingly sensitised to the powerful role of discourses in constructing the meanings of our lives (Foucault, 1980). But although my engagements with post-structuralism drew me into a more critical assessment of theories of women self-in-relation, at the same time I wondered about the ‘relationality’ of the selves and identities imagined by discourse analysts. Thus, while books and journal articles asserted understandings of identity ‘as relational’, the actualities and complexities of ‘being in relationship’ seemed more elusive.

In tandem with this, the academic literature and critical psychological research of discourse analysis seemed to be based on a kind of superior listening which involved researchers deconstructing the stories of others, and writing these deconstructions as evidence of the insertion of those others in dominant discourses. It was not clear to me how this investment in the academic theorist as the knowledgeable political agent engaged in rarefied discussion about the workings of power in the lives of (individual) others, and at the same time disconnected from those lives – even in the pages of the journal of *Feminism and Psychology* – could be the locus of political change and transformation. Certainly, all this was far removed from the grassroots contexts to which I looked as the locus of political transformation. Of course, some of these issues are not unique to psychology, and many are also related to larger issues in relation to the academic institution. In any case, with so many epistemological and theoretical dilemmas, and in particular the ethical and political compromises at stake, I never completed that particular study.

This thesis, then, is an opportunity for me to address the schisms, tensions and mutually-inhabiting questions provoked by these parallel histories, and of trying to be 'at home in the world':

> Understanding, as distinguished from having correct information and scientific knowledge, is a complicated process, which never produces unequivocal results. It is an unending activity by which, in constant change and variation, we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality, that is try to be at home in the world. (Arendt, 1994, pp. 307-308)

**To Search Again**

I do not then regard the 'I' of my knowledge as existing in some inner, privatised, bounded psyche, from which my knowledge might emanate in some transparent way. My voice here is polyphonic, and interanimated with all these voices and conversations from my history. My hope for this thesis is to create a dialogical grounding for my own political practice by which the knowledge of feminist grassroots activists is of vital significance in opening transformative possibilities which counter neoliberal rationalities. In this regard, my epistemological commitments find resonance in the etymology of the word 'research' which is derived from the Old French *cercher* to search, and *recercher* to seek or to search again. A deeper etymological dig is even more intriguing: *cerehier* is from the Late Latin *circāre* to go around, from Latin *circus* meaning 'circle'. Located in its etymological roots, therefore, research becomes a process disruptive of linearity, where the researcher becomes a seeker in the openness of *again.*

The Irish word *brí* assists with these epistemic claims. It is the word for 'meaning' but also the word for 'strength' and 'vigour'. It therefore opens meaning and meaning-making to embodiedand passionate involvements. To further extend such involvements, it can be brought into alliance with another Irish phrase: *trína chéile.* This phrase denotes a state of confusion, but its literal translation is 'through-other' – a Hiberno-English word which Paulin (2006) describes as 'almost philosophical' (p. x). This 'through-otherness' grounds meaning in difference and an encounter with the other. It gathers unto itself Arendt's ontology of the human condition based on uniqueness in plurality, and it opens up a social world disruptive of tidy boundaries. In so doing, it enters the philosophical world of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981),

where the dialogicality of meaning is unfixable and unfinalisable and so the future becomes open.

**My Research Question**

My research question, 'Whose political voices can become possible through neoliberal times?', has itself emerged in dialogue with the discursive registers of what and who. Its historical 'other' was: 'What kinds of political voices are possible under conditions of neoliberalism?' The question of what *kinds* of political voices is useful in allowing me to broaden the notion of 'the political' by linking notions of voice to different kinds of knowledge and knowing, in terms of embodied relational voices as distinct from abstracted, individualised ones. But it is still wedded to ideas of 'whatness', and therefore to practices of categorisation which can themselves become abstract and reified. These in turn are linked to understandings of language as product rather than process. This is not to say that acts of naming, which require categorisation, are not useful – or indeed important and inevitable. But part of the point of my argument is that they are not an end in themselves and must always be provisional.

So I rewrote this to foreground the central discursive register of 'Who:' '*Whose* political voices?' This connects my question to Cavarero's Arendtian-informed ontology of voice which specifically asserts the central importance of 'who' rather than 'what', and therefore the recognition of relationality, plurality, and embodied 'unique existents' as vital to the creation of political community. It also connects me with Bakhtin's historicised and polyphonic notion of 'dialogicality' which links the question of 'who is speaking?' to ideological struggle and ideological becoming.

The phrase 'under conditions of neoliberalism' no doubt owes its provenance to Foucault. But now I felt a somewhat oppressive spatialisation introduced by 'under conditions'. So I re-placed 'under neoliberal conditions' with 'through neoliberal times'. 'Neoliberal times' attends to what is for me central to 'neoliberal conditions' – those conditions which I am setting out to reframe through notions of temporality. The metaphor of 'through', although still spatialised, is also a space-time concept which introduces a sense of movement. In the question then, 'Whose political voices can become possible through neoliberal times?', I have

tried to inscribe the co-existence of different temporalities, which turns on understandings of voice as polyphonic, dialogical, and unfinalisably, historically open.

The question as it is posed may seem impossibly large in scope. Nor can it be bounded through focal questions in order to assist a manageable inquiry. But I do not set out to answer my question in a linear, systematic way. The voice phenomena of the discursive register of who is, in principle, uncontainable and unfinalisable. This has epistemological as well as political ramifications which trouble many taken-for-granted assumptions of the usual connections between research, education and politics.

### The Mermaid as a Frame Story for My Thesis

I have tried in this initial presentation of my analysis to convey a sense of the clash of rationalities at stake in the double analytic I am employing through the Arendtian discursive registers of what and who. Yet, the very conceptual language I employ is already imperfectly equipped to convey the different orders of reality at stake here, and the profound consequences of their respective realisations: on the one hand, the awful despair, violence and trauma which is an actualised but concealed cultural norm; on the other hand, the joy and wondrous possibilities of transformative feminist action. In addition, my thesis as it has finally revealed itself is not one which accords in form and content with standard thesis practice. While this indeed is part of the epistemological point, it nonetheless behoves me to offer the reader some structured basis for orientation. These two concerns are, of course, organically related, although appearing perhaps to call for diametrically-opposed solutions. My response to both, however, is to draw on Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill’s (Ní Dhomhnaill & Muldoon, 2007) figure of the mermaid as a holding metaphor for my thesis[2].

## Organisation of the Thesis

The thesis is organised into four parts, each part with its own corresponding chapters. It is comprised of two volumes, each volume containing two parts. Volume I contains Part I and Part II, and Volume II contains Part III and Part IV. The Thesis Conclusion chapter is located

[2] All Irish language quotations throughout this thesis text which refer to the mermaid or the merfolk are by Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, excerpted from Ní Dhomhnaill & Muldoon (2007) *The Fifty Minute Mermaid,* Oldcastle, Ireland: Gallery Press. Unless otherwise stated, English translations are by Paul Muldoon.

at the end of Volume II, followed by the Reference list, Glossary and Appendices. Volumes, parts and the corresponding chapters for each of the parts are outlined below:

**Volume I**

**Part I *'D'fhág sé ar snámh mé idir dhá uisce/*He left me swimming between two waters' *(trans. Falci, 2012).***

*Chapter 2* draws on *Flower Power* (AONTAS, 2009), a document developed with women's community education groups; this sets the scene for a discussion on women's community education (WCE). *Flower Power* establishes WCE as an educational practice committed to social transformation through listening to unique voices, stories, and through policy engagement. I then locate WCE in a neoliberal funding environment which valorises labour market imperatives as gender equality, as outlined in the Irish government's *National Women's Strategy* (Government of Ireland, 2007*)*. The chapter argues for a Foucauldian understanding of neoliberal rationalities as government at a distance which depend on the production of neoliberal subjectivities (Foucault, 1991). It explores the implications of the psychologisation of women as objects of surveillance, and of how a Personal Voice/Policy Voice binary is complicit with neoliberal rationalities. It opens up the question of a feminist counter-rationality to neoliberalism, arguing for new conceptualisations of subjectivity in tandem with new conceptualisations of the political.

*Chapter 3* argues for Arendt's (1958) ontology of the human condition in uniqueness and plurality as a counter-rationality to the neoliberal subject, informed by Cavarero's (2000) feminist Arendtian philosophy of the narratable self. This reconfigures the terms of both the personal and the political. I outline Arendt's discursive registers of 'what' and 'who' as the basis for my double-analytic of neoliberal subjects and narratable selves. Cavarero's (2005) genealogy of the 'devocalisation of the logos' exposes the gendered binaries of a philosophy of the universal which nourish neoliberal rationalities, opening also onto feminist considerations of space/times. Arendt's account of the *vita activa* and the ascendance of *homo faber* provides then for a more explicit historical articulation of the 'what' with neoliberal subjectivities.

*Chapter 4* applies the analysis of the previous two chapters to understandings of narrative. This chapter traces the working out of the *National Women's Strategy* into a technology of linear biographical narratives. It then introduces the alternative post-modern narrative practices developed by White and Epston (White, 2007; White & Epston, 1990) which emphasise multi-storiedness, and alternative narratives of resistance. However, from the perspective of Cavarero's philosophy, I problematise a gap in White's and Epston's work between the embodied practice of narratology and its theorisation. This opens up narrative processes to feminist understandings of time and embodiment.

**Part II *Bhí trioblóidí speisialta aici i gcónaí i dtaobh teoranna/*She always had special troubles with boundaries *(my transl)*.**

*Chapter 5* details my listening engagements with Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare based on the collaborative narrative practices of White and Epston (1990) and Bird (2004b). The emergent polyphonic nomadic narratives bring me to trouble two boundaries of the hegemonic epistemic order. The first is my anxiety around 'how many participants is enough?' and this resolves itself into a logos of infinity and unfinalisability. I also refuse the epistemic boundaries of the notion of 'data' as delegitimising Lady Gaga's, Alice's and Clare's status as knowers, and as a foundational norm of linear time and transcendence. This refusal allows me to sustain a shared ontology and epistemology as narratable selves and necessary others, and to validate oral knowledge.

*Chapter 6* troubles the ontological boundaries between the embodied, generative, open narratives of narratable selves, and the fixations of the written word along with its regulative discourses. I describe three interventions in the power/knowledge writing politics of representation. The first is a poetic transcription practice informed by Cavarero's genealogy of the devocalisation of the logos: I tran-scribe 'with an ear', adapting Emily Dickinson's punctuation practices to re-present narratives as embodied and generative. The second intervention is informed by Tamboukou's (2011) account of the epistolary pact based on the narratable self ethic of I-you: I retell parts of Lady Gaga's, Alice's and Clare's stories to them by writing each one a letter. The third intervention is based on Bakhtin's (1981) account of novelisation and heteroglossia which uncrowns authoritative knowledges through sociological contradictions, in order to open up a world still in creation.

*Chapter 7* is comprised of three unique letters addressed respectively to Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare. Each letter focuses on a particular epistemic contestation and its effects on the speaker and the women whose stories she hears. Lady Gaga protests the exclusions and abstractions of academia. Alice's protest is against health discourses which label women, and silence the effects of trauma. Clare protests against the destructive effects of bureaucratic practices which fail to show compassion and which increase traumatic suffering. Each narrative of critique is in dialogue with and sustained by the pedagogical spaces of hearing women's stories or women's singing, as well as historical narratives of feminist awakenings. In relation to my overall thesis, the letters also provide openings for picking up other narrative trajectories as I develop my analysis.

*Chapter 8* engages with the question, 'How does pain enter politics?' The scene is set by Ní Dhomhnaill's (2007) account of the merfolks' trauma of being dried out, and what this means for language and memory. The rest of the chapter is woven around Arendt's (1958) account of pain, in dialogue with Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare. It argues for women's community education as a radical trauma praxis.

## Volume II

### Part III *Na murúcha a thriomaigh*/The merfolk who were dried out (*my transl*)

*Chapter 9* analyses the Irish government's *National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2010-2014* (Cosc, 2010), also known as the Cosc strategy, as the dry land of neoliberal government at a distance. It contests an individualising criminal justice discourse, and how this discursively contains questions of wrongness. I then open the Cosc strategy to critical interrogation with regard to constructions of voice, time, knowledge and politics, subverting these constructions through the narratives of Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare.

*Chapter 10* more explicitly interrogates the Cosc strategy through Alice's, Lady Gaga's and Clare's epistemic critiques of health discourses, academia, and bureaucracy, demonstrating how the wrongs they protest are systematically reproduced and normalised in governmentalised responses to violence against women.

**Part IV …*as tobar gan tóin*/ …from a bottomless well**

*Chapter 11* is the scene of an intense struggle of rationalities. The dry land position here is that of the governmentalising guidelines of the *Local and Community Development Programme Guidelines 2011* (Pobal, 2011*)* (LCDP) which, at the time of the research, establish the conditions under which the three women's organisations are funded. The LCDP rationalities are confronted with the rationalities of narratable selves, through narratives interanimated with the voices of local women. This opens up grassroots eruptions, as well as refusals to follow the neoliberal script.

*Chapter 12* opens up the conditions of possibility which Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare actively fight for to sustain these narrative spaces. This involves ideological struggles which displace normative worker identities, and hegemonic space-times. Written as a poetic ensemble addressed to the mermaid, the chapter evokes a between-worlds consciousness which brings forward a politics of moments, dreams, remembering, and solidarity.

**Thesis Conclusion**

*Chapter 13***,** the thesis conclusion, begins with a poetic account of natality from Ní Dhomhnaill in the form of a newborn merchild connected by sound to the power of the sea. I identify the theoretical, methodological and political contributions of my study, with an emphasis on how these might support a transformative feminist praxis. In a neoliberal context marked by the appropriation of a feminist discourse of gender equality for extending the power of the disciplinary state, I discuss the ethic of uniqueness in plurality as a feminist counter-rationality of the political. I discuss the implications of the study for contesting violence against women, for women's community education, for resisting the hold of neoliberal subjectivities, and for a human rights discourse of dignity and action in a world which is ours in creation.

# Part I

*D’fhág sé ar snámh mé idir dhá uisce/*
He left me swimming between two waters.

Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill; transl. Falci (2012)

Chapter 2

## Women's Community Education and Neoliberal Rationalities

The purpose of this chapter is to locate my thesis in the context of women's community education (WCE) in Ireland, and to theorise particular challenges for a transformative feminist pedagogy in the context of neoliberalism. I argue for a Foucauldian understanding of neoliberal rationalities, central to which is the production of neoliberal subjectivities.I also introduce the central themes of my thesis with regard to conceptualisations of the personal, the political, and voice.

### Flower Power: Situating Women's Community Education

*Voices and Stories*

> Women's community education organisations make every effort to create an environment where women have a voice and a sense of belonging, where life experience and critical awareness matter and where hope, self-worth, and courage are supported. (AONTAS, 2009, p. 41)

> [A] core practice [is to] provide women with the opportunity to reflect ontheir life story. (AONTAS, 2009, p. 88)

> Women's community education groups acknowledge and affirm their collectivecontribution to women, to community and to education and seek to value each unique and distinctive voice that makes up that collective. (AONTAS, 2009, p. 116)

These quotes are from *Flower Power: AONTAS Guide to Best Practice of Women's Community Education* (AONTAS, 2009). The document was produced byWCE groups facilitated by the adult education organisation,AONTAS. *Flower Power's* vision is

to'faithfully reflect the work of women's community education; contribute to sustaining and enhancing quality practice; and to resource the practice of radical and women-centred education' (p. 26). Its concern is that 'WCE organisations will make visible to themselves and to othersoutside the group the scale, complexity and importance of all of the activities thatWCE groups engage in' (p. 19).

*Flower Power* has a specific political purpose, that of naming and demonstrating how WCE is 'aqualitatively different kind of education to other forms of adult education' (p. 20). This 'qualitatively different kind of education,' and how it might be understood, is of central concern for my thesis. Connolly (2006) identifies two key differences which distinguish community education: firstly, an emphasis on social transformation, and secondly an emphasis on process. These are the differences which *Flower Power* make explicit.

Concerned with 'radical and women-centred education' (p. 26), *Flower Power* states: 'All the activities a WCE organisation carries out are shaped by a feminist/gender analysis' (p. 21). The organic metaphor of a flower holds the process. The roots are the principles of Women-Centredness, Quality, Equality and Justice (p.7) 'that nourish the work and keep it upright' (p. 29). Thegoals are Celebration, Empowerment, Leadership and Equality. Along with its vision and aspirations, these are to WCE 'what the sun, the wind, the rain is to life on earth' without which 'we wither up and die and are gone forever' (p. 29). The four flowerlets representdimensions that are 'Rooted in the Reality of Women's Lives, Women-Led, Political, and Strategic' (p.15).

The central ontological claim of 'Rooted in the Reality of Women's Lives' links knowledge to the telling of stories:

> The word education is, in part, informed by the latin word educere which means 'to draw out.' From this root, any process that involves drawing out the knowledge of participants and allowing them to learn from each other can be considered education. A women's support group is a group involved in education, because participants tell their stories and those stories can teach others about ways to understand their own lives and cope with difficulties. (AONTAS, 2009, p. 23)

The very process of telling stories establishes this space of education. It also puts into action the commitment 'to be inclusive of all women' (p. 56) by seeking to value 'each unique and distinctive voice' (p. 116). The element of voice is described as offering 'a model of

leadership that is a real voice for women and gives expression to their goals, experiences and achievements' (p. 29). It is expressed in commitments to 'make spaces for individual women and the group of women who make up the organisation to speak out and be heard' (p. 103); '[b]uild our identity as a collective and develop a group voice' (p. 106); be 'a voice in the public domain through attendance at seminars and networking events, through presentations and performance, through publications and through lobbying on issues affecting our lives and those of other women' (p. 107).

*Flower Power* highlights the centrality of political action and social transformation: 'WCE organisations engage in and prepare and invite participants into collective action for social change' (p. 21). It sets out the WCE vision as 'the achievement of equality for women across the social, cultural, economic and political spheres of life as well as the changes necessary to the structures and systems of society that are essential for this vision to be fulfilled' (p. 41). Thus, Flower Power emphasises actions whereby 'groups get involved in political action, lobbying, campaigning and other sorts of activities that aim to change the way in which Irish society works so that it becomes a more equal society' (p. 21).

> The principle of equality mean a commitment to the need to address theconditions that limit women's freedoms and choices and the attitudes andbehaviours that create fear in women's lives, such as barriers to education andincome, racism, domestic violence, rape, pornography and all practices that denywomen's rights in their homes, communities and wider society. (p. 56)

The document identifies three national policy agendas as a focus for political action. The first of these is policy on lifelong learning: 'WCE makes quality second chance education accessible to women in their local areas across the country' (p. 20). The second is social inclusion policy: 'WCE groups fight for barriers to education, such as childcare, to be addressed for all women across Ireland by engaging in policy work and action for social change' (p. 20). The third area focuses on gender equality. It notes that 'Women's self-esteem and confidence are broken down by inequality,' and that WCE 'works to achieve gender equality by fostering women's self-esteem ... raises awareness and provides women with the information and the analysis essential in understanding their lives and in progressing the issue of gender equality' (p. 20). To this end, *Flower Power* also encourages WCE groups to '[b]e part of local, regional, andnational WCE networks, bothformal and informal' (p. 116) and in particular to become active members of the National Collective of Community-based

Women's Networks (NCCWN) (pp. 116, 117, 131). Seventeen women's projects, involving thousands of women learners and participants, are currently members of the NCCWN, established in 2002,'to enable women experiencing disadvantage to network and have a voice in national policy developments' (NCCWN, 2013, p. 1).

*WCE and Feminism*

WCE organisations emerged in small, informal, women's groups in Ireland in the 1980s. They were initiated by working class women to provide opportunities for women whose communities had been ravaged by poverty, unemployment and emigration. As Mulvey (1992) notes, women experienced these economic and social conditions in very gender-specific ways, as unpaid carers in the private sphere, dependents within the social welfare system, and excluded from, or otherwise failed by mainstream education and training programmes. Women responded by forming their own groups at a local level to provide accessible education which women themselves controlled. Rooney (2000) describes these women's local learning initiatives in Northern Ireland 'like coming upon a flower sprouting through the "founding faultlines"' of nation, class and gender' (p. 98).

Although the NCCWN is explicit in linking feminism and community development (e.g. NCCWN, 2013), the relationship between feminism and locally based women's groups has been a subject of debate. L. Connolly and O'Toole (2005) note that some commentators regard the praxis of locally-based women's groups as having 'consolidated a new third wave of feminism in Ireland' and 'a new kind of feminism embedded in community development' (p. 201). To others however, the movement of community-based women 'has little or no association with feminism and the established women's movement' (p. 210). Bríd Connolly notes that most women involved in WCE did not identify with the women's liberation movement, perceiving it as removed from their lives (see also Ward & O'Donovan, 1996). But she also describes how, when women's community education started in the early 1980s, 'the ways of working, the content of the programmes and the learning environments were radically different to anything that had gone on in Ireland before' (Connolly, 2007, p. 125). It seemed to be, she writes, 'a very feminine set up, with loose, informal networks allowing the entire phenomenon to develop' (p. 125). The fundamental starting point was, '[t]he lived experience of the participants' (p. 125). She suggests that women's community education

enables 'the engagement of ordinary women with the women's movement, in a meaningful way' (Connolly, 2001, p. 1).

Central to this 'meaningful way' is a critical pedagogy of voices and stories: 'Community education provided a forum for listening to the voices of otherwise silenced people, it developed a process which valued the stories and enabled the participants to interrogate their own words' (Connolly, 2003, p. 9). Connolly highlights how WCE has shaped the field of adult and community education in Ireland more broadly, subverting the traditional, hierarchical, and conventional models of adult education (see Ryan & Connolly, 2000). Indeed, L. Connolly and O'Toole (2005) describe the emergence of WCE as being the occasion for 'a ground-breaking debate about class' in feminist politics in the 1980's. Quilty et al. (2016), for instance, link WCEs to the emergence of 'a particular form of community-based higher education' (p. 38). They highlight the importance for feminist scholars, as well as critical adult educators,such as Paulo Freire (1970) and bell hooks (1994), of 'listening to women'ssocially-situated narratives and of co-constructing knowledges with them as a way to challenge their invisibility not just within academia, but within the processes of the very construction of knowledge' (p. 37). Quilty et al. suggest that this pedagogic position challenges the idea that, citing Jackson (2011), 'ruling groups are able to exercise control over what is taught and how it is taught, maintaining hegemonic control' (in Quilty et al., 2016, p. 38). This is a 'radical re-positioning of knowledge-making, ownership and purpose' which highlights 'the capacity of critical adult and community education to remake as liberatory the power relations endemic in any educational provision' (Quilty et al., 2016, p. 38).

Wilson (2013) also adopts this position as she critically engages with the project of establishing national training standards for the domestic violence sector in the Republic of Ireland. She argues that the neoliberal state has an opportunity to grant contracts and funding to those organisations 'that can provide trained and accredited workers but that do not bring with them the inconvenience of a critical stance of the state and an annoying habit of demanding radical social change' (p. 124). In an international context, Wilson documents the dominance of training courses which focus only on the role of providing 'safe, accountable and effective services' to survivors of domestic violence, and which therefore limit the political change potential of domestic violence organisations. She argues therefore that 'following the leadership of Black, Minority Ethnic, disabled and other marginalised women

who have developed expertise in responding to gender-based violence is essential if the Irish domestic violence sector is to ensure that an accredited learning programme is inclusive and emancipatory' (p. 127). Otherwise, she warns, 'the sector risks replicating rather than eradicating the oppressive ideologies and practices that underpin all forms of violence and oppression' (pp. 127-128). Rather than acceding to a state-centric model of accredited training, the domestic violence sector in Ireland should 'move to claim' for itself 'a more suitable home ... within the field of adult and community education' (p. 128). This educational and learning space is 'the most suitable form of education for a movement whose ultimate goal is to contribute to a new world in which women, children and all oppressed peoples can live with safety, dignity and freedom' (p. 129).

This is the world which is laid claim to in the Mná Sasa Manifesto (Banúlacht, 2011), produced through a feminist community education solidarity praxis with feminist community activists from Ireland and Tanzania. Written as a collective and multi-authored narrative document,[3] it announces:

> We are feminists in community activism in Tanzania and Ireland. This Manifesto is an act of solidarity between us in this urgent time of cutbacks and global economic crisis. We come together from our shared histories of patriarchy and colonialism in a refusal to accept the deepening injustices we witness against women – the daily injustices of poverty and gender-based violence. (in Banúlacht, 2011, p. 4)

The exchanges referred to here were developed over a number of years, facilitated by the Irish feminist development education organisation Banúlacht, and Tanzanian feminist organisations, the Tanzanian Gender Networking Programme (TGNP), and Kivulini Women's Human Rights organisation. Mohanty's (2003) theorising of feminist solidarity informed the exchange, emphasising the interconnectedness of histories, the importance of foregrounding connections of domination, but also of struggle and resistance:

> We refuse to be 'foot-soldiers' plugging the holes of neo-liberal policies. We refuse to be left doing service delivery instead of holding governments to account. Feminism dares us to expect more.
> We refuse to allow feminist agendas to be weakened.
> We refuse to allow our movement to become disjointed.
> (Banúlacht, 2011, p. 6)

[3] I explain this process in Chapter 6.

The practical purpose of the document is a pedagogical one of facilitating feminist grassroots education and movement-building, connecting women's stories to a project of contesting neoliberalism through connections of feminist global solidarity[4].

This project also foregrounds the relationship between WCE and women's human rights, and the historical context of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) agreed at the 4th United Nations World Conference on Women in 1995. Reilly (2009) highlights bottom-up feminist *praxis* and transnational collaboration as pivotal in 'shaping and realizing the radical promise of human rights' (p. 90). Highlighting the dangers of 'false universalization,' she argues that 'the overall trajectory of international human rights discourse since the inception of the UN ... has been deeply shaped by hegemonic Western, neo-liberal, male biases' (p. 66). The radical promise of a feminist human rights perspective is premised on a shift from the liberal state-centric rationalities characteristic of earlier women's human rights initiatives (Bunch, 1990; Reilly, 2009). Rather than reiterating the bias of civil and political rights over social, economic and cultural rights, feminist reconceptualisations of human rights discourse highlight the interdependence of all human rights. They also unsettle the public-private divide upon which traditional human rights depends. Thus, violations of the 'civil right' to 'bodily integrity' cannot be understood without consideration of how 'economic, social and cultural marginalization fosters vulnerability to violations of the "civil right" to bodily integrity' (p. 90). This exposes how 'wider social and cultural mores and power dynamics are implicated in facilitating and concealing such abuses' (p. 79), requiring a more expansive vision of the state's role in implementing human rights. Reilly argues that such praxis 'demonstrates the potential to disrupt this [Western, neoliberal, male] trajectory and create spaces where usually marginalized actors can achieve meaningful shifts in the exercise of power' (p. 66). It is in these disruptive spaces that WCE can be located.

And yet, as Connolly (2007) writes, 'critical pedagogy is enmeshed in systems that have been staunchly resistant to human freedom and liberatory change, such as global capitalism' (p. 126). This is exemplified in Banúlacht's decision to close in 2012, based on a refusal to apply for core funding under Irish Aid's new development education criteria which would hugely compromise Banúlacht's social change agenda. The deeper point here is not the closure of Banúlacht per se, but the conditions of its closure which highlight the wider challenges for

[4] The Manifesto, initially created through conversations in English, was also translated into Swahili.

critical education caught in funding relationships with the state. But Connolly also highlights how theorisations of critical pedagogy are themselves embedded in patriarchal relations. She cites Luke and Gore (1992) who write, 'in the process of trying to create emancipatory classrooms, we have come up against 'uneasy' readings ... our readings of where feminist educational work stands in relations to male-authored critical pedagogy' (p. 1, cited in Connolly, 2007, p. 125). For Connolly, this uneasiness – that of being a feminist educator within patriarchal systems of knowledge, scholarship and pedagogical relations – resonates with her own experience: 'Critical pedagogy is still embedded in patriarchal relations, silencing the feminist voices, or at least marginalising them' (2007, p. 126). In this context, she argues that 'feminist critical educators could demonstrate a new way of working' (p. 126). This is the central position of my own thesis, although one which must first attend to a number of political tensions.

*WCE and Political Tensions*

This overview of WCE sets the context for my thesis. Firstly, it opens up feminism as a dynamic site of diversity and contestation, and the radical possibilities for feminist movement afforded through listening to the voices of women involved in WCE. Secondly, it locates these alternative ways of working in the context of tensions between state-centric and grass-roots praxis. But thirdly, this opens up its own tensions with regard to funding relationships with the state. *Flower Power's* concern 'to resource the practice of radical and women-centred education' (p. 26) is therefore a fraught one, potentially tied to enmeshments in a neoliberal state, global capitalism, and the silencing of feminist voices. Indeed, Pillinger (2011) locates her review and evaluation of the NCCWN in an economic and social policy context 'of unprecedented change and uncertainty' (p. 6), brought about by the economic crisis, funding cuts, and the radical restructuring of funding arrangements for community development organisations. She highlights how this has taken place alongside 'an overall reduction in government support and commitment to equality and social inclusion and a backlash against women's equality and feminism in national policy and at a local level' (p. 6).

In this context, my argument in this chapter will appear to be bleak. *Flower Power's* concern that 'WCE organisations will make visible to themselves and to othersoutside the group the scale, complexity and importance of all of the activities thatWCE groups engage in' (p. 19)

will emerge as holding an increasingly precarious and tenuous relationship with radical feminist transformation. This is because forms of visibility to 'others' have become increasingly tied to neoliberal practices of surveillance. In this context too, the very notion of 'gender equality' has becomedisembedded from its roots in the realities of women's lives. But furthermore, the commitments to listening to unique voices and stories will also appear complicit with this neoliberal turn. This is however but the start of an argument with many twists and turns, characterised by shifting ontological, epistemological and political assumptions.

The next two sections establish a theoretical move from 'neoliberalism proper' to 'neoliberal rationalities.'

## Neoliberalism Proper

*Neoliberalism and Women's Lives*

What Couldry (2010) calls 'neoliberalism proper' refers to the market principles which explicitly install market functioning as the dominant reference point of economic, political and social life. The Celtic Tiger years of Irish economic growth were widely promoted as what could be achieved through deregulation, privatization, and openness to global capital. A. Fraser et al. (2013) argue that the 'recession' phase of disturbance and restructuring has deepened and extended neoliberalism's influence in Ireland: 'Neoliberal adherents and champions have successfully managed to colonize tenets of "freedom" (to accumulate, primarily) and "rights" and ... fundamentally shaped the terms of debates about the way society, the state, and the market should interact' (p. 39). A steadily growing Irish scholarship has critically interrogated Ireland's neoliberalism from economic, political and cultural perspectives (e.g. Allen, 2000, 2007; Coakley, 2012; Coulter & Nagle, 2015; Kirby et al., 2002; Lynch et al., 2012; O'Broin & Kirby, 2009). However, exceptions notwithstanding (e.g. Kennedy, 2003, 2013; Lynch et al., 2012; Murphy, 2015; Spillane, 2015), there has been little concerted critique of neo-liberalism from an Irish feminist perspective.

Barry and Conroy (2012) describe how punitive cuts in public expenditure have had devastating consequences for women:

> Women, who make up the majority of those on low pay, those living in poverty and workers in the lower paid sections of the public sector, have been badly affected. Reductions in the earnings disregard of lone parents pushes them further into poverty traps. Education and health services have been cut, community and local area programmes have lost resources, and budgets for important equality agencies and equality initiatives have been severely cut. (p. 21)

They note how Ireland's welfare regime depends on an expectation that women in the family will deliver care and support across a range of social needs (p. 2). It is therefore primarily women who are 'picking up the pieces left after the withdrawal of important services' (p. 21). Women predominate among those with short-hours jobs: 'part-time work is also low paid work, particularly when it is women's work' (p. 8). Such 'market mediated processes of subordination' are, states Fraser (2013), 'the very lifeblood of neoliberal capitalism' (p. 225).

All of this increases women's vulnerability to violence. Analysing the connections between neoliberalism and violence against women, True (2012) identifies the three factors which condition and heighten women's vulnerability as: the gendered public-private sphere in terms of the division of labour; the contemporary global, macroeconomic environment; and the gendered dimensions of war and peace as the three factors which condition and heighten women's vulnerability. Welfare cuts and exclusions have made women trying to leave violent situations particularly vulnerable, especially ethnic minoritised[5] women who may not have access to social funding (AkiDwA, 2010; Pavee Point, 2011a; Safe Ireland, 2013; Women's Aid, 2008). A report by Safe Ireland (2013) on the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) notes that, 'There is an escalated risk for women who do not have recourse to public funds, it is so profound if you have no options. Their partners and husbands also know this so they can act with greater impunity: there are no repercussions to them being so violent' (p. 4). Many women leaving violent relationships face new forms of discrimination as lone parents. Lone parents in receipt of welfare payments have become a specific category of women; targeted and penalised by the state through drastic cuts, they must now engage in 'back to work' measures when their youngest child is seven (see Murphy, 2014).

[5]Burman and Chantler (2005) use the term 'minoritisation' (rather than 'minority', or 'minority ethnic group') 'to highlight that groups and communities do not occupy the position of minority by virtue of some inherent property (of their culture or religion, for example) but acquire this position as the outcome of a socio-historical process' (f.n. 2, p. 60).

The already disadvantageous position of women within the traditional location of capital has been consolidated in the *'life cycle approach'* to social policy outlined by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) in *The Developmental Welfare State* (NESC, 2005). According to NESC, 'a new kind of welfare state is needed because Irish society itself is radically different to the society that existed only a few decades ago' (p. 2). The 'life-cycle approach' involves assessing the risks faced and supports needed at four different 'stages' of the 'life cycle': children, working aged, older people and 'people who cannot live autonomously' (NESC 2005, p. 226). It provides the basis for the goals and priority actions of social inclusion policy, emphasising 'labour market activation, client-centred "active case management" and lifelong learning' (Pobal, 2011). Murphy and Kirby (2008) critique the approach as centred around attachment to the labour market, with the category of the 'working aged' defining all adults by their employment status. They argue that it is 'completely gender-blind' (p. 24), failing 'to recognise and consider systematically the implications of the Irish male breadwinner approach to structural features in our social and economic systems (p. 24). The absence of a gender dimension or analysis of care work is for them 'most troubling' (p. 24).

*Gender Equality Policy*

Barry and Conroy (2012) conclude their paper by stating that, 'Gender equality policy has become a victim of the recession and crisis management of the Irish economy' (p. 22). I argue however that 'gender equality' policy itself has been captured by neoliberalism.

A key reference point for gender equality policy is the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA). But Marchand (2009) locates the BPfA in a global context already rife with contradictions, citing Sen (2005) that, 'even as such an agenda was being spelled out, the global economic policy terrain was almost entirely subordinated to neoliberal economic thinking dominated by the Washington Consensus (Sen, 2005, p. iii, in Marchand, 2009, p. 924). Marchand argues that within the new global regime of gender equity, women are being 'instrumentalised' to fit neoliberal development discourse and to be turned into 'efficient economic or market actors' (p. 932). For Reilly (2009) too, the deepening hegemony of free market ideology is in tandem with state antipathies to committing the resources necessary for more expansive visions of human rights: 'the relative openness to recognizing VAW as a human rights issue partly stems from the degree to which it can be understood as a violation of the individual, rather

than a manifestation of profoundly unequal, structural power relations that foster and conceal denials of human rights' (p. 91).

The central policy document in the Republic of Ireland for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action is the *National Women's Strategy 2007-2016* (Government of Ireland, 2007). The *National Women's Strategy* (NWS) exemplifies the neoliberal agenda of turning women into efficient market actors. It stresses 'the role of women in the economy, in society and in decision-making' (p. 117) highlighting that 'These initiatives also underpin the economic goals of the European Union which emphasise gender equality as a mechanism for sustained economic growth, competitiveness and social inclusion' (pp. 116-117).This vision of 'gender equality' informs an assessment of women's community education:

> AONTAS, the National Association of Adult Education, actively promotes the involvement of women in community education ... The women's community-based groups and networks provide an important women-friendly access point for women who wish to gain qualifications, skills and confidence which will enable them to participate more fully in the labour market and in community life. (p. 46)

The social change agenda of women's community education is completely ignored. The reference to participation in 'community life' is vague; there is no reference in the NWS to collective action, to feminism or the women's movement. WCE is absorbed instead into the instrumentalising narrative of 'qualifications, skills and confidence' for the purpose of labour market participation. The NWS states that, 'Investment in training by employers and the development of programmes to facilitate both the unemployed and employees adapt their skills through further training and re-skilling is critical to future employment growth' (p. 36). It expresses particular concerns about inadequacies related to women: 'Inadequate training has been identified as another factor which impacts upon the advancement of women' (p. 36). Therefore, citing the National Centre for Performance and Partnership (2005), 'the … development of closer ties between the workplace and the education sector and support for individuals and organisations wishing todevelop their skills must become priorities' (cited p. 37). All of this accords with critical perspectives which argue that adult education in Ireland is being increasingly colonised by a neo-liberal economic and political logic, reflected in the growth of discourses of individualism, consumerism and market competitiveness (Connolly, 2007; Finnegan, 2008; Fitzsimons, 2012; Fleming, 1996; Grummell, 2007).

The NWS exemplifies what Fraser (2013) calls 'a new romance of female advancement and gender justice' espoused by neoliberalism which 'turns a sow's ear into a silk purse' (p. 220):

> Endowing their daily struggles with an ethical meaning, the feminist romance attracts women at both ends of the social spectrum: at one end, the female cadres of the professional middle classes, determined to crack the glass ceiling; at the other end, the female temps, part-timers, low-wage service employees, domestics, sex workers, migrants, EPZ[6] workers and microcredit borrowers, seeking not only income and material security, but also dignity, self-betterment and liberation from traditional authority. At both ends, the dream of women's emancipation is harnessed to the engine of capitalist accumulation. (pp. 220-221)

Fraser (2013) argues that while the most progressive currents of second wave feminism as a transformative political project were premised on an expansive understanding of injustice and a systemic critique of capitalist society, this emanicipatory project has been 'a casualty of deeper historical forces' (p. 217). In the shift from state-organised capitalism to neoliberalism, she argues that previously unambiguously emancipatory feminist ideals have been resignified and are now 'fraught with ambiguity' (p. 223).The welfare state for instance, previously challenged by feminists for its assumptions of male authority, is now under attack from free-marketeers. In this new context, she argues that feminist ideas are unwittingly and disturbingly supplying 'a good part of the romance that invests flexible capitalism with a higher meaning and a moral point' (p. 220). Therefore 'we for whom feminism is above all a movement for gender justice need to become more historically self-aware as we operate on a terrain that is also populated by our uncanny double' (p. 224). It is necessary, argues Fraser, 'to disrupt the easy passage' from a critique of traditional male authority to 'its neoliberal double' (p. 225).

At stake here then for Fraser is 'the disconcerting dance of these two feminisms' (p. 224). One feminism is a radical transformative social movement for gender justice. The other is its neoliberal off-spring which is:

> a general discursive construct which feminists in the first sense no longer own and do not control - an empty signifier of the good (akin, perhaps, to 'democracy'), which can and will be invoked to legitimate a variety of different scenarios, not all of which promote gender justice. (p. 224)

[6] Export Processing Zone

This second incarnation is, she suggests, a feminism that has ‘gone rogue’ (p. 224). The NWS is clearly one face of Fraser’s ‘feminism gone rogue.’ Fraser suggests that ‘this is a moment in which feminists should think big’ (p. 226).

*Policy Role under Threat*

What are the implications of this for WCE? Each of the policy domains identified by *Flower Power* – social inclusion, adult education and gender equality – reflects a resignification by neoliberalism. Additionally however, there are two key challenges to the very possibility of influencing policy, identified by *Flower Power* as central to the transformative role of WCE.

Firstly, the policy role of community organisations is under threat. ‘Do we run policy lobbying campaigns? ... Do we have core, multi-annual funding?’ *Flower Power* (p.38) encourages WCE group to ask themselves. But following rationalisations of the community and voluntary sector recommended by *The McCarthy Report* (2009), the threat of closure and withdrawal of funding hangs over community organisations deemed overly critical of the State (Harvey, 2014). A central point of contention for community organisations is a shift from a recognised role in influencing policy to service delivery. NESC (2005) explicitly repositions Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) from ‘primarily “voices”’ to ‘also integral to service delivery’ (p. 195). Harvey’s (2014) study identifies the most sensitive advocacy issues for the State as community development, childcare, women’s issues, development education and corruption (p. 58). In this context of cutbacks and restructured funding arrangements, the National Collective of Community-based Women’s Networks advocated for ‘recognition of the NCCWN as a significant and important partner both nationally and locally in order to ensure the voices of marginalised and isolated women are heard and represented’ (NWCI & NCCWN, 2012, p. 3).

But secondly, the link between policy and funding has heightened debate among community organisations about these partnership terms of policy engagement. Social Partnership, a corporate-biased and consensus-orientated policy-making paradigm institutionalised in 1987, saw Trade Union, Farming and Business Pillars coming together to agree strategies for controlling wage growth and inflation. The role played by social partnership in normalising neoliberalism in Ireland is well documented (Allen, 2000, 2007; Murphy & Kirby, 2008; O'Broin & Kirby, 2009). Initially excluded, community organisations campaigned vigorously

to be included (see Community Workers' Cooperative, 1989). But the formation of the Community and Voluntary Pillar in 1996 has been marked by ambivalence; *'We hate it here, please let us stay!'*, is the title of one paper on the matter (Meade, 2005). Participation by local and national community sector organisations in formal partnerships with the state has resulted in a 'tangible increase in the visibility and size of the community sector, but with that sector largely dependent on state funding for its survival' (Meade, 2012, p. 896). For Murphy and Kirby (2008), social partnership has institutionalised a problematic relationship between civil society and the state, muting political dissent and positioning community organisations in the role of service deliverers.

These debates, however, have set the scene for reasserting the centrality of policy and advocacy on new terms. A paper commissioned by The Community Platform, entitled *A Better Ireland is Possible,* sets out to 'contribute to the emerging debate on the nature of Irish society and democracy, which moves beyond current realities to foster genuinely creative responses to new and intransigent socio-economic challenges' (Murphy & Kirby, 2008, Preface). According to Murphy and Kirby, 'Civil society organisations are often thought of as having a relatively autonomous space between the market and the state,' and 'Such civil society actors have a crucial role to play in influencing the nature of political economy models and in ensuring a better trade-off between efficiency and equity considerations' (p. 38). It is through this position of relative autonomy that they argue counter-discourses are possible. They also highlight this as a benefit to the state since, 'the state, in attempting to manage in a context of globalisation, has an interest in developing or harnessing a governance relationship with civil society actors' (p. 38). This analysis has informed campaigns such as The Advocacy Initiative which argues for 'The need for the state to re-affirm the principles of the autonomy and right to advocacy of voluntary and community organizations (in Harvey, 2014, p. 5). It has also set the context for Claiming Our Future (www.claimingourfuture.ie.), based on social justice values and creative grassroots approaches for engaging with policy, including women's groups and organisations.

But, following Fraser (2013), do such initiatives respond to the neoliberal moment as one in which feminists should 'think big'? This question prompts consideration about the activity of thinking itself. From a Foucauldian perspective, it raises questions about the regimes of truth which regulate what can be knowable, and how forms of thought and knowledge are saturated with power relations (Foucault, 1980). A Foucauldian approach opens up

alternative understandings about neoliberalism as a particular form of rationality, posing alternative questions about policy, feminism, and the 'voices' of women's community education. The next sections explore these questions.

## Neoliberal Rationalities

### *Government at a Distance*

Brown (2003) argues that while neoliberalism foregrounds the market, its key transformative impulse lies elsewhere: 'the internalization of a rationality whose values become part of "the given"', and which 'reaches from the soul of the citizen-subject to education policy to practices of empire' (para. 7). This formulation is based on Foucault's (1991) notion of governmentality, which builds on his analysis of modern power as productive. Foucault (1991) theorises modern power as working by 'governing at a distance' through the 'conduct of conduct.' This entails a transformation of how political power is exercised, so that citizens are to be educated into an alliance between personal objectives and ambitions and institutionally-valued goals or activities (Rose, 1999). It depends on a form of surveillance which is self-surveillance.

Walkerdine (2005) frames the political challenge of neoliberalism for governments as one of 'how to manage and govern a population when traditional ties have been taken away by globalisation and neoliberalism' (p. 48). The context here is the changes which are taking place in the global labour market and the nature of work, and with the idea of life-long learning replacing jobs for life. The new problems of government posed by neoliberalism require new associated forms of government regulation. In particular, they require a 'flexible and autonomous subject who is demanded to be able to cope with constant change in work, income and lifestyle and with constant insecurity' (Walkerdine, 2003, p. 240). The government of neoliberalism 'demands that we take responsibility for managing and therefore regulating ourselves' (Walkerdine, 2005, p. 48). As a productive power, the point is not one of crushing subjectivity, but of fabricating neoliberal subjects responsible for their own biography. Rather than choice and freedom being markers of liberation, they are 'aspects of the government of neoliberalism' (Walkerdine, 2005, p. 48). As Walkerdine (2003) notes, the autonomous and flexible subject 'negotiates, chooses, succeeds in the array of education

and retraining forms that form the new "lifelong learning" and the "multiple career trajectories"' (p. 240). This is a subject who must be 'capable of constant self-reinvention' (p. 240), and which is 'presumed by, as well as being the intended product of, contemporary forms of education and training' (p. 240).

Neoliberal government at a distance therefore requires particular kinds of self-narratives based on values of autonomy and self-realisation: 'however apparently external and implacable may be the constraints, obstacles and limitations that are encountered, each individual must render his or her life meaningful as if it were the outcome of individual choices made in furtherance of a biographical project of self-realization' (Rose, 1999, p. ix). Governments can keep order i.e. make citizens responsible for their own self-regulation, by producing discourses in 'which success as a constantly changing successful entrepreneur of oneself is possible' (Walkerdine, 2003, p. 241). The NESC life cycle model may be understood in these terms. Its emphasis is firmly on the requirements of self-governance. The values and expectations that people in Ireland hold are changing, we are told, with 'a stronger appreciation of the individual and of her/his life *as something to be personally shaped'* (NESC, 2005, p. 2, my italics). It links this self-shaping to the need for a flexible workforce: 'Seeking flexibility in the workplace requires a deeper appreciation of the worker as an agent of change rather than a reluctant subject compelled by successfully designed supervision and reward systems' (p. 32). The entrepreneurial subject finds privileged status: 'Emphasising entrepreneurship means cultivating problem-solving skills, individuality and respect for responsible risk-taking' (p. 32). The NESC life cycle approach therefore consolidates as the normative basis of social policy human subjects who are, as described by Elliott (2002) 'capable of picking themselves up by their own bootstraps and making something of life, with no rationale beyond the market-driven imperative of constructing, shaping, defining, transforming' (p. 13). In this sense, it provides the ideological 'glue' for binding normative conceptions of life and subjectivity to the neoliberal economic and political order.

The NESC (2005) account of 'entrenched' problems of 'rote learning, conformity and fear of failure' (p. 32) also highlights the importance of 'cultivating problem-solving skills, individuality and respect for responsible risk-taking' (p. 32). Walkerdine (2003) notes the contradictions at stake here: 'While self-realisation is what is expected of the life project and one in which success is judged by the psychological capacities to succeed, the ability to handle uncertainty, the never knowing where work will come from etc., in fact produces an

almost inevitable failure that will be lived as a personal failing' (p. 241). The issue for Walkerdine is that, in Foucauldian terms, the practices of subjectification produce a constantly failing subject: 'the subject of neo-liberalism is produced as multiple, having to cope with existing in a number of different discourses and positions' (p. 241). A key task then for neo-liberal and globalised economies which are no longer willing to provide long-term support is for short-term supports which 'prop up the fragile subject, to keep the illusion of a unitary subject intact' (p. 241).

'In this new order,' writes Walkerdine (2003), 'psychology is centre stage' (p. 49). The illusion of a unitary subject depends firstly on psychology as *the* discourse which people draw on to explain what happens to them. On the one hand, people must understand their failures in essentially personal and psychological terms. On the other hand, psychology provides the discourse of 'a stable centre, an ego capable of resilience' (p. 241) that 'props up the fiction of the autonomous subject of choice' (p. 241). Through practices such as counselling and therapy, psychology also then provides the restorative practice to pick up failure: 'a whole array of psychological supports is required to make this new subject possible without becoming a burden on the state through illness, disability and time off work (Walkerdine, 2005, p. 49). These are what Rose (1999) calls 'psy knowledges': 'the heterogeneous knowledges, forms of authority and practical techniques that constitute psychological expertise ... have made it possible for human beings to conceive of themselves, speak about themselves, judge themselves and conduct themselves in new ways' (p. ix).Indeed, Rose and Miller (2010) argue that modern political rationalities of government at a distance, and their supporting technologies, are intrinsically linked with developments in knowledge and the powers of expertise. Technologies of self, argues Rose (1999), are practised under authoritative persons from the theological, psychological and pedagogical disciplines.

In an Irish context, Ryan (2001) argues that 'psychology has constructed for itself a power base in the places where pedagogies are created: in pre-schools, universities, colleges and communities' (p. 66). These pedagogies draw on liberal-humanist and human relations discourses, emphasising 'the need to deal with the whole person' (p. 66). But this is a conceptualisation of the human subject as unitary and rational, and 'untrammeled by social forces' (p. 66). Ryan cites Renshaw (1990), Kenway et al. (1990), and Gilbert (1989; 1990) who have linked the emergence of the 'self' literature of social psychology with the appeal of

the human relations self-esteem discourse to policy makers and teachers (p. 66). These 'self' discourses are also a feature of the NWS, and through this psychologisation we can discern a policy framework for securing women to neoliberal forms of discipline.

*National Women's Strategy as Government at a Distance*

A Foucauldian perspective facilitates an analysis of the NWS as part of this neoliberal project of government at a distance. Its opening words are:

> There are now over two million women and girls in Ireland. Our challenge as a Government is to enable each and every one to live a fulfilling life, whatever her chosen path. ('Foreword', Government of Ireland, 2007)

The very fabric of this statement – the assumed role of Government 'to enable each and every one', the accent on choice, the terms of fulfillment, and the desires to which it speaks – are all part of the enabling web of neoliberal governmentality. It announces the neoliberal governmentalising demand that we live our lives *as if* they were in furtherance of a biographical project of self-realisation. Already in this opening statement, the domain of the individual is set out as the locus of intervention.

Hand in hand with an emphasis on the labour market imperatives previously discussed is an emphasis on the psychologisation of social life. The very achievement of the aims of the NWS ties the project of gender equality to the fate of 'attitudes' and women's 'self-belief':

> The achievement of the aims of the Strategy ... requires a change in societal attitude among both men and women so that women can achieve their full potential within a refocused Irish society ... This attitudinal change must be accompanied, of necessity, by a new self-belief among women in Ireland and preparedness to recognise and seize opportunities to advance their individual contributions to Irish society at all levels ... (p. 111)

All of this highlights the biographical project of self-regulating subjects; it is out of a renewed 'self-belief' that women must have a 'preparedness to recognize and seize opportunities' - opportunities of course to 'advance their *individual* contributions' (my italics). This renewal works in tandem with 'attitudinal change,' reflecting how the notion of 'attitudes' carries much of the explanatory burden for gender inequality in the NWS:

> Change on many fronts is required to enable more women to reach the top decision-making positions in Irish society. Some of these changes are cultural, requiring a break from the traditional roles previously played by women who tended to operate behind the scenes rather than to the forefront of activity. This is an outcome of stereotyping and of often patriarchal attitudes towards women's role in society. (p. 95)

Wetherell (1996) argues that the view that attitudes aresimply a feature of human nature should be treated sceptically (p. 124). Usually understood in individualistic terms, and often assumed 'to be scattered around in people's heads, rather like currants in a fruitcake' (p. 135), she contends that not only do individualistic understandings of 'attitudes' evade ideological questions of power, but they are themselves ideological. Part of the ideological work of attitudes in the NWS is to secure a psychological notion of individual causality. But it also performs the 'easy passage' from the critique of traditional male authority to 'its neoliberal double' (Fraser, 2013) i.e. from 'patriarchal attitudes' and 'traditional roles' to 'the forefront of activity' in the labour market. In Ireland, as Ryan (2001) notes, 'traditional, old-style Roman Catholicism is widely seen as having contributed to women's oppression' (p. 14). In this context, she highlights how psychological approaches are usually regarded as a secular challenge to religious perspectives on women's nature, although both 'share a view of "woman" that does nothing to challenge existing power arrangements' (p. 14).

In linking the exclusions women experience to 'lack of self belief and confidence', the NWS can be inserted into a long history which connects women's exclusion from the public domain to inadequate personhood (Stephenson, 2006). But this inadequacy assumes a historically specific twist in a neoliberal context. Women's 'lack of self belief and confidence' is so pervasive as to be 'still found frequently, even among very successful women in Ireland' (p. 95). The emphasis on 'successful' provides a clue as to the kinds of selves and the kinds of beliefs at stake in the 'self-belief' exhortation; 'very successful women', are characterised by a concern with 'the top decision-making positions' and 'high level employment' (p. 21).

But 'women from socially disadvantaged backgrounds' – those who populate the spaces of women's community education – require particularly intensive personalised intervention/surveillance:

> Women from socially disadvantaged backgrounds are now less likely to face barriers before they can enter or re-enter the labour market and become more financially independent. The increasing availability of community based childcare, particularly in areas of disadvantage and at comparatively reduced cost, helps to ensure that women from these areas can avail of developmental supports, which would prepare them for work, either for the first time or for a return to the labour market. Each woman seeking a return to work will have a personal set of developmental needs and can be helped through the availability of a range of education and training supports. These include services to encourage the development of social skills and self development training, through programmes to complete education, through skills training and possibly through a period of sheltered employment to prepare for engagement in the open labour market. (p. 28)

The emphasis on autonomous, 'financially independent' individuals encodes the welfare-to-work policies of activation measures.What is concealed from view is the dismantling of the welfare state, the gendered burden of care work, low-paid work in the gender-segregated 'open labour market', how the 'increasing availability of community based childcare' itself depends on a low-paid and insecure workforce of women, and of course the compulsory nature of activation policies. What is emphasised instead is a biographical project of choice and freedom for '[e]ach woman seeking a return to work'. It is a project which links with the NWS's account of WCE as responding to 'women who wish to gain qualifications, skills and confidence' (p. 46).

Having produced and then concealed the conditions for 'failure,' marginalised women become the targets of individualised expert interventions which emphasise the personal and psychological nature of their situation. As flawed neoliberal subjects characterised by a psychological lack, each has a 'personal set of individual needs'. New technologies of self include 'social skills and self development training' so that they 'can be helped through the availability of a range of education and training supports'. 'Social disadvantage' is constructed as attached to individuals - a reified, static category for the purposes of targeting individual women who are *'from* socially disadvantaged backgrounds'. It is also constructed by pathologising social histories – the casual reference here to 'services to encourage the development of *social skills'* renders women's own embodied forms of engaging with the social world as already deficient and socially unskilled.

Walkerdine (2003) argues that upward mobility has become a 'central trope of class/ification' (p. 242) for working class women, providing 'a vehicle for the fantasy of moving away from pain and silence' (p. 243). In this move, psychological discourse is central 'for explaining as

pathology the distress often experienced by working-class women in their bid for upward mobility, or even simple respectability' (p. 242). But, citing Lawler (1999), she states that 'the fantasy of "getting out and getting away" may be achieved only at the price of entering another set of social relations, in which the assumed pathology of their (working-class women's) history and their desires is brought home to them more intensely' (p. 243). The most likely consequences however are 'the many narratives of failure lived as psychopathology and inadequacy' (p. 242).

This Foucauldian analysis has highlighted subjectivity as a central site of neoliberal power. More specifically, the NWS demonstrates Fraser's (2013) analysis of the slide from critiques of traditional male authority to a new neoliberal subject. Additionally, it highlights how adult education is positioned as occupying a central role in the neoliberal project of government at a distance, and the production of neoliberal subjects. The question arises therefore as to how the WCE practices outlined in *Flower Power* 'look' through this Foucauldian lens.

## Voice Divided: The Subject of Women's Community Education

### *The Personal Voice*

Relying heavily on the notion of 'self-esteem', *Flower Power* constructs the personal in ways that are not too dissimilar from the NWS:

> Women's self esteem and confidence are broken down by inequality. Therefore, WCE works to achieve gender equality by fostering women's self-esteem. (AONTAS, 2009, p. 20)

The fostering of self-esteem in turn depends on notions of voice and story, and the importance of valuing 'each unique and distinctive voice that makes up that collective' (p. 116). A reliance on psychologising concepts suggests an essentialising of experience, with 'voice' invoked as the naturalised intervention.

As noted above, this 'self-esteem' discourse is precisely what Ryan (2001) cites as evidence of the dominance of liberal-humanist discourses in adult education, and of psychology's power base in pedagogical contexts. The implicit assumption is of an autonomous, real, asocial self lying hidden behind social roles or masks, and lying in wait to become 'self-

actualised'. The locus of social change then becomes invested in a process of personal change which is assumed to lead to individual liberation and fulfillment. Additionally, Ryan notes that a major influence on Irish feminism has been the idea that women have special 'female' ways of knowing, informed by the work of Belenky et al. (1986) and Ruddick (1989): 'This is also perhaps the most visible and influential face of feminism in the mainstream of everyday life, in the media and in adult education in Ireland' (Ryan, 2001, p. 69). Such easy polarities have negative consequences for feminism: 'the personal will be reduced to the psychological and the individual, losing in the process a vision of the politicised personal and the personal nature of the political' (p. 73). Ryan argues that subjectivity must be a central arena for political activity: 'I assert that if radical adult education does not actively theorise subjectivity, then liberal-humanist ideas about the individual will prevail, under a guise of objective knowledge and neutrality' (p. 3).

Stephenson (2006) similarly argues that simply representing and asserting the personal is an increasingly inadequate response to the ongoing flows of patriarchal powers. Difficulties emerge in attempting to think the psychological without simply shoring up neoliberal individualism, and because of the patriarchal revaluing of the personal domain: 'The subjective is being captured and used as means to reaffirm phallocentric subjectivities – modes of being in which an ossifying autonomy and the capacity for individual control are asserted above and beyond situatedness and the productive, unpredictable fluidity of existence' (p. 80).

The notion of 'voice', of course, is one of the most pervasive ways of representing and asserting the personal e.g. 'to value each unique and distinctive voice' (AONTAS, 2009, p. 116). 'Voice' has been criticised for generally being employed to refer to an authentic rendering of experience by those who have been silenced. It tends to assume a pre-existing subject, and a self that is singular, coherent, consistent and rational (Cruddas, 2007; Rakow and Wackwitz, 2004). Luke and Gore (1992) note that, along with concepts such as 'power' and 'citizenship', the concept of 'voice' has considerable significance in critical pedagogy texts. Few teachers motivated by the intention 'to emancipate, to liberate, to grant space and time for silenced voices' would question the importance of 'giving' students voice (p. 4). And yet, they note how such concepts are points of struggle for many poststructuralist feminists who take issue with the 'silent regulation' and the 'technology of control' deployed by such signifiers (p. 4). Cook-Sather (2007) draws parallels between 1990's post-

structuralist feminist critiques of critical pedagogies, and more recent 21st century concerns regarding 'student voice' to caution against 'identity' and 'voice' as two key foci of liberatory efforts. These run the risk of essentialising student experiences, and perpetuating relations of domination in the name of liberation (p. 390).

It is important to recognise that *Flower Power* does not invoke an essentialising discourse of women's 'special ways of knowing' which Ryan (2001) notes is pervasive in Irish feminism. In addition, central to the social change commitments of *Flower Power* is that the notion of 'voice' does not stay at the personal level of uniqueness and stories but moves to promoting a 'collective voice' and 'a voice in the public domain' (p. 107). This political voice emphasis can be regarded as an historical outcome of feminist debates articulated since the 1990s regarding the tendency among grassroots women's groups to over-emphasise personal development to the neglect of social and structural analysis. This issue was the focus of a 1995 conference of women's networks in Ireland. The resultant report, *Women's Power for a Change* (Mulvey, 1995) is summarised by Ryan (2001):

> This document provides an overview of current dominant feminist attitudes to women's power and personal development education in Ireland, as the conference was attended by influential activists, policy makers, academics and community leaders. The report documents frustration at the lack of structural change and lack of participation and representation by women in community, regional and state development. It exhibits a belief that a concentration on personal development is preventing women from engaging in structural analysis. The reluctance of women to accept the label feminist is noted, as is the view that the priorities of funders mean that women's work is acceptable only if it is 'poverty work'. (p. 13)

Ryan however questions the terms of these debates: 'In the analyses and commentaries on these issues and on personal development and in the assertions that women need to "move beyond" personal development, there is an assumption that structures are the "root causes" of oppression' (p. 13). Her point is that these assumptions do not challenge and therefore leave intact an individual-society dualism whereby 'the psychological and social parts of the human person are essentially separate territories: one internal and one external to the person' (pp. 5-6). The problem, she argues, is not 'personal development *per se'* but 'is a result of the dominance of mainstream psychology practices. The personal should not be regarded as constituting merely a "first step" which is less important than structures' (p. 14). Conceptualising the social and psychological as being in 'a recursive relationship of mutually advancing production and change' (Mama, 1995, cited in Ryan, 2001, p. 6), the solution

cannot be to evacuate the terrain of subjectivity. On the contrary, Ryan argues that if subjectivity is untheorised, then 'it is open to colonisation by right wing forces, without even a struggle' (p. 20).

From this perspective of the need to contest the individual-society binary, an alternative set of questions arises with regard to the 'voices' of *Flower Power*. Does the story-telling process occupy some preparatory, pre-political pedagogical space, which derives its political significance through building 'self-esteem,' and so facilitating a shift into that which is 'properly' political i.e. 'structures'? When *Flower Power* states that 'the experiences of belonging and being heard make a difference in women's lives and in work for equality' (AONTAS, 2009, p. 57), what might be the difference which is alluded to here? The difference, one might say, is in the pedagogical process, where the emphasis is on critical reflection on experience and this will '[p]rovide women with the opportunity to reflect on their life story and experiences from social analysis and gender perspectives' (p. 21). But this still raises questions about the nature of reflection, the status of 'life story' and 'experiences', and how these connect with the assumptions of any particular 'social analysis'.

Indeed, the problem of an individual-society dualism is mirrored in mainstream social theories which, while focusing on 'the social', leave the atomistic, core subject intact (Henriques et al., 1984). As Ryan (2001) highlights, many sociologists also tend to make unproblematic use of mainstream psychology's concepts of 'the individual, the self and personality, or ... related concepts such as "self-esteem"' (p. 5). This translates into pedagogies which attempt to combine liberal-humanist assumptions of the individual with social analysis. However, Ryan argues that 'these models do not have the radical content necessary for social change in social relations in general, because of their reliance on a core, rational and unitary subject, nor in gender relations, because of their reliance on the notion of male/female essential differences and dual cultures' (p. 66). She concludes that, despite good intentions, the gender status quo is maintained (p. 66).

I will be revisiting these specific questions in the next chapter. For now, however, if one set of problems with the individual-society binary arises with regards to understandings of 'the personal,' the other side of this schism concerns understandings of 'the political'. In practical terms, the call to challenge 'structures' translates into a call to engage with policy. It is exemplified by *Flower Power's* 'voice in the public domain' as the voice of policy

engagement (p. 107). It is in this regard that I argue the self-society binaries critiqued by Ryan (2001) are reproduced in *Flower Power* through a voice binary; the narrative voice of 'the personal' is implicitly 'other' to the 'public' policy voice. It is the latter which ultimately sets the terms of the 'political,' of 'social analysis' and the 'proper' destination of critical reflections.

However, I argue that this hegemonic political discourse of 'policy voice', pervasive among community organisations in Ireland, including women's organisations, is premised on adopting a particular set of naturalised rationalities.

*The Policy Voice*

In this section, I critically explore the 'policy voice' as a rationality of government at a distance by focusing on four modalities: 1.'Policy' as discourse; 2. Policy as instrumental reason; 3. Power as productive; 4. Subjectivity and 'the feminine'.

1. 'Policy' as Discourse

Firstly, in Foucauldian terms, 'policy' itself must be recognised as a discursive formation and a 'regime of truth'. Shore and Wright (1997), outlining an 'anthropology of policy', argue that policy has become an increasingly central organizing principle in contemporary societies, on a par with other key mobilizing concepts such as 'community,' 'society,' and 'nation.' Typically, 'policy' is represented as 'a mere tool that serves to unite means and ends or bridge the gap between goals and their execution, in short, a legal-rational way of getting things done' (Wedel et al., 2005, p. 37). Following Foucault, therefore, they argue that 'modern power largely functions not by brute imposition of a state's agenda but by using policy to limit the range of reasonable choices that one can make and to "normalize" particular kinds of action or behavior' (p. 38).

The argument here is that policy must be understood as a type of power, but also the embodiment of a certain kind of instrumental reason. A key task for the anthropology of policy is 'to expose the political effects of allegedly neutral statements about reality' (Wedel et al., p. 37). The starting point of an anthropological approach to public policy is to examine the assumptions and framing of policy debates, the cultural and philosophical underpinnings

of policy, its 'enabling discourses, mobilizing metaphors, and underlying ideologies and uses (p. 34). In addition, Wedel et al. (2005) highlight the need to direct critical attention to 'the cultures and worldviews of those policy professionals and decision makers who seek to implement and maintain their particular vision of the world through their policies and decisions' (p. 34). The authors argue that anthropologists can explain how taken-for-granted assumptions channel policy debates in certain directions, inform the dominant ways policy problems are identified, and legitimize certain policy solutions while marginalizing others.

In addition, Wedel et al (2005) highlight the role of policy in enabling particular classifications of target groups. One set of questions they pose is:

> What role do policies play in the fashioning of modern subjects and subjectivities? In other words, how do policies shape a community's ideas about human beings and being human? ... Is it useful to view policy as a "technique of the self or a meaningful projection of a community's understanding of itself, others, and the world? (p. 35)

They argue that policy not only constrains actions, but also fashions modern identities and ideas about what it means to be human. It does this by classifying people and problems and so actively creates new categories of individuals, such as 'citizens' and 'ratepayers, 'asylum seekers' and 'economic migrants.' Their point is not that policy determines the behaviour of its target population but rather that it imposes an ideal type of what a 'normal' citizen should be: 'Individuals of a population must contend with, measure up to, subvert, manipulate, or simply internalize these ideal types as part of their own identity' (pp. 37-38). This classification function of normalisation is evident in the policy texts I have discussed so far. NESC's 'life cycle approach' is constructed around its ideal of 'working aged' (p. 226). Life is 'something to be personally shaped' (p. 2) with the worker an 'agent of change' rather than 'reluctant subject' (p. 32). Similarly, the NWS constructs and classifies 'women' as its targets: 'very successful women,' 'women from socially disadvantaged backgrounds,' women who have a 'fear of failure,' and so on.

In fact, in the *National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence (2010)* (Cosc, 2010), 'policy' and 'gender equality' are conflated. It claims, 'There have been significant advancements in the achievement of gender equality, well recognised as an important factor in violence against women, through the implementation of national policies including ...' (p. 27). It then lists fifteen policy documents, including the *National Women's*

*Strategy* (p. 27). No further evidence is deemed necessary to substantiate the claim. These policy document iterations of 'gender equality' are suggestive of how the discourse of 'gender equality' assumes a policy life of its own, becoming what Baudrillard (1994) calls a 'simulacrum' of action. 'Policy' and 'gender equality' become tied to each other as a self-contained system of meaning which depends on 'substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring everyreal process via its operational double' (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 2). The terms of the 'gender equality' claim, tied to sixteen policy documents, including the policy document of the claim, also illustrates Foucault's (1979) contention that individuals are situated 'in a network of writing ... in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them' (p. 189). One might say that to enter the policy regime is to enter a sort of hall of mirrors, and an infinite regress to the neoliberal subject at the elusive centre.

2. Policy as Instrumental Reason

But secondly, as the 'embodiment of a certain kind of instrumental reason' (Wedel et al, 2005, p. 37), policy engagement presumes a certain form of rational political subjectivity. The point, of course, is to be 'heard' by the state, and this requires forms of knowledge translatable into government practices. Rose and Miller (2010) write that 'Knowledge is ... central to these activities of government and to the very formation of its objects, for government is a domain of cognition, calculation, experimentation and evaluation' (p. 273). Such forms of knowledge are 'technologies of government', and they include 'techniques of notation, computation and calculation; procedures of examination and assessment; the invention of devices such as surveys and presentational forms such as tables; the standardisation of systems for training and the inculcation of habits; the inauguration of professional specialisms and vocabularies' (p. 281). This 'inauguration of professional specialisms and vocabularies' highlights the central role of experts in government at a distance:

> The complex of actors, powers, institutions and bodies of knowledge that comprise expertise have come to play a crucial role in establishing the possibility and legitimacy of government. Experts hold out the hope that problems of regulation can remove themselves from the disputed terrain of politics and relocate onto the tranquil yet seductive territory of truth'. (p. 286)

It could be argued that, when community organisations draw on policy discourses for social change, they do not remove themselves from but rather locate themselves self-consciously in the terrain of politics. But this is a 'political' of policy arguments which rely on certain 'territories of truth:' setting out statistics, analysing causalities, categorising and making truth claims about those who are 'socially excluded', 'disadvantaged' etc. And all of this depends on the specialist and expert vocabulary of policy-speak. Thus, Meade (2012) argues that community development has become 'imbued with the politics of expert knowledge,' appealing to 'consciously "rational" forms of intervention' situated within 'a distinct and highly specialised "social sphere."' (p. 890). She positions 'the creation of a policy active community sector' (p. 890) in the context of professionalising and bureaucratising community development practice.

3. Power as Productive

Thirdly, the politics-policy conflation does not sufficiently address the *productive* dimensions of power upon which neoliberal government at a distance depends. A paradoxical consequence is that the manifest terms of critique remain bound to neoliberal rationalities.

As highlighted above, policy rationalities depend on particular forms of instrumental knowledge which Rose and Miller (2010) call 'technologies of government'. The point here is that neoliberal government at a distance depends upon such heterogeneous 'humble and mundane' mechanisms. It is through an analysis of 'the intricate inter-dependencies between political rationalities and governmental technologies' that it becomes possible to understand the 'multiple and delicate networks' (p. 273) that connect people's lives with the aspirations of authorities (p. 273). From this perspective, 'government' should be analysed in terms of the mechanisms through which 'a multitude of connections are established between the aspirations of authorities and the activities of individuals and groups' (Rose and Miller, 2010, p. 28). Government is not firstly invested with power which it then uses to implement a programme. Power is rather an *effect* and *outcome* of the networking, arising 'from an assemblage of forces by which particular objectives and injunctions can shape the actions and calculations of others' (p. 282). That is, 'To the extent that the modern state "rules", it does so on the basis of an elaborate network of relations formed amongst the complex of institutions, organizations and apparatuses that make it up, and between state and non-state institutions' (p. 274).

The distinction between 'state and civil society' is part of the logic which legitimises the claims for the contribution which community organisations have to make in policy development. The problem of cooption, as previously discussed, arises when these lines become blurred, necessitating arguments for the autonomous role of civil society to support its role in policy and advocacy. But Rose and Miller (2010) argue that a 'political vocabulary structured by oppositions between state and civil society, public and private, government and market, coercion and consent, sovereignty and autonomy and the like, does not adequately characterise the diverse ways in which rule is exercised in advanced liberal democracies' (p. 272). From this perspective, a relocation to an 'autonomous' engagement with the state does not necessarily render organisations less governable: 'different procedures of translation and alliance are entailed when "political" institutions are "de-centred" in networks of power. But the opposition between state and non-state is inadequate to characterise these transformations' (p. 298).

Sharma (2008) argues that the very logic and dynamics of neoliberal governmentality rests on the impossibility of a clear divide between those who govern and those who are governed: 'Neoliberalism, like any hegemonic cultural project, works by annexing social subjects of all kinds - individuals, groups, NGOs - to the endeavor of rule, which entails inculcating habits of self-governance; such entities, although less advantaged than the state and subordinated to it, are critical nodes in the network of neoliberal governance' (p. 224). Thus she asks: 'What does it mean ... to be co-opted by an entity that cannot be clearly demarcated or to seal oneself off from governmental processes that permeate the entire social formation?' (p. 235).

Indeed, interrogating community development as a technique of government in contemporary Ireland, Meade (2012) argues that 'the state has been centrally implicated in calling the community sector into being and ... in their turn, community organisations have shaped and mediated policy delivery on the ground' (p. 892). She argues that community development is 'the site and source of a range of what Foucault (1991) might recognise as governmental technologies, that variously seek to empower, conscientise, responsibilise, include, discipline, reform or mobilise citizens' (p. 905). Whilst recognising that community development practices articulate plural and often disputed meanings, and notwithstanding the often significant political divergences between state and community organisations, Meade writes that there has been, 'since the 1970s, a growing consensus in the social sphere that

community development is a productive technique by which to conduct the conduct of socially excluded constituencies' (p. 891). During the 1970s and 1980s, community development contributed to the extension and reshaping of governmental strategies in marginalised communities through adult education classes, job clubs and other initiatives (Meade, 2012). Thus, '[i]ndividually, citizens would work their way out of poverty and into inclusion: collectively, they would become partners in government' (p. 895). Yet, since the status of the social sphere itself was already subordinated, then 'those very factors that contributed to the incorporation of community development within state policy would make it vulnerable to retrenchment if and when economic priorities changed' (p. 893).

4. Subjectivity and the Feminine

But fourthly, policy rationalities depend on bypassing the issue of subjectivity as *the* key site of control for neoliberal governmentality. This failure to interrogate subjectivity implicitly supports a notion of political subjectivity which reinstates the autonomous self-governing subject upon which neoliberalism depends (c.f. Ryan, 2001).

While the issues of subjectivity, including political subjectivity, raised by neoliberal forms of governance have implications for all social justice organisations, they have particular implications for women and for feminism. Gill (2009) argues that the present moment is distinctive in being marked by a dramatically increased *intensity* of self-surveillance and so regulation of women. It is also marked by an *extensiveness* thatreaches entirely new spheres of life and intimate conduct. Walkerdine (2003) and Gill (2009) both argue that a heightened subjection of women to surveillance practices builds upon a long-established incitement of women to become objects of the gaze in the performance of successful femininity. Therefore, although neoliberal governmentality incitesboth women and men to become self-reflexive subjects, the feminine takes on a particular significance – 'to be looked at and in that sense feminised and in charge of their own biography in Rose's sense' (Walkerdine, 2003, p. 242). Given the extent to which women are required to work on and transform the self, to regulate every aspect of their conduct, and to present all their actions as freely chosen, Gill (2009) asks, 'Could it be that neoliberalism is *always already gendered,* and that women are constructed as its ideal subjects?' (p. 443).

This is a deeply troubling question. But as my analysis of the NWS suggests, the rationalities through which a rogue 'gender equality' insinuates itself depends precisely on women being the successful object of the gaze. As Ahmed (2004) writes:

> [T]he feminist hope for a gender-free world has been cruelly translated into a post-feminist vision of a present in which gender has been overcome, a neo-liberal vision in which it is assumed that gender, as with other forms of power, no longer makes a difference. In this vision of the present, women are not oppressed; feminism is no longer necessary; and so on. The world is not the world we hoped for, but a continuation of what we were against under our name. (p. 186)

Ahmed (2004) writes of how 'The wish and hope of de-gendering – that gender could be overcome if we changed this or that practice, or once we knew "it was just gender" – may now even seem complicit with the liberal assumption that we can will away power simply through recognising its force' (p. 186). Given such complicity, for some the very usefulness of 'gender' for feminist theory is in dispute (see Eveline and Bacchi, 2005), with some theorists (e.g. Moi, 1999, cited in Eveline and Bacchi, 2005) suggesting that we should abandon the notion of gender altogether.

## Towards a Counter-Rationality

*Feminist Knowledge Claims*

My analysis supports arguments that Foucault provides feminists with an important diagnostic tool for critiquing neoliberal governmentality (Oksala, 2013). In particular, it affirms the argument that there is a need to reconceptualise the personal for radical pedagogical purposes (Ryan, 2001; Stephenson, 2006). For Stephenson (2006), to step outside an imaginary fixated on self-esteem requires acknowledging the capture of the personal by neoliberalism, testing the current normative constraints of the personal, and troubling and interrupting the very conditions in which subjectivity is produced. Similarly for Ryan (2001), the central organising question for praxis-oriented, radical adult education is this: 'under what conditions is self-reflection a politically radical act for women?' (p. 3). She argues that these conditions include openly questioning dominant discourses about women and men, naming power and the social nature of feelings and contradictions. My analysis additionally argues that a feminist reconceptualisation of the personal must be in tandem with reconceptualising the political.

Following Brown (2003), I locate my project in a search for a counter-rationality to neoliberalism. Brown argues that this is the only way to challenge the all-encompassing rationality of neoliberal governmentality. Such a counter-rationality, she suggests, must entail 'a different figuration of human beings, citizenship, economic life and the political' (para. 42). Sharma's (2008) study of the governmentalisation of women's empowerment in India is of relevance here since it highlights the contradictory effects of neoliberal rationalities. She argues that empowerment is not simply a regulative discourse but a 'contentious, and unpredictable site on which both conforming and unruly subjects, communities, and struggles take form' (p. 223). She describes how '[w]omen undergoing collective empowering processes act in ways that may refuse to adhere to any preconceived dominant script and may, thus, confound expectations' (p. 236). Sharma argues therefore that it is necessary to examine how neoliberal ideas 'confront other political rationalities and histories in different places, recuperating them or sitting uncomfortably with them or not fitting at all' (p. 228).

In this vein, a feminist search for counter-rationalities is also one which must go beyond Foucauldian rationalities. While Foucault's analysis of neoliberal governance provides an important resource for critique, Ransom (1993) highlights how feminist critiques of Enlightenment thinking have shown marked and important dissimilarities from those of Foucault. Exceeding Foucault with regard to what can be taken as legitimate epistemological resources, feminism has challenged 'not reason *per se*, but a form of reason which defined itself in opposition to the particular and the emotional' (p. 137). Ransom draws attention to Foucault's discursive mode which depends on what has been spoken, and so disregards the person who speaks, quoting Foucault (1991), 'What matter who is speaking; someone has said: what matter who is speaking' (in Ransom, 1993, p. 123). But Ransom argues that, for feminists, it does matter who is speaking. For Ryan (2001), this sets the terms of the epistemological and pedagogical challenge: 'how does radical self-reflection differ from a human relations discourse, when people want to know "Who am I?"' (p. 135).

The epistemological gap between Foucauldian and feminist critiques of Cartesian thought is evidenced in the following statement where Foucault (2001) offers his interpretation of the speech of a woman, Creusa, publicly challenging her rapist in Euripedes' play *Ion*:

> For after being raped by Apollo, and deprived by him of her son, to learn that now she will also not have her questions answered while Xuthus receives a son from the god - this proves to be too much for her to take. And her bitterness, her despair, and her anger bursts forth in an accusation made against Apollo: she decides to speak the truth. Truth thus comes to light as an emotional reaction to the god's injustice and his lies (Foucault, 2001, p. 52).

This passage marks a crucial epistemological parting of the ways between Foucauldian and feminist critiques of Enlightenment thought. While Foucault's genealogical project of parrhesia explicitly attempts to open up an alternative critical epistemology of truth which departs from the modern Cartesian legacy, his argument here is premised on rational-emotional binaries. Central to Foucault's account of Creusa's public exposure of injustice is that truth 'bursts forth' as an 'emotional reaction.' This characterisation provides a foil for highlighting the 'natural parrhesia' (p. 51) of the male character Ion, whose rational deliberations are manifested in his 'small digressive political critiques' (p. 51). Ahmed (2004) argues that such aprojection of 'emotion' onto the bodies of others excludes them from the realms of thought and rationality, and also conceals the emotional and embodied aspects of thought and reason – a practice tied up with identifying reason as the preserve of the masculine and Western subject (p. 170).

Indeed, perhaps the most contentious aspect of Foucault's relation with feminist politics has been his remarks on rape: 'when one punishes rape one should be punishing physical violence and nothing but that. And to say that it is nothing more than an act of aggression: that there is no difference, in principle, between sticking one's fist into someone's face or one's penis into their sex' (Foucault, 1977, cited in Heyes, 2013, p. 5). This 'no difference' underlines Bartky's (1990) argument that 'Foucault treats the body throughout as if it were one, as if the bodily experiences of men and women did not differ and as if men and women bore the same relationship to the characteristic institutions of modern life' (cited in Heyes, 2013, p. 8). It also exemplifies how this projected sameness of body is male. While Foucault sometimes trivialized the particulars of feminine subjectivities, 'more often he simply generalizes from his genealogies of populations of men' (Heyes, 2013, p. 80). Given Foucault's androcentrism, Mills (2003) cautions against simply adding women to a Foucauldian analysis: 'this androcentrism needs to be analysed and a modified framework needs to be developed which does not focus on the analysis of men or Man in isolation from the analysis of women' (p. 123).

With regard to a counter-rationality to neoliberalism then, at stake here are larger questions concerning the legitimisation of feminist knowledge claims in ways which, whilst refuting 'the self-redeeming properties of the system's political rationality', do not end up being 'seduced by the mirage of a "feminized" postmodern male philosophy' (Braidotti, 1995, p. xi). Hartsock (1987) similarly argues that post-modern intellectual moves represent 'a fundamental failure of imagination and reflect the imprisonment of dominant modes of thought within Enlightenment paradigms and values' (p. 196). She writes, 'Why is it, exactly at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood become "problematic"?' (p. 196).

These questions invite a more positive reappraisal of *Flower Power's* concern with voice and stories, albeit from a position which raises specifically feminist concerns about the ontological, epistemological and political limitations of given rationalities. Morgan and Coombes (2001) ask how it is possible for women to engage with discourses which already position them within 'power relations that historically exclude, marginalize and subordinate the specificity of women's narratives and voices' (p. 370). They argue for understanding silence as an *event:* 'an experience of not saying, or unsaying' (p. 363), and 'as enabling exclusion or marginalization through social power relations in which the absence of speech is constituted' (p. 367; cf Clair, 1998). Norval (2009) argues for 'voice' as a central category of radical pluralisation in order to place thevery possibility of speaking and *of being heard* as a central concern in democratic theory. Questioning normative democratic concerns of 'voice,' she argues that 'voice' cannot be simply collapsed into 'represented demands' (pp. 312-313). There is a need rather to counter the ongoing possibilities of domination whereby 'those struggling for a sense of control over their own lives' find that 'their very struggles cannot be heard and understood as democratic' (pp. 298-299). A central concern of politics therefore must be 'a situation in which we need to address "unrepresentable," heterogeneous or inchoate "demands," that is, demands that fall outside of the extant terrain of representation, where there is a deprivation of voice' (p. 310).

It is to this realm of inchoateness falling outside the extant terrain of representation that Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's poetic metaphor of the mermaid offers one possible answer (Ní Dhomhnaill & Muldoon, 2007). It is a framework which, I will argue over the next chapters, can support a feminist counter-rationality to neoliberalism.

*Ní Dhomhnaill's Mermaid*

Ní Dhomhnaill's sequence of Irish language poems, *The Fifty Minute Mermaid,* a bilingual collection with translations by Paul Muldoon, tells the story of the merfolk forced into exile on dry land (Ní Dhomhnaill & Muldoon, 2007). In my thesis, I draw on this image of dry land as a metaphor for neoliberal governmentality. The memory of underwater existence provides the basis for a counter-rationality.

The metaphor of the mermaid forced onto dry land holds the theme of 'a shock to one's sense of identity' (Ní Dhomhnaill, 2005, p. 116) rendered in embodied terms. Ni Dhomhnaill writes in an essay of how this is a way of dramatising the alienation of language-change: 'I found myself toying with a rather dangerous opposition of the amniotic fluid of the local Irish-speaking people as being akin to the sea, while the lonely, because perforcedly individualised, reaches of the professional middle classes might be akin to dry land' (p. 115). Of the metaphor of a tribe of merpeople who have come up on dry land, she writes,

> This framing metaphor is dangerous, I admit, because the sea/land, Irish/English contrast could be accused of being reductive and essentialist. The poems themselves, however, seemed to me to overcome such idiocy, and attempt to capture a past, a loss, a bemingled present, intrusive, oppressive and depriving, yet not without beneficence either (p. 115).

Falci (2012) notes that the mermaid poems articulate the liminal space between this world and the otherworld along which almost all of Ní Dhomhnaill's poems are arranged. For Ní Dhomhnaill (2005), the Irish language holds a 'highly elaborate conceptual framework' to 'describe and deal with the "otherworld"' (p. 86). This 'place of a deeper reality – known in Irish as *an saol eile,* the "otherworld"', is 'inaccessible most of the time, and never easy to reach' (p. 157). She further suggests that this framework is 'virtually untranslatable due to an inbuilt bias in the English language against the validity of otherworldly experience' (p. 86).

In the merfolk poems, *an saol eile* is evoked through the ever-present memory of an underwater existence. One of the differences between existence underwater and that of 'dry land' concerns the power of the mermaids:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Is faoin méid atá ar eolas againn faoina saol fó-thoinn* | From what we can determine about their underwater existence |
| *is léir go raibh réimeas leathan comhachta ag na murúcha baineanna* | it's obvious that the females had a wide range of powers |
| *is go rabhadar, ar an mórgóir, saor ó smacht go mór* | and that they were pretty much free of all oversight |
| *murab ionann is mar atá an cás acu anois ar an míntír. (l. 42)* | quite unlike their circumstances on dry land. (p. 43) |

In the poem, *Teoranna*/Boundaries, Ní Dhomhnaill creates a language for the merfolk characterised by a lack of boundaries:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Is féidir linn a thabhairt faoi ndeara gan stró* | We can recognize at once, without any difficulty, |
| *go ritheann gach uile rud isteach ina chéile ann,* | that everything in the language runs into everything else, |
| *is nach bhfuil teoranna docta i gceist idir rud ar bith.* (l. 128) | that there are no strict boundaries between one thing and another (p. 129) |

The language is called 'pelagic' because it covers the seven seas. Ní Dhomhnaill's linguistic reimagining destabilises the fixity of nouns, temporalities, and identity. The language, for instance, has no nouns. Meaning is expressed through verbal nouns: the way you would say/'the moon rose above the river'/would be 'up over the upstreaming it mooned' (p. 129). Ní Dhomhnaill also plays with the fixed temporalities of verb tenses: for example, the conjugation of Past Tense, Present Tense or Future Tense in the first person singular depends 'entirely on the age of the speaker' (p. 129).

The embodied shock and alienation of being forced to live on dry land is articulated in *An Mhurúch San Oispedéal/*The Mermaid in the Hospital, where the mermaid wakes up 'to find her fishtail/clean gone/but in the bed with her/were two long, cold thingammies' (p.35).

| | |
|---|---|
| *Ach seo í an chuid* | But here's the thing |
| *ná tuigeann sí –* | she still doesn't get- |
| *conas a thit sí féin ina ndiaidh* | why she tumbled out after them |
| *'cocs-um-bo-head'.* | arse-over-tip ... |
| *Cén bhaint a bhí* | How she was connected |
| *ag an dá rud léi* | to those two thingammies |
| *nó cén bhaint a bhí aici* | and how they were connected |
| *leosan? (l. 34)* | to her. (p. 35) |

In this moment of transformation, the leg 'thingammies' become a symbol of disconnection, and of the imposed imperative to live on dry land. The mermaid on dry land therefore symbolises this embodied forgetting of water, and the silences carried in the body. But the significance of these traumatic forgettings, and indeed the very notion of forgetting itself, depends on the dislocations and the liminality of swimming/floating/hanging between two worlds or two waters - '*ar snámh idir dhá uisce'.* This is a precarious existence on the edge of boundaries: between the fluidity of watery memories and the bounded territoriality of dry land. There are also epistemic tensions at stake. Even as the mermaid cannot understand her connection to the legs in the above poem, there is now an additional pedagogical injunction attached to this objectified bodily condition: '*Caithfidh tú foghlaim/conas siúl leo'*/You have to learn/how to walk with them' (my transl.).

This series of epistemic alienations are also expressed through the mermaid's incomprehension of bounded identities, mediated through a language which does not recognise boundaries. In *Teoranna/*Boundaries, from the perspective of what Phillips (2008) describes as 'the naff banality of psychology' (n. pag), the mermaid is described in the English translation as always having 'a real difficulty with boundaries' – or, in Ní Dhomhnaill's Irish, *trioblóidí speisialta* – (*lit.* special troubles):

*Bhí trioblóidí speisialta aici i gcónaí i dtaobh teoranna.*
*Nior fhéad sí a aithint riamh, mar shampla, go rabhamair go léir*
*aonaránach is discréideach, inár nduine is inár nduine.*
*Ritheamair go léir insteach ina chéile, ba dhóigh leat uaithi,*
*faoi mar a bheadh na dathanna ó smearadh íle*
*ar an mbóthar tar éis cith báistí.(l. 130)*

She always had a real difficulty with boundaries.
She could never understand, for instance, that we were all
separate and discrete, each and every one of us.
We all ran into each other, you'd swear to listen to her,
like the different colours in an oily puddle
after a shower of rain. (p. 131)

This chapter has established the Foucauldian terms of my question, 'whose political voices can become possible through neoliberal times?' The 'neoliberal times' of my question relates to historically specific rationalities of government at a distance. These are productive of neoliberal subjects whose 'self-interests' are aligned with the neoliberal project. I have located the governmentalisation of WCE as part of this disciplinary network and, following Fraser (2013), linked it to a neoliberal 'rogue feminist' discourse of 'gender equality.' I have

contested a ‘political voices’ discourse which is collapsed into ‘policy voice’, arguing that the ‘policy voice’ is coextensive with neoliberal rationalities. In order therefore to attend to ‘what can become possible’ through neoliberal times, I have argued that ‘the personal’ must be reconceptualised in tandem with a reconceptualisation of ‘the political’ in order to develop a ‘counter-rationality.’ To centre feminist epistemological concerns also requires an epistemological space for the question ‘who am I?’ (Ryan, 2001). I have introduced Ní Dhomhnaill’s mermaid on dry land as a framing metaphor for the relationship between neoliberal rationalities and (feminist) counter-rationalities. In the next chapter, I draw on Cavarero (2005) and Arendt (1958) to frame this relationship as one between the discursive registers of ‘what’ and ‘who’.

Chapter 3

# The Narratable Self as a<br>Counter-Rationality to Neoliberalism

| | |
|---|---|
| *D'fhág sé ar snámh mé idir dhá uisce. (l. 88)* | He left me hanging there,<br>like a drowned man between two seams of<br>water. (p. 89) |

The phrase *'D'fhág sé ar snámh me idir dhá uisce'* can be interpreted as 'he left me swimming/floating between two waters' (Falci, 2012). Elsewhere, Ní Dhomhnaill translates 'idir dhá uisce' (a traditional phrase) as 'nearly drowned and nearly saved' (O'Connor, 1996, p. 114). In Muldoon's translation, however, this watery in-between existence is fixed as being drowned. Furthermore, the speaker (this is an autobiographical poem) is turned into a man. These transformations establish the philosophical context of this chapter.

The purpose of this chapter is to make a case for Arendt's (1958) ontology of uniqueness in plurality as a basis for feminist counter-rationalities to neoliberalism. It introduces Cavarero's (2000) 'narratable' self which is informed by Arendt's ontology of the human condition, developed by Cavarero into a challenge to a patriarchal tradition which ignores uniqueness. A key distinction is between the discursive registers of 'what' and 'who'. This sets the terms for my double analytic of '*ar snámh idir dhá uisce*/swimming between two waters.'

## Cavarero's Narratable Self

*Uniqueness in Plurality*

Hannah Arendt (1958) sets out the ontological basis of the human condition as follows:

> Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live. (p. 8)

Uniqueness, plurality and action are thus intertwined: 'Action, the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world' (p. 7).

For Cavarero (2000), these ontological commitments point to 'a radical phenomenology' (p. 191) upon which she builds a distinctive feminist philosophy. Not surprisingly, of course, Cavarero restates Arendt: 'not Man, but rather men and women live there and inhabit it' (p. 63). The restatement points to a feminist interpretation of Arendt which links the universal critiqued by Arendt to the patriarchal symbolic order: 'Man is at once the entire human species, and one of its two genders. Man is neuter and masculine. Man is both, neither of the two, and one of the two' (p. 49). The gendered terms of Arendt's question, 'What is Man?' assume a particular valence for Cavarero: 'the tradition which, by ignoring uniqueness, celebrates the glorious accomplishments of Man, is the same tradition that consents only to human beings of the male sex the ability to recognize themselves in this abstract universal' (pp. 57-58). But she writes, '"Man" – a name in language – is an abstraction that creates a disembodied and fictitious entity; it makes of plurality a faceless one, without biography ... As a fictitious entity of the ancient philosophical vocabulary, man inaugurates a tradition in which the plurality of unique beings appears from the beginning as an insignificant and superfluous given' (p. 190). Thus, '[t]he whole of the Western tradition, with philosophy at its base, becomes Man's field of self-representation ... the Western tradition is a patriarchal, androcentric, and phallocentric culture; it is a culture that seems destined to survive into the second millennium, and which has sung the glory of its protagonist, Man, from the beginning' (p.49- 50).

At stake here is Arendt's (1958) account of a confrontation between two discursive registers sustained by different kinds of questions. The first asks '*what* is Man?' This question is born out of a philosophy which, from Plato through to the doctrine of the modern individual, has been 'seduced by the universal' (Cavarero, 2000, p. 53). The task it has assumed has been 'to redeem, to save, to rescue the particular from its finitude, and uniqueness from its scandal' (p. 53). The second discursive register asks 'Who are you?' (Arendt, 1958, p. 178). For Arendt, 'the moment we want to say *who* somebody is, our vocabulary leads us astray into saying *what* he is; we get entangled in a description of the qualities he necessarily shares with others like him; we begin to describe a type or a "character" in the old meaning of the word, with the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us' (1958, p. 181). Following Arendt, Cavarero (2000) emphasises that the term identity must not be understood as arising 'from a process of identification, or from a social construction of that identity, but rather as that which a singular existent designs in her uncategorizable uniqueness' (p. 73).

Although the uniqueness of *who* and the abstractions of *what* apply to both women and men, the consequences of the hegemony of *what* are not the same. For women, this is accompanied by a constitutive estrangement from representations of the subject in the patriarchal symbolic order: 'she is thought, represented, defined from the point of view of the Man. In so far as she is the woman *of* Man and *for* Man, different *from* him since he is the paradigm of the human species, the woman – though a noun – is never universal' (Cavarero, 2000, p. 50). The male subject defines *what* women are: 'She consists rather in a series of images, which must represent, from time to time and according to the context, *what* a woman must be in the economy of masculine desire: for the most part a mother or a wife, and, on occasion (as seems to be the case!), a combination of the two' (p. 50). Thus, Cavarero (2000) writes:

> For millennia, the question 'what is woman?' has concerned a definition – a hundred definitions, a thousand contradictions – for which no one of course expected a woman to answer. The discourse on the universal, with its love of the abstract and its definitory logic, is always a matter for men only. The scission between universality and uniqueness, between philosophy and narration, signals from the beginning a masculine tragedy (p. 53).

Ní Dhomhnaill (2005) too writes that, 'the more the image of woman comes to stand for abstract concepts like justice, liberty or national sovereignty, the more real women are denigrated' (p. 48). She cites Meaney's (1994) argument that an assertion of 'masculine'

authority invariably underpins the process by which a nation declares independence and sovereignty:

> Women in these conditions become scapegoats of national identity. They are not merely transformed into symbols of the nation, they become the territory over which power is exercised. The Irish obsession with the control of women's bodies by Church, State, boards of ethics and judicial enquiries, has its roots in such anxieties (Meaney, 1994, quoted in Ní Dhomhnaill, 2005, p. 49).

In Chapter 2, the question 'what is woman?' was newly answered by objectifying women as neoliberal subjects. In the *National Women's Strategy*, (Government of Ireland, 2007), this is cast in the discourse of gender equality.

For Arendt (1958), 'The chief characteristic of this specifically human life ... is that it is itself always full of events which ultimately can be told as a story' (p. 97). On this basis, Cavarero (2000) highlights that,

> The discursive order that says *who* someone is ... does not belong to the (genuinely philosophical) art of definition, but rather to the art of biography ... the verbal response to *who* someone is always consists in the narration of his or her life-story; that is, in the tale where this someone has used up already her time (at least her time up until now) – the unrepeatable existence of *a single* insubstitutable being. (p. 73).

*The Narratable Self*

Cavarero (2000) expands on Arendt through the concept of 'the narratable self'. The narratable self is 'the "house of uniqueness" ... the familiar sense of every self, in the temporal extension of a life-story that is this and not another' (p. 34). It centres on how 'the self makes her home, so to speak, in the narrating memory – the inalienable dwelling of her *living her/himself, remembering herself'* (p. 34). To this familiar experience of a narratability of the self which each *I* has, there also corresponds 'a perception of the other as the *self* of her own story' (p. 34). Such a perception exists regardless of whether the other's story is known in detail or not at all: 'The other always has a life-story and is a narratable identity whose uniqueness also consists, above all, in this story' ... [T]his *who* also already comes to us perceptibly as a narratable self with a unique story*'* (p. 34).

The type of story which Cavarero attends to here is the type 'whose tale finds itself at home in the kitchen, during a coffee-break, or perhaps on the train, when even those who do not want to hear it are forced to listen' (p. 53).The narratable self then is 'a self that is expressive and relational, and whose reality is symptomatically external in so far as it is entrusted to the gaze, or the tale, of another' (p. 41). The story tells 'the accidental that is in every life', of being 'this and not another' and, for Cavarero, 'the accidental needs care' (p. 53). She writes, 'To tell the story that every existence leaves behind itself is perhaps the oldest act of such care' (p. 53).

Cavarero tells a story about Emilia. Who is Emilia? This question is precisely the point:

> *What* Emilia is we could, in fact, try to define with a good approximation: she is a Milanese housewife; she is poor, married, without children ... in short, she is a woman like many others who have a difficult lot in contemporary cities. In this sense, she is the champion of a certain sociological 'type'. *Who* Emilia is, on the other hand, eludes this classification. This *who* is precisely an unrepeatable uniqueness which, in order to appear to others, needs first of all a plural – and therefore political – space of interaction. (p.58)

The possibility of Emilia's story, and her appearance as 'who,' has been provided by her friend Amalia to whom Emilia has repeatedly told her story: 'For female friends, the questions "who are you?" and "who am I?", in the absence of a plural scene of interaction where the *who* can exhibit itself in broad daylight, *immediately* find their answer in the classic rule of storytelling' (p. 58). Amalia writes Emilia's story, and returns it to Emilia who 'can carry the text of her story with her and reread it continuously – moved every time by her own identity, made tangible by the tale' (p. 72). In relating this to Emilia's desire for her story, Cavarero makes a distinction between 'ontological affirmation' and 'mere empirical existence': 'Emila does not seem to have any doubts about the importance of this ontological affirmation ... [She] knows that a life about which a story cannot be told risks remaining a mere empirical existence, or rather an intolerable sequence of events' (p. 56). Cavarero suggests that what is intolerable is not so much a life that 'has always been a "no"' (p. 56) but 'rather the fact that the life-story that results from it remains without narration' (p. 57).

Emilia and Amalia attend one of the '150-hour schools' founded in Milan by the Italian Left in the 1970s to provide supplementary education in the arts and sciences for workers or housewives who lacked higher education (p. 65). Cavarero's source for Emilia's story is 'one of the most famous books of Italian feminism', published in English under the title *Sexual*

*Difference: the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective (1990).* It describes the aim of women who attend the classes, which is to 'think that my "I" exists' (p. 56). The story of Emilia appears in the book as a report of Amalia, after the premature death of Emilia at fifty-three years of age.

Although *Flower Power* is not (yet?) one of the most famous books of Irish feminism, we can now however newlyappreciate its significance through the (anti-)philosophical lens provided by Cavarero. The desire of women's community education to 'seek to value each unique and distinctive voice that makes up that collective' (AONTAS, 2009, p. 116), and to 'provide women with the opportunity to reflect on their life story' (p. 88), now partakes in a recognition of enormous human, philosophical and political consequence. Such desires do not belong to the classical realm of moral theory, and are not 'the result of a grandiose strategy' (Cavarero, 2000 p.88) but rather 'an irreflexive recognition, already at work in the exhibitive nature of the self, which is rendered even more explicit in the active and desiring practice of reciprocal storytelling' (p. 88). They subvert centuries of philosophical ruminations on the question 'What is Man?' along with its modern variants. To 'seek to value each unique and distinctive voice' (AONTAS, 2009, p. 116) is, in Cavarero's terms, to speak 'the language of the existent [which] assumes the bodily condition of "this and not another" in all of its perceptible concreteness' (Cavarero, 2005, p. 20-21). It is therefore to recognise 'the accidental that is in every life, or rather the accidentality of being "this and not another," which happens to everyone as the *given* of their very being here' (p. 53).

The WCE process of being 'Rooted in the Reality of Women's Lives' registers the context of plurality through which uniqueness acquires meaning. The scene of the women's group is one where unique, embodied women appear to one another through relational practices of sharing, and being heard, where WCE '[r]elates to each woman as an individual, as well as part of a group and encourages sharing with each woman having an opportunity to be heard' (AONTAS, 2009, p. 57). This is the scene of *who,* where '[o]ne always appears to someone ... existing consists in disclosing oneself within a scene of plurality where everyone, by appearing to one another, is shown to be unique' (Cavarero, 2000, p. 20). It calls up 'the necessary aspect of an identity which, from beginning to end, is intertwined with other lives – with reciprocal exposures and innumerable gazes – and needs the other's tale' (pp. 87-88).

Thus, the question 'Who am I?' which Ryan (2001, p. 135) names as a focus for radical education practice, echoes the aim of women who attend the 150 hour classesin Milan which is 'to "think that my "I" exists' (Cavarero, 2000, p.56). Such affirmation in *Flower Power* similarly counters lives which have always been a No:

> Women's community education organisations recognise that many women have experienced criticism, shaming, fear and control in their lives. In their work they aspire to making sure that women experience affirmation, recognition, dignity and leadership through their involvement with women's community education. (p.41)

*The Narratable Self as a Counter-Rationality to the Neoliberal Subject*

My central thesis is that the narratable self offers a counter-rationality to neoliberalism. The question is then: what are the differences between the neoliberal subject and the narratable self? Cavarero (2000) highlights how 'modernity turns its focus from the world itself to the individual, from the public to the private, from the appearing object to the interiority of the subject' (p. 41). But this 'individual' is 'seduced by a universality that makes it into an abstract substance' (p.38). The overarching difference then is that the neoliberal subject is a continuation of the discursive register of *what*, while the narratable self is explicitly located in the *who*. This sets the framework for my double-analytic, allowing for some critical purchase on the neoliberal subject from the affirmative position of *who*. As an initial statement to clarify the 'whatness' of the neoliberal subject, and how the narratable self offers a counter-rationality, I identify five key dimensions of difference. These are: (1) a stable core/unstable unity; (2) in/vulnerability; (3) un/knowability; (4) relationality; (5) the locus of the political.

1. Stable Core/Unstable Unity

As noted in Chapter 1, Walkerdine (2003) argues, from a Foucauldian perspective, that neo-liberal and globalised economies need 'to keep the illusion of a unitary subject intact' with psychology providing the discourse of 'a stable centre, an ego capable of resilience' (p. 241) to prop up this fiction. The narratable self is precisely *not* this. Cavarero (2000) emphasises that the term uniqueness is not to be equated with 'an idea of romantic origins,' 'the pride of a self-referential ego,' 'a mysterious interiority, supposed *internal*, profound, hidden nucleus' (p.89). It does not partake in a modernist notion of 'autobiography as an expressive modality

“which gives voice, as much as possible, to an ineffable individual”’ (p. 89, citing Ferraris, 1992). It does not have at its centre a compact and coherent identity but ‘an unstable and insubstantial unity, longed for by a desire that evokes the figure – or rather, the unmasterable design – of a life whose story only others can recount’ (p. 63). The *who* finds herself always already exposed to another as irredeemably social. Utterly given over to others, ‘there is therefore no identity that reserves for itself protected spaces or a private room of impenetrable refuge for self-contemplation. There is no *interiority* that can imagine itself to be an inexpressible value’ (p. 63). Arising from the scene of action which is necessarily ‘contextual and mutable,’ the self too is necessarily ‘intermittent and fragmentary’ (p. 63). The story that results is not ‘monotonous and monolithic’ but is ‘unpredictable and multi-vocal’ (p. 43).

This distance from individualism does not lead Cavarero to embrace the postmodern subject either. As Walkerdine (2003) highlights, the subject of neo-liberalism is produced as multiple, having to cope with existing in a number of different discourses and positions. But for Cavarero (2000), the material presence of a singular unrepeatable existent, from birth to death, opens up the question of the unity of identity: ‘From the beginning, *uniqueness* announces and promises to identity a *unity* that the self is not likely to renounce’ (2000, p. 37). Of ‘the as-yet-unqualifiable – nude-*who’,* appearing at birth, she writes that, ‘*straight away* time begins to flow and the existence of the newborn, which carries on her exposure in time, becomes a story’ (p. 38). This is life exposed to‘the becoming-time of existence’ (p. 38). For Cavarero then, unity lies in ‘the *insubstitutability* that *persists* in time because it continues to present itself in time’ (p. 2).

The narratable self therefore escapes the contradictions which assault the neoliberal subject. On the one hand, she cannot be fixed into a stable identity. On the other hand, she has an embodied unity of existence through the time of living which defies discursive fragmentation.

2. Vulnerability

The ‘ego capable of resilience’ (Walkerdine, 2003, p. 241) which marks the successful neoliberal subject is premised on a norm of invulnerability. Vulnerability denotes an ego-failure which requires psychological intervention. For Cavarero (2011), however, vulnerability *is* the human condition: ‘If, as Hannah Arendt maintains, everyone is unique

because, exposing herself to others and consigning her singularity to this exposure, she shows herself such, this unique being is vulnerable by definition' (p. 20). For Cavarero (2011), Arendt's 'great intuition concerning the ontological and political centrality of the category of birth' is that '[t]he infant, the small child ... actually proclaims relationship as a human condition not just fundamentally but structurally necessary' (p. 30). Totally consigned to relationship, a child for Cavarero is 'the vulnerable being par excellence and constitutes the primary paradigm of any discourse on vulnerability; at the same time, and even more so, the child is also the primary paradigm of any discourse on helplessness' (p. 30). Vulnerability is linked to the corporeal potential to be wounded: 'As a body, the vulnerable one remains vulnerable as long as she lives, exposed at any instant to *vulnus* [wound]' (p. 30). This is a vulnerability which Cavarero argues characterises the body in its presentation to and with others, entailing finitude and contingency.

This constitutive vulnerability is denied by modernist thought. Citing MacIntyre (1999), Cavarero (2011) notes that 'human vulnerability and affliction' (p. 21) has been ignored in the entire history of philosophy from Plato onward in the name of a rational and independent subject. The corresponding logic of the sovereign subject of the state is, citing Butler (2004), 'the individual' which 'shores itself up, seeks to reconstitute its imagined wholeness,but only at the price of denying its own vulnerability, its dependency, its exposure' (in Cavarero, 2011, p. 21). Cavarero (2011) argues therefore that, 'Already inscribed in the birth of philosophical discourse, the illusion of the self-sufficient "I" achieves in modernity merely its best-known and most prominent affirmation' (pp. 21-22).

The recognition of vulnerability as constitutive of, rather than an aberration from, the human condition radically shifts the ethical claims of selfhood from the neoliberal insistence on 'autonomy.' For Cavarero (2011), the ethical dimensions of social existence are opened by the potential to be wounded but also cared for: 'Irremediably open to wounding and caring, the vulnerable one exists totally in the tension generated by this alternative' (p. 30).

3. Knowability

The epistemological claims of neoliberal rationalities depend on being able to define, categorise and normalise human existence. This sets the possibilities for regulation and surveillance at a distance. Insertion into the neoliberal order depends then on the assumption

that subjects are inherently knowable as a 'what', with psychology providing the readily available expertise to explain and analyse. For Code (2009), the epistemic injunction against uniqueness means that the testimonies of those who are particularly vulnerable, the experiencesof which they speak, and their attempts to achieve acknowledgement 'may be ignored, silenced, greeted with incredulity' (p. 328). This raises 'vexed questions about the impersonal authority and expertise that govern, and may facilitate or block, commitments to knowing other people and their situations well enough to do well by them within an entrenched social imaginary' (p. 328).

From this perspective, the most radical challenge to neoliberal identity practices must surely be the insistence that identity is 'that which a singular existent designs in her uncategorizable uniqueness' (Cavarero, 2000, p. 73). Arendt (1958) writes, 'nobody knows whom he reveals when he discloses himself in deed or word' (p. 186). This uncategorizable uniqueness then eludes the controls of the knowledge systems which would try to rein it in. Not only that, but even as the story is told, the teller is still ongoingly immersed in the unpredictable flux of existence. For Cavarero (2000), the life-story cannot be 'a *simple* unity, as the coherent development of an immutable substance' (p. 72). The one who is unique is *also one in the very act of self-exhibition'* (p. 72, my emphasis). The narratable self therefore, exposed to the 'becoming-time of existence' (p. 38), cannot be fixed and known.

4. Relationality

The networking through which government at a distance produces its powers depends on the regulation of relationality at its nodes; people must encounter each other as neoliberal subjects in order to reproduce neoliberal subjectivities e.g. through expert/client relations.

But for the narratable self, the reciprocity of the narrative scene opens an entirely different relational ethic. This is an ethic which 'desires a *you* that is truly an other, in her uniqueness and distinction' (p. 92). This ethic informs Cavarero's concept of 'the necessary other', central to which is a form of relationality which depends on sustaining a mutuality of uniqueness:

> The necessary other is indeed here a finitude that remains irremediably an other in all the fragile and unjudgeable insubstitutability of her existing. Put simply, the necessary

> other corresponds first of all with the *you* whose language is spoken by the shared narrative scene. (p. 92)

At the centre of the reciprocity of the narrative scene is a 'dynamic of desire' (p. 41) which is, and through which, 'She wants and gives, receives and offers, *here and now*, an unrepeatable story in the form of a tale' (p. 88). The desire for the tale is a desire for 'above all, the unity, in the form of a story, which the tale confers to identity' (p. 37). The unity is not a substance, but belongs to desire: 'everyone looks for that unity of their own identity in the story (narrated by others or by herself), which, far from having a substantial reality, belongs only to desire. The desire orients both the expectations of the one who is narrated and the work of the one who narrates' (p. 41).

## 5. The Political

In Chapter 2, I critiqued policy rationalities as continuous with neoliberal rationalities. From the perspective of the 'who', policy rationalities depend on the register of what, not least because of a concern to champion 'sociological types.' But the ontological condition of uniqueness in plurality opens for Arendt (1958) a distinctive notion of the political which runs counter to this.

For Arendt, there is a difference between physical identities which merely appear to each other, and their *active* self-disclosure and the difference. It is this interactive scene of appearance to one another that Arendt calls *politics.* In doing so, she challenges the traditional, canonical lexicon of what constitutes politics. The core of this challenge relates to understanding uniqueness as an absolute difference, of valorising *who* rather than *what,* 'which, as Arendt never tires of arguing, changes the very notion of politics' (Cavarero, 2000, p. 89). For Arendt (1958), the political is about action which means'to take an initiative, to begin ... [I]t is not the beginning of something but of somebody, who is a beginner himself ... It is in the nature of beginning that something new is started' (p. 177). The space of action emerges when embodied individuals appear to each other: 'it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be' (1958, p. 206). Arendt highlights its fragile, intangible quality: 'This ... subjective in-between is not tangible, since there are no tangible objects into which it could solidify; the process of acting and speaking

can leave behind no such results and end products' (p. 183). Nonetheless, she emphasises that 'this in-between is no less real than the world of things we visibly have in common. We call this reality the "web" of human relationships, indicating by the metaphor its somewhat intangible quality' (p. 183).

From this perspective, Arendt argues that Western history is a history of depoliticisation, marked by the rule of the few over the many or various models of domination: 'Throughout this two-thousand year history, the political as a shared space of action disappears, or rather reappears only intermittently in revolutionary experiences' (Cavarero, 2000, p. 57). Indeed, Cavarero highlights 'a curious linguistic code based on the intrinsic morality of pronouns' (p 92) which attends many movements for transformation, ranging from communism to feminism: 'The *we* is always positive, the *plural you* is a possible ally, the *they* has the face of an antagonist, the *I* is unseemly, and the *you* is, of course, superfluous' (pp. 90-91). The uniqueness of the narratable self however desires the *you:* 'She is the *you* that comes before the *we,* before the plural *you* and before the *they'* (p. 90).

However, Cavarero (2000) argues that narration finds an Arendtian political scene within the feminist consciousness-raising groups characteristic of 1980's Italian feminism: 'Nothing, in fact, is lacking, because this experience can, in Arendt's sense, define itself as political: a shared, contextual and relational space is created by some women who exhibit *who* they are to one another' (p. 59). In the practice of consciousness-raising, the narratable self 'comes by herself to satisfy her own desire for a narrated story' (p. 59). The creation of a relational space of reciprocal exhibition is perceived and affirmed as political:

> The insistence on the *relationship between women,* on the *contextuality of the practice* and on "*starting from oneself"* – that has characterized the feminist political lexicon in Italy since the 1980s – therefore finds a fundamental source in the consciousness-raising groups. Its uniqueness consists in a horizon that sees politics and narration intersect. (p. 60)

For Cavarero (2000), the importance of the exclusively feminine setting of such a horizon in the consciousness-raising group, and the intertwining of women's stories, allows for the deconstruction of 'a point of view on the world, which claims to be neutral, but in reality conforms largely to masculine desires and needs' (p. 60). An epistemic imperative enters Cavarero's analysis here: 'To learn to narrate themselves as women means in fact to legitimate for themselves a definition which is outside the gaze of the other' ... Or rather,

outside the standards of the gaze of Man' (p. 60). In this relational context then, not only can 'the uniqueness of each one ... finally expose itself', but this also 'shows itself capable of working as a point of view that is independent of the masculine one' (p. 60). Through the plural process of claiming uniqueness then, the universal Man can be deconstructed.

In this way, not only does the narratable self offer a counter-rationality to the neoliberal subject, but Cavarero's analysis exposes the neoliberal subject as a continuation of the question, 'What is Man?' Central to my argument is the assertion that neoliberal governance depends upon and is nurtured by a gendered symbolic order.

*Implications for WCE*

From the Foucauldian perspective outlined in the previous chapter, I problematised the emphasis on voice and uniqueness in *Flower Power* (AONTAS, 2009) as one part of an individual-society binary. But, for Cavarero, this uniqueness is central to providing a distinctly feminist realisation of the political. In *Flower Power,* too, the recognition of uniqueness accords with the aim of WCE to promote 'the value and worth of women's lives and experiences in a society where women have not achieved equality' (p. 57). Here the deconstruction of the male gaze is identified as central to women's community education:

> WCE is about providing women with the space to see the world in a different way and to offer women opportunities to understand the reasons underlying their experiences of the world that have been shaped by an unequal society where women come second to men. (AONTAS, 2009, p. 21)

From this perspective, the creation of 'the space to see the world in a different way' through the process of telling unique stories opens possibilities for new kinds of tellings and new relationships with the world. This is a seeing which affirms the possibility of unique contributions to this newly created world:

> Women's community education organisations struggle to make sure that women are fully supported to explore the different possible ways that each individual woman can fulfil her sense of purpose in life, can create her own vision for equality and plan her own unique contribution to the world. They meet this hope by ensuring that women can bring their life knowledge and experiences into the activities in the organisation unrestricted. (pp. 41-42)

This struggle for the realisation of uniqueness is fundamentally an act of creativity which can allow for the emergence of new responses:

> Creativity in women's community education is a process in which the imagination, resources and experiences of the group provide opportunities for women's self-expression. Creativity allows new approaches to women's collective empowerment and new responses to the issues encountered by women to emerge. (p. 144)

All of this helps to clarify and transform the terms of understanding the personal/policy voice binary which I critiqued in Chapter 2. Rather than necessarily marking binaries of individual/society or personal/political, what is at stake here can now instead be understood as registering two competing understandings of the political: on the one hand, an incipient notion of the political which takes its ontological foundations in unique, embodied narratable selves; on the other hand, a hegemonic notion of politics which looks to statist rationalities of policy. My central argument is that the ontology of uniqueness in plurality already recognised as central in WCE provides the possibility of a counter-rationality which can confront the rationalities of neoliberalism.

Nonetheless, this is not a straightforward proposal. Firstly, the necessary relation between the ontological and the political does not mean that they immediately coincide. While a relational, embodied ontology of plural uniqueness is a necessary condition for rethinking politics, it is not sufficient for the emergence of such a politics. The difference between ontology and politics is action: 'Without action in a shared space of reciprocal exhibition,' writes Cavarero (2005), 'uniqueness remains a mere ontological given – the given of an ontology that is not able to make itself political' (p. 196).

Secondly, Cavarero (2000) highlights the risks which attend the feminist consciousness-raising group:

> In the reflection of the one in the other, the very personal identity that is consigned to the tale of an unrepeatable life-story runs the risk of losing its expressive reality and rounding itself in the common 'being women' that is represented here. 'I am you, you are me, the words which one says are women's words, hers and mine.' The empathy risks producing a substance. Put simply, *who* I am and *who* you are seem to surrender to the urgency of the question of *what* Woman is. (p. 60)

Therefore, while the process facilitates a critical perspective on patriarchal tradition, and amends universalism in its masculinist expression, it also ‘deviates from its original desire’ so that ‘[t]he uniqueness of the self sacrifices itself to the hypostatization of the female gender’ (p. 60). One might say that this urgency to surrender to the *what* is facilitated by policy commitments which demand categorical statements about ‘women,’ thus hastening the morphing of who into the register of what, and a ‘gender equality’ which refuses distinction and uniqueness.

Thirdly then, feminist ‘consciousness-raising’ cannot be regarded as an atheoretical process which simply ‘happens’ when women come together and share their stories, even if the context is explicitly recognised as political. Ryan (2001) describes the original feminist consciousness-raising approach in Ireland as deconstructive in exposing and subverting the personal/political binary. But she highlights the humanist assumptions implicit in liberal and radical feminisms, and the belief that ‘timeless and true differences’ (p. 8) exist between women and men: ‘Negotiating diversity, multiplicity and differences is a different but necessary political project’ (p. 9). This requires rejecting the ‘reductionist, monocausal or foundationalist explanations characteristic of liberal-humanist thought and practice’ (p. 9).

While the consciousness-raising groups of the Irish feminist movement were influenced by the methods and ideas of Anglo-American feminism (Connolly & O'Toole, 2005), the Italian feminist movement developed its own distinctive theory and practice (Braidotti, 1995; Cavarero & Bebtolino, 2008). Central to this is what Braidotti (1995) describes as ‘the extraordinary role’ (p. xiv) played by Irigaray in Italian feminist thought and politics: ‘Contrary to “standpoint” feminists who go on believing in the self-redeeming properties of the system’s political rationality, Irigaray insisted on the need for an in-depth revolution of the socio-symbolic structures on which the system rests’ (p. xv). In Italian feminism, Irigaray was embraced as a thinker who was ‘bent upon redefining the terms of political subjectivity by exposing the deeply sexed nature of the state, the notion of citizenship, and the entitlements they represent’ (pp. xiv-xv).

In an Irish context, outside the dominant terms of feminist thought, Ní Dhomhnaill’s thinking is also informed by a similar insistence on the need for an in-depth revolution in socio-symbolic structures. This is the point of the mermaid in exile on dry land, ejected from the social and relational conditions of water existence. Ní Dhomhnaill (2005) writes:

> What I am suggesting is that there is as yet a great existential void in Western discourse which might well be filled by women, to the enhancement of all. I think it is safe to say that something is at work in women's poetry at the moment, a genuinely new phenomenon, nothing less than an attempt to create an alternative Logos which is inclusive of the Feminine at a fundamental level. This stands in opposition to the dominant Western discourse, which, right back since the days of Plato and an all-male Symposia, was exclusive of it, if not predicated on the downright absence of the Feminine. (p. 174)

Ní Dhomhnaill's notion of 'the Feminine' is not based on essentialist assumptions: 'I do not wish to suggest that because of their gender women necessarily have any privileged access to a so-called "real" (semiotic) underside of symbolic discourse, nor do I think that the passage from woman to 'the Feminine' is in any way a straightforward one' (p. 174). As an example of the phenomenon of 'the Feminine,' she describes the poet Eiléan NÍ Chuilleanáin's imaging of Pygmalion's statue coming to life:

> The image of the Feminine, which in Western discourse was until now artificially constructed and man-made, takes on a life of her own which is powerful and comprehensive and, with Medusa-like locks, arises out of the natural matrix where 'a green leaf of language comes twisting out of her mouth'. It is a powerful image of an energy on the move which is daunting and exciting to partake in and to witness. (p. 175)

Of these interventions in Western discourse, Ní Dhomhnaill further writes, 'That some should consider this the remit of philosophy and not of poetry is only a symptom of how deeply the malaise of dualism lies at the very roots of our being' (p. 174).

Cavarero too effects 'a wilful displacement of the classical teleological route of thought; in a carefully planned derailing of the patriarchal train of thought' (Braidotti, 1995, p. xvi). Confronting women's exclusion through challenging the masculinist ontology of metaphysical closure, she 'undoes this founding gesture of philosophy, and rethinks the ontological script of Western civilization' (Cavarero & Bebtolino, 2008, p. 130). Moreover, in her genealogy of the Platonic triumph of reason through 'the devocalisation of the logos,' Cavarero (2005) explicitly challenges the philosophy/poetry dualism as intrinsic to this founding gesture. This specific intervention opens an alternative vocal logos of uniqueness: 'An antimetaphysical strategy, like mine, aiming to valorize an ontology of uniqueness, finds in the voice a decisive – indeed, obligatory – resource' (p. 129).

This deontologising move also provides for an understanding of the desire of WCE to 'seek to value each unique and distinctive voice that makes up that collective' (AONTAS, 2009, p. 116) which liberates it from the standard political lexicon. Instead, it becomes the source of possibilities for a revolution of socio-symbolic structures. Women's community education then too, as with women's poetry, might partake in a movement which is 'unprecedented and radical and being pursued by women of enormous intellectual perspicacity' (Ní Dhomhnaill, 2005, p. 175).

## Devocalisation of the Logos

### *The Platonic Legacy*

In her genealogical account of 'the devocalisation of the logos,' Cavarero (2005) positions Plato's thought in a critical dialogue with the Homeric world from which it emerged – the world of oral narratives and embodied voices. Plato's task effectively is '[t]o liquidate Homer [which] means ... to neutralize at once the world of the tale and the seductive, bodily, and enchanting effect of the phone' (p. 81).

For Homer, the importance of epic is in the production of 'an irresistible pleasure, that it seduce the listeners' (Cavarero, 2005, p. 105). It draws its strength from 'the rhythmic matrix of pleasure, the delight of the acoustic sphere that follows the rhythms of the body, which makes the rhapsode's voice powerful' (p. 84). Based on oral methods of composition, Homer works with the voice and the laws of sound: 'Inscribed in the internal body even before it reaches the ear, this law is rhythmical, like breath or the heartbeat…it makes itself manifest in speech through the regulation of accents, the number of longs and shorts, the modulations, assonances, and silences' (p. 80). In the Homeric economy, the narrating song is superior to rational discourse. Homer traces the source of his power to the omniscient female figure of the Muse. His is a privileged position as 'a filter' between the goddess and the listeners: 'He is the only one who can translate the vocality and the omniscience of the Muse into a narrating song that transmits to the listeners a humanly bearable pleasure' (p. 114).

Cavarero cites Plato for whom Homer 'nurtures and waters the passions and establishes them as rulers in us when they ought to wither and be ruled' (*Republic*, cited in Cavarero, 2005, p.

84). Homer is an illusionist who seduces especially ‘those who love sounds’ (*Republic,* cited in Cavarero, 2005, p. 84). Challenging the interweaving of musical form and narrative content, Plato attacks ‘the very form and substance of the poetized statement, its images, its rhythms, its choice of poetic language’ (Havelock, 1963, cited in Cavarero, 2005, p. 81). But most of all, he attacks the musicality of the repetition of assonances which entices the ear and produces in the listeners a series of ‘reflexes of the sexual or digestive apparatus [that are] highly sensual and are closely linked with the physical pleasures’ (Havelock, 1963, in Cavarero, 2005, p. 84). Thus Plato, writes Cavarero, ‘fears the voice of acoustic pleasure, the voice that is rhythm and breath ... He fears, in short, the corporeal realm of the vocal’ (p. 84).

The transition from Homer to Plato is therefore a transition from the centrality of the ear to the eye. His ‘liquidation of Homer’ is in order for thought to be ‘capable of capturing sonorous events and of freezing them as abstract and universal images, characterized by objectivity, stability, and presence, and organized in a coherent system’ (Cavarero, 2005, p. 81). For Plato, ‘thought’ is ‘a vision of pure signifieds’ (p. 51), and thus to be distinguished from the mutable and contingent things of the ordinary world. Cavarero draws on Hans Jonas (2001) to compare the senses of sight and hearing. Sight and the objects of the gaze provide secure coordinates which are disrupted by the sense of hearing. Sight affords ‘a position of autonomy that is at once active and detached. The world is there, it is visible, but it is up to us to look or not’ (Cavarero, 2005, p. 37). The visible world simply ‘lies in front of us’ in a way that is ‘stable, immobile, objective’ (p. 37). But the hearing subject is in an acoustic world that ‘interrupts, interferes, or surprises everywhere with its sounds’: ‘The hearer is completely exposed to sonorous events, which come from an exterior that the hearer does not fully control ... Hearing consigns us to the world and its contingency’ (p. 37).

Plato’s ‘vision of pure signifieds’ establishes, therefore, a philosophical lexicon guaranteed by the detached gaze. The philosophical existence of ‘ideas’ and ‘theory,’ essential to the vocabulary of philosophy and Western science, belongs to this platonic predilection for the eye rather than the ear. Cavarero notes that Plato’s *idein* means ‘the visible’ (p. 36). But the ‘things looked at’ for Plato are not of the external world, but mental images of ‘the mind’s eye’. In a paradoxical move, Plato adopts what Cavarero calls ‘an ungrateful attitude toward visual perception’ (p. 50). Having transferred ‘the veracity of the bodily eye to the immaterial sphere of thought’, Plato ‘then accuses the eye itself of producing a realm of tricks, shadows and illusions’ (p. 50). A stick can never be as straight as the *idea* of straightness. A particular

grey dog seen at a particular time of day can never radiate the same 'universal and fixed dog-ness' as the *idea* of the dog: 'For Plato what makes the gray dog…an object that plays tricks on the eyes is the fact that the dog is alive – and thus particular, subject to change, in the process of becoming' (p. 50). The things of the ordinary world are, after all, mutable and contingent. The experience of the bodily eye is therefore transferred to that of the mind: 'Frozen in an immobile presence, mental images thus end up constituting the spectacle preferred by philosophers' (p. 38).

The platonic mind, then, requires a language of signifieds which coincide with the fixed, universal idea, rather than the unstable particularity of things. From this perspective, language proceeds by generalising and erasing differences: 'Reduced to empirical referents by language, all four-legged creatures who bark become "dog." In short, language reduces the many to one, or rather it says the one of the many' (Cavarero, 2005, p. 49). The classifying effect of language thus performs the reduction of multiplicity, facilitating the platonic aim 'of devocalizing speech and transform[ing] the generality of the name into the universality of the idea' (p. 50). For Cavarero, a pivotal historical point in the creation of this lexicon is Plato's use of the term 'theoria' to mean "the contemplation of real, lasting, immobile things" (p. 38) This is the birth of what gets called science, and it carries the 'antiacoustic and videocentric mark of platonic thought' (p. 81) into Western philosophy.

This 'antiacoustic and videocentric' mark is also carried into understandings of the political. Cavarero (2002) highlights '[t]his inherence of order to *theoria*, which is the crux of the political proposal of Plato's *Republic*' (p. 511) as leaving a lasting legacy on the disciplinary status of political theory. Although different authors and epochs, from Hobbes and Locke to Rawls, identify and resolve the question of politics in different ways, all revolve 'on the essence of politics as order' (p. 511): 'political theory recognizes its specific object in an order – governable andpredictable, convenient and reassuring, just and legitimate – that neutralizes the potentially conflictive disorder inscribed in the natural or prepolitical condition of human beings' (p. 511). In other words, political theory depends upon 'an image of disorder on which political *theory* imposes a remedy' (p. 511). All of this is the antithesis of the Arendtian sphere of action: 'Ignoring the oxymoron at its core, political theory thus cancels the unpredictability of plural interaction that constitutes the *proprium* of politics and replaces it with the predictability of order' (p. 512).

*The Binary Economy*

The critical point for Cavarero (2005), however, is not simply the privileging of sight. It is rather 'a precise strategy of devocalizing logos that relegates the voice to the status of those things that philosophy deems unworthy of attention' (p. 70). Therefore, '[t]hat which *each* voice as voice signifies – namely the uniqueness and the relationality that the vocal manifests – does not even get proposed as a matter for reflection' (p. 70). For Cavarero, uniqueness has its corporal root in voice,and she quotes Calvino (1988) as follows: 'A voice means this: there is a living person, throat, chest, feelings, who sends into the air this voice, different from all other voices ... A voice involves the throat, saliva' (cited in Cavarero, 2005, p. 4). This uniqueness is 'a deep vitality of the unique being who takes pleasure in revealing herself through the emission of the voice. This revelation proceeds, precisely, from inside to outside, pushing itself in the air, with concentric circles, towards another's ear' (p. 4). In *For More than One Voice,* Cavarero locates uniqueness and plurality in the sphere of the vocal. 'In the uniqueness that makes itself heard as voice, there is an embodied existent, or rather, a "being-there" [*esserci]* in its radical finitude, here and now' (Cavarero, 2005, p. 173). For Cavarero, the crucial significance of this devocalisation is that the logos is stripped of what is 'proper to the voice' (p. 10). What Levinas (1998) calls the '*who* of *saying*' (cited in Cavarero, 2005, p. 29) evaporates into anonymity.

Cavarero's account illuminates how the devocalisation of the logos is tied to 'the perverse binary economy that splits the vocalic from the semantic and divides them into the two genders of the human species' (p. 207). In this codified account of language, 'whose semantic soul aspires to the universal' (p. 10), voice becomes an 'empty sound' (p. 34). Its role is a service one of providing 'an acoustic robe for the mental work of the concept' (p. 35). One of the 'chief vices of logocentrism' (p. 13) is that it transforms the bodily excess of the voice into a lack. Speech becomes a divider 'that produces the drastic alternative between an ancillary role for the voice as vocalization of mental signifieds and the notion of the voice as an extraverbal realm of meaningless emissions that are dangerously bodily, if not seductive or quasi-animal' (p. 13). Since song has been feminized from the start, vocality and song now appear together 'as antagonistic elements in a rational, masculine sphere that centers itself, instead, on the semantic. To put it formulaicly: woman sings, man thinks' (p. 6). The devocalisation of the logos then is accomplished and confirmed by its division into 'a purely feminine phone and a purely masculine semantikon' (p. 107). Thus, for Cavarero, the dualism

of the symbolic patriarchal order which mythologises rationality as a masculine preserve, and the feminine with the body, is inextricably tied to the devaluation of the vocal: '[E]ven the androcentric tradition knows that the voice comes from "the vibration of a throat of flesh" and, precisely because it knows this, it catalogs the voice with the body. The voice becomes secondary, ephemeral, and inessential – reserved for women' (p. 6).

*WCE and a Devocalised Logos*

This analysis allows the 'divided voice' – the personal voice vs political/policy voice – discussed in Chapter 2 to be understood as a legacy of the devocalisation of the logos and the binary economy of Western philosophy. This understanding in turn allows for a fuller appreciation of what is at stake for a WCE praxis which would claim 'each unique and distinctive voice' (AONTAS, 2009, p. 116), rather than the policy domain, as the ontological foundations of the political. As discussed in Chapter 2, 'policy voice' rationalities synchronise with neoliberal rationalities. From Cavarero's (2002) perspective, these can be understood as reflecting the platonic legacy of political theory which 'recognizes its specific object in an order – governable and predictable' (p. 511). By the same token, the classifying role of language upon which it depends to fix its subjects into the discursive order of what is also a function of Plato's 'thought as a vision of pure signifieds' (Cavarero, 2005). Cavarero's genealogy exposes, not only how this is premised on an image of 'disorder' underneath, but how, at a deep symbolic level, this 'disorder' has a crucial gendered valence. It is grounded in an ontological fear of contingent realities and embodied voices and their stereotyped associations with women. This allows for another interpretation of the question posed by Gill (2009): 'Could it be that neoliberalism is *always already gendered ... ?*' (p. 443).

For Cavarero (2005), the uniqueness and distinction of voice, made manifest in *Flower Power,* permits a radical rethinking of the classical relationship between speech and politics. This is because the vocalic 'attacks the traditional connection between politics and speech, first, from the site of ontology' (p. 108). The most important consequence of the devocalization of the logos is the construction of a system which neglects uniqueness and relationality. This neglect attends the possibilities of meaning: 'the voice pertains to the very generation of meaning – the very meaning that renders logos itself as a system of signification possible' (p. 182). Cavarero notes that in the etymology of the Latin *vox*, 'the

first meaning of *vocare* is "to call," or "invoke,"' (p. 169) so that voice is the site where embodiment, relationality and sound converge in unique existence – its destiny is towards the ear of another and calls for a response. Importantly, this is not about 'recuperating a voice that is still pure voice because it precedes the advent of speech' (p. 179). It is rather one of 'recuperating the voice in the realm of speech toward which the voice is itself essentially destined' (p. 179). Speech then is not merely an 'acoustic signifier' but 'a vocalic relation that convokes mouths and ears' (p. 182).

For Cavarero, an ontology of voice is decisive in order to become attuned to a different kind of speech and a different kind of listening: 'the aim is to free logos from its visual substance and to finally mean it as sonorous speech - in order to listen, in speech itself, for the plurality of singular voices that convoke one other in a relation that is not simply sound, but above all resonance' (p. 178 -179). 'Resonance' is a form of communication which is akin to 'a song for two voices' (p. 171). The voice-body connection is central to a vocal ontology of uniqueness since such embodiedness, or the 'embodied existent', has an inevitably relational impulse in a world of sound: it is a uniqueness 'that makes itself heard' (p. 243).

This has particular implications for feminism since the vocalic has an 'antipatriarchal valence' (p. 207). It is not about 'feminizing politics.' It means extricating speech from binary gender stereotypes: 'tracing speech back to its vocalic roots, extricating speech at the same time from the perverse binary economy that splits the vocalic from the semantic and divides them into the two genders of the human species' (p. 207). The antipatriarchal valence of voice then is based on a 'simple recognition': 'that the political essence of speech is rooted in the corporeal uniqueness of the speakers and in their reciprocal invocation' (p. 207). As Kottman (2005) notes, Cavarero's concern is 'to amplify the resonance of voices in order to open the possibility of a different mode of political existence' (p. viii). In other words, to be liberated from the 'perverse gendered binary' is to be liberated from the 'what' of 'Woman': 'it is not Woman who makes herself heard; rather, it is the embodied uniqueness of the speaker and his or her convocation of another voice' (p. 207). Given the gendered questions at stake, in order for women's uniqueness to be heard, recuperating the theme of the voice is an obligatory strategic gesture from a feminist perspective.

But even as this analysis opens up the political possibilities of *Flower Power's* ontological recognition of the uniqueness of the vocal, it also clarifies the closures which *Flower Power*

installs and which preclude such political realisation. What *Flower Power* calls 'a voice in the public domain' is not the voice in the sonorous sphere of resonance where singular beings 'invoke one another contextually' (Cavarero, 2005, p. 173). This 'public domain' voice is accomplished rather 'through attendance at seminars and networking events, through presentations and performance, through publications and through lobbying' (AONTAS, 2009, p. 107). This is the meaning of 'to get involved in political action' (p. 21). The pedagogical intervention is conceived as 'preparation' for a politics whose moment of change lies in the future: 'WCE organisations engage in and prepare and invite participants into collective action for social change' (p. 21).

The *a priori* assumption here is that the scene of sharing in the women's group is not already a public space of exposure and not already to be *involved* in political action. Instead, the preparation for 'collective action' is predicated on the need to '[b]uild our identity as a collective and develop a group voice' (p. 106). This 'group voice' harbours the moment of closure which dissolves the uniqueness and relationality of 'you and 'I' into an identity politics, and a collective 'we' which claims a common identity of Women.

*Feminist Times and the Political*

Attention to the dimension of time allows us to make more explicit what is at stake here. In this regard, Edkins (2003) usefully distinguishes between 'politics' and 'the political': 'Politics is part of what we call social reality. It exists within the agendas and frameworks that are already accepted within the social order' (p. 12). Politics in this sense accords with linear time, where 'events that happen are part of a well-known and widely accepted story' (p. xiv). On the other hand, what Edkins calls 'the political' concerns 'the real', and involves a disruption of linearity: '[s]omething happens that doesn't fit, that is unexpected ... It doesn't fit the story we already have, but demands that we invent a new account, one that will produce a place for what has happened and make it meaningful' (p. xiv).

This distinction reflects Cavarero's (2002) distinction between the predictability of order based on *theoria,* and the unpredictability of action. As discussed above, the order of politics 'cancels the unpredictability of plural interaction' (p. 512). It requires then the subjugation of the flux of becoming which marks the embodied uniqueness of the vocal as who someone is. At stake is what Grosz (1999) calls 'a double displacement' of time: '[time] disappears into

events, processes, movements, things, as the mode of their becoming. And it disappears in our representations, whether scientific or artistic, historical or contemporary, where it is tied to, bound up in, and represented by means of space and spatiality' (pp. 1-2). Bakhtin (1981) introduces the notion of the *chronotope* in order to make time explicit: 'We will give the name chronotope (literally time space) to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships' (p. 84).

The disappearance of time in our representations reflects the hegemonic hold of normative assumptions that time is a neutral 'envelope' in which events happen (Ermarth, 2010). It is something we are simply 'in' as an 'empty homogeneous medium' (Edkins, 2003, pp. xiv-xv). This neutral time is about directionality, progress, development, accumulation, and lineage (Grosz, 1999). Ideas and habits of mind associated with time as neutral have, as Ermarth (1992) notes, become naturalised through centuries, codified 'in a thousand practices across cultures congenial to empiricism and capitalism' (p. 212). Notions of determinism and the imperative of predictability are the defining concepts within sciences, structured by assumptions of a past which leads resolutely to the present and a predictable future. But determinism 'annihilates any future uncontained by the past and present' (Grosz ,1999, p. 4).

This hegemonic temporality has been contested by postcolonial and feminist theorists (Adams, 1995; Chakrabarty,2000; Ermarth, 1992, 2010; Everingham, 2002; Hutchings, 2008; Lloyd, 2001; Mohanty, 2003). From these perspectives, 'a vision of "our times" ... disregards the extent to which it does or does not fit with the various presents of those people, institutions, communities and states not narrated as in the vanguard of historical development' (Hutchings, 2008, p. 165). Ermarth (2010) argues that the gendered dualism between public and private domains has a crucial temporal inflection: 'There is not only His and Her space, but His and Her time. Humanist time, historical time, social time, the time of public affairs becomes His time. It is the professional's time, common time, universal time, the time of wars and heroics' (pp. 137-138). She writes, 'So much of women's experience is precisely *not* in this common time in any important sense' (p. 138). The point here is that this 'common time' crucially depends on delegitimising alternative temporalities. In particular, it entails 'a perpetual transcendence of, one might even say flight from, the concrete ... of a kind which trivializes the specific detail and finite moment' (Ermarth, 1992, p. 31).

For Ahmed (2004), emotions are 'the very "flesh" of time ... It takes time to know what we can do with emotion' (p. 202). Addressing the question, 'Why is social transformation so difficult to achieve?' (p. 12), Ahmed argues that the 'truths' of the world depend on emotions – 'on how they move subjects and stick them together' (p. 170). Her cultural politics of emotion is not only a critique of the psychologisation of emotion, but also of models of social structure which neglect emotional intensities and investments and therefore reify being. Contesting understandings of emotion as 'the unthought' and assumptions of rational thought as being 'unemotional' (p. 170), Ahmed adopts Rosaldo's (1984) understanding of emotion as 'embodied thought' to address forms of politics that seek to contest social norms. She theorises society as an 'affective economy,' involving the constant circulation of and transformation of emotions, linked to questions of power and history. Thus, '[h]eteronormativity functions as a form of public comfort,' so that the body *as body* disappears: 'to be comfortable is to be so at ease with one's environment that it is hard to distinguish where one's body ends and the world begins' (p. 148). But feelings of pain and discomfort 'return one's attention to the surfaces of the body *as body'* (p. 148). Both comfort (often called 'rational') and discomfort (often called 'emotional') circulate between and constitute each other as part of the affective economy of power which carries the effects of history in the present. For her, feminism involves an emotional response to 'the world', involving as it does 'a reorientation of one's bodily relation to social norms' (p. 171).

But Ermarth (2010) argues that dominant understandings of 'gender' as an issue are still locked into the empiricist habits of mind which inform the temporal neutrality of modernity: 'The neutral medium of history calls ... for the kind of actions appropriate to such thinking – what can be done about it, what laws or practices should be created, what funds should be raised to insure that conditions change for the better?' (p. 148). But with such commitments come 'all the tools of thought that came with empiricism some centuries ago' (p. 148), and so they keep 'reinscribing gender difference in terms that so manifestly do not "solve" the problems that gender involves' (p. 148). Such a monolithic science, with its 'axiomatic mathematizable propositions, measurable empirical entities, and pure concepts" (Fink, 1995, cited in Lather, 2004) is 'the master's discourse with its imperative to be obeyed within its guise of reason' (Lather, 2004, p. 27). In these tools of thought can be traced the videocentric logos of a visible world which simply 'lies in front of us,' and the Platonic language of fixed, universal ideas which refuses to recognise that which is 'alive – and thus particular, subject to change, in the process of becoming' (Cavarero, 2005, p. 50).

This, to reiterate, is the significance for Cavarero (2005) of an acoustic world that 'interrupts, interferes, or surprises everywhere with its sounds' (p. 37). In this logos, time has 'a quality of intangibility, a fleeting half-life ... thus erasing itself as such while it opens itself to movement and change. It has an evanescence, a fleeting or shimmering, highly precarious "identity" that resists concretization, indication or direct representation' (Grosz, 1999, p. 1). This marks the difference between a frozen spectacle of Woman in the discursive register of what, and one exposed to 'the becoming-time of existence' (Cavarero, 2000, p. 38) in the discursive register of who. It is the difference between being moored in exile on dry land, and being an 'energy on the move' (Ní Dhomhnaill, 2005, p. 175) where language has no nouns to fix discrete identities. For Grosz (2005), it invites speculation on 'the becoming-art of politics' (p. 2). This is 'a politics of surprise, a politics that cannot be mapped out in advance, a politics linked to invention, directed more at experimentation in ways of living than in policy and step-by-step change, a politics invested more in its processes than in its results' (p. 2).

*Limitations of Cavarero*

Cavarero's analysis powerfully illuminates alternative feminist rationalities to those of neoliberalism, and sensitises us to the neoliberal subject as a continuation of a larger patriarchal history. However, with regard to the historical specificity of neoliberal rationalities, it is limited. There is a danger therefore of underestimating the specific powers of neoliberal rationalities, and how government at a distance invades the site of story-telling itself.

The importance which Cavarero (2000) attaches to the feminist political lexicon of consciousness-raising practices in Italy since the 1980s, highlighting the 'insistence on the *relationship between women,* on the *contextuality of the practice* and on '*starting from oneself*'' (p. 60), becomes complicated under conditions of neoliberal governance. While for Cavarero '[i]ts uniqueness consists in a horizon that sees politics and narration intersect' (p.60), neoliberal governance too is a horizon that sees politics and narration intersect, relying on particular biographical projects (Rose, 1999; Walkerdine, 2003). Of course, neoliberal biographical projects are, as discussed above, directly opposed to those of the narratable self. Nonetheless, the feminist political lexicon of 'starting from oneself' is now a hazardous one.

The 'contextuality of the practice' has been dramatically transformed under neoliberal conditions. As discussed in Chapter 2, the story-telling practices of women's community education are deeply embedded in a disciplinary regime of funding relationships with the state which valorise labour-market imperatives.

Cavarero (2000) notes that, 'The story of a unique being ... is always [an] unpredictable and multi-vocal story' (p. 43). Since the who is exposed to 'the gaze and to other's questions,' the story which emerges is 'intertwined with other lives – with reciprocal exposures and innumerable gazes' (p. 87-88). The ontological basis of such historical gazes and questions must be distinguished according to whether they are founded on *who* or *what* questions and responses. Neoliberal government at a distance, of course, depends precisely on forms of surveillance which subject women to the gaze of expert others. But Cavarero does not elucidate the process of deconstructing these gazes through which uniqueness may be exposed. Concerned as she is to highlight the important distinction between the two registers of what and who, and the ontologically different kinds of questions and responses which they hold, what is not interrogated is the tense relationship between them.

Cavarero (2000) is perhaps too hasty to entrust the process of deconstructing the male gaze to the relational context of a women-only group, where the exposure of uniqueness 'shows itself capable of working as a point of view that is independent of the masculine one' (p. 60). As discussed in Chapter 2, assumptions of an 'independent point of view' are precarious in the context of a neoliberal project which works by inculcating habits of self-governance. In this context, when Cavarero writes that, 'To learn to narrate themselves as women means in fact to legitimate for themselves a definition which is outside the gaze of the other. Or rather, outside the standards of the gaze of Man' (p. 60), this now presents itself as the basis for a critique of traditional male authority which can quickly embrace 'its neoliberal double' (Fraser, 2013, p. 225) posturing as 'gender equality'. Deconstruction cannot simply be assumed then to emerge from the sharing of stories, even when the context is recognised as explicitly political. In the end, Cavarero does not provide a fully satisfying answer to Ryan's (2001) question regarding what radical self-reflection might mean when people want to know 'Who am I?'' (p. 135) through neoliberal times. To draw on Ní Dhomhnaill's mermaid metaphor, while Cavarero fills out a theoretical account of dry land (what) and an alternative account of the sea (who), we still do not quite have the mermaid herself in exile on dry land with her embodied biographical entanglements.

By the same token, nor do we have the mermaid who has 'troubles with boundaries'. Indeed, given Cavarero's (2005) insistence that the ontological and political do not automatically coincide, Kottman (2005) describes it as 'curious' that her own analysis of the voice does not push itself toward implications for action: 'In *For More than One Voice*, the act of speaking or vocalization is employed primarily as a "resource" with which to "valorize an (antimetaphysical) ontology of uniqueness" that radically subverts the classical definition of logos in relation to politics. Vocalization is not conceived by Cavarero as a "political" action, but rather as a phenomenon through which an antimetaphysical, relational ontology might find its most forceful articulation' (p. xxiv). But the fact of '[b]eing born with "a voice like no other" does not, in the end,' writes Kottman, 'guarantee or determine the actions performed by that singular voice' (p. xxv). He highlights the different kind of critical purchase which Arendt brings through the notion of risk and initiative so that, for her, '[t]he risk of speaking up is, finally, inseparable from the freedom that such action might bring about ... a risk that adheres to the radical contingency of action' (Kottman, 2005, p. xxv). Such an appreciation opens 'a scene of speaking in which the voice itself, in all of its fragility, confounds the limits and conditions of its own resonance' (p. xxv).

To some extent, this neglect on Cavarero's part could be linked to an analysis which remains tied to the larger brushstrokes of history given her precise project of subverting the logos. Her genealogy of the ontological clash between Homer and Plato, for instance, is of an entirely different order to Sharma's (2008) account of the embodied confrontation of rationalities by women in India undergoing governmentalised empowerment strategies. Arguing that this is not simply a regulative discourse which fashions 'bureaucratized and passive state subjects' (p. 235), Sharma highlights the ambiguous and uneven effects of neoliberal rationalities. As an unpredictable site, the empowerment strategy 'takes on a life of its own; it erupts, interrupts, and exceeds neoliberal, regulative logics' (p. 235). It is therefore 'an "excess," a moving target whose meaning is continually redefined through subaltern women's struggles. It has an ambiguous and open-ended quality that manifests in multiple and conflicted ways in women's lives' (p. 236). In postcolonial contexts, such subaltern mobilizations can enable a politics which 'speaks the language of the *aam aadmi* or the common person' (p. 236), and which 'leach[es] into the elite, formal realm of nominal "democratic" politics' (p. 236). Sharma then argues that these popular struggles compel democracy to function and look like it is meant to: 'not an exclusive and regulated domain of polite conversation indulged in by

privileged members of society but an unruly political theatre' (p. 236); Sharma refers to what Hall (1997) describes as 'an absolutely, bloody-unending row' (Sharma, 2008, p. 236). Finally, Sharma's analysis gives concrete expression to the unruly domain of action, in the specifically historical context of neoliberal governance, as a confrontation of rationalities.

*What/Who as Ideological Struggle*

Bakhtin's (1981) dialogical theory is useful in filling in some of the gaps in Cavarero's vocal ontology, providing a framework for conceptualising the relationship between the discursive registers of what and who as a site of ideological struggle.

The destiny which Cavarero accords to voice, towards the ear of another and calling for a response, is mirrored in Bakhtin's philosophy. For Bakhtin (1981), every utterance or word is always addressed 'toward the specific world of the listener' (p. 282) and 'cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates' (p. 280). In this sense, the dynamic of desire which Cavarero describes as marking the reciprocity of the narrative scene finds some correspondence in Bakhtin's notion of addressivity. Similarly to Cavarero, this is not about abstracted any-bodies, but a 'concrete listener' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 280). For Bakhtin too, 'the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other' (p. 293), so that the opening of dialogue always implies the simultaneous 'inter-animation' of more than one voice (Wegerif, 2008, p. 349). Since meaning is essentially dialogic, it cannot be grounded upon any fixed or stable identities but is the product of difference and not identity. What Bakhtin calls 'internally persuasive discourses' are characterized by a creativity where meaning is always 'unfinished' and semantically inexhaustible. The word in the discourses 'is half-ours and half-someone else's ... It is not finite, it is open ... in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever new ways to mean' (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 345–346).

But the 'borderline' of the in-between also marks a key difference between Bakhtin and Cavarero, or at least a theoretical emphasis which is muted for Cavarero. For Bakhtin, we do not take words from a dictionary but 'from other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 294). Singular voices then are polyphonic, embodied with the voices of those who have used them before; they are what he describes as 'populated – overpopulated– with the intentions of others' (p. 294). This

complicates the *who* of speaking. Recognising the multivocality of each unique voice raises questions of ‘who is speaking?’ and ‘who owns meaning?’ (Wertsch, 2001, p. 222). While for Cavarero this borderline creates possibilities for resonance between two unique voices, for Bakhtin – precisely because of such uniqueness which carries histories of exposures – it is always a site of tense struggle. This understanding provides for an interpretation of the relationship between thediscursive registers of who and what as a site of ideological struggle. Ideological struggle is based on the idea that there are two very different relations that a person can have with the discourse of the other. One set of relations is the open, creative dialogue described above. The other is with ‘authoritative discourses’ which are based on the assumption that meanings are static and demand our unconditional allegiance. Authoritative discourse is ‘indissolubly fused with its authority - with political power, an institution, a person - and it stands and falls together with that authority’ (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 343). For Bakhtin, language is always a site of ideological struggle, based on an *always present* conflict between these two discourses: a totalizing, centripetal force which tries to fix meaning into a monological vision, and centrifugal forces which try to diversify, unfix and opening up meaning as dialogical, creative and unfinalisable (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 272).

Bakhtin’s account opens onto complex struggles over the ownership of meaning as individuals struggle to adapt the word to their ‘own semantic and expressive intention’ (p. 293):

> [The word] becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accent ... Prior to this moment of appropriation ... it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions; it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. (Bakhtin, 1981, pp.293- 294)

For Bakhtin, the ‘difficult and complicated process’ of ‘making it one’s own’ marks ‘the ideological becoming of a human being [which] is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others’ (p. 341).

Cavarero’s account of ‘exposure to the becoming-time of existence’ now opens onto the possibilities of ideological becoming. It is this process which more clearly accords with Arendt’s account of action. It points to the beginning of *somebody* and not *something* since ideological becoming is marked by newness and creativity which exceeds that which is given. It is here too that the site of women’s community education as a dialogical space of open and unfinalisable ideological struggles provides the possibilities for political action. In this

regard, *Flower Power* can itself be regarded as a site of ambiguities, contradictions and ideological struggles. Refusing the closures of authoritative discourses which predetermine what properly constitutes politics or women, or gender equality, and embracing the who position of being 'rooted in the realities of women's lives', women themselves become centred as unique embodied knowers in ideological and political struggle.

In the next section, I discuss Arendt's (1958) concept of 'the vita activa' as facilitating an understanding of what/who ideological struggles, producing both conforming/behaving and acting subjects, in the historically specific context of struggles with neoliberal rationalities.

## The Vita Activa and the Rise of Homo Faber

*The Life Cycle Again*

In Chapter 2, I discussed the NESC Life Cycle Model (NESC, 2005) as a particular expression of neoliberal governance, setting the policy terms of 'the entrepreneurial self'. Of particular interest is how Arendt's (1958) discussion of the notion of 'life cycle' provides the possibility of a direct ontological and political challenge to this.Writing of the 'cyclicality of life,' Arendt describes how, 'Life is a process that everywhere uses up durability, wears it down, makes it disappear, until eventually dead matter, the result of small, single, cyclical, life processes, returns into the over-all gigantic circle of nature herself' (p. 96). As historically understood then, 'the life cycle' concerns the species life. But she writes, 'The word "life," however, has an altogether different meaning if it is related to the world and meant to designate the time interval between birth and death' (p.97). The significance of 'the durability and relative permanence' of the cyclicality of life is that it makes possible 'the two supreme events of appearance and disappearance within the world ...' (p. 97). The birth and death of human beings are for Arendt 'not simple natural occurrences' (pp. 96-97), but are 'related to a world into which single individuals, unique, unexchangeable, and unrepeatable entities, appear and from which they depart' (p. 97).

These distinctions which Arendt makes between 'cyclical life' and 'the time interval between birth and death' expose an ontological violence at the centre of the NESC welfare state, whereby a species concept of "life" swallows up and colonises the singular life. In this

application, the NESC life cycle model takes ‘the time interval between birth and death,’ and fills it with a generic blueprint deemed applicable to all lives as expressed in four ‘states.’ Thus, the ‘changeless, deathless repetition’ of the biological processes of the species life cycle is grafted onto the political social order of the world where people live. The life cycle approach is the discursive register of ‘what’ writ large, institutionalising a standardised and standardising Life Story as the basis of social cohesion according to the terms of the neoliberal order.

Foucault’s (1997) concept of bio-politicsis relevant here, particularly his notion that in modernity, what he calls *species-life* increasingly displaces individual lives. Drawing on this concept, Rail et al. (2010) point to the way in which the life of the population increasingly informs how ‘individuals are subject to governmental control, surveillance and regulation’ and how, ‘This conception of life gets adopted as an ideology, soon becoming a pervasive public morality that is internalised’ (p. 220).

*The Vita Activa*

Arendt (1958) elaborates her own conception of life which she calls ‘the vita activa’ (the active life). The vita activa follows from the human condition, although Arendt is careful to clarify that ‘the human condition’ is not the same as ‘human nature’ (p. 10). The consequences of the NESC governmentalising life-form ontology for *actual* unique embodied lives are further exposed when considered through the lens of the vita activa. With the term ‘vita activa,’ Arendt designates three fundamental human activities: labour, work, and action. Each responds to the basic human condition of life, that of *natality*, ‘the new beginning inherent in birth’ (p. 9) where the task of all activities is ‘to provide and preserve the world for, to foresee and reckon with, the constant influx of newcomers who are born into the world as strangers’ (p. 9). The activity of labour corresponds with the care of this human body, of ‘life itself’ (p. 11), and the biological process of ‘spontaneous growth, metabolism, and eventual decay’ (p. 7). The activity of work is connected with the human condition of worldliness: ‘Within its borders each individual life is housed, while this world itself is meant to outlast and transcend them all’ (p. 7). Work and its resulting artifacts ‘bestow a measure of permanence and durability upon the futility of mortal life and the fleeting character of human time’ (p. 8).

The third area is action. As discussed above, it is connected with the human condition of plurality. For Arendt, action has the closest connection with natality since ‘the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting’ (p. 9). Thus she states that ‘natality, and not mortality, may be the central category of political, as distinguished from metaphysical, thought’ (p. 9).

In my view, a full understanding of action in Arendt’s philosophy depends on this larger life context of the *vita activa*, not least because it sets the terms of Arendt’s argument as to *why* the political sphere of action has been historically unrealised. This is an argument which Cavarero does not appear to particularly attend to, but one which crucially informs my own critique of neoliberal governmentality. Arendt (1958) writes that, ‘The conviction that the greatest that man can achieve is his own appearance and actualization is by no means a matter of course. Against it stands the conviction of *homo faber’* (p. 208). Homo faber is ‘a toolmaker and producer of things’ (p. 229). She argues that only in the modern age, ‘in its early concern with tangible products and demonstrable profits or its later obsession with smooth functioning and sociability’ (p. 221), has this become the primary definition of the human (p. 229). For Arendt,

> Perhaps the clearest indication that society constitutes the public organization of the life process itself may be found in the fact that in a relatively short time the new social realm transformed all modern communities into societies of laborers and jobholders; in other words, they became at one centered around the one activity necessary to sustain life. (p. 46)

The NESC Life Cycle model is premised on this society of jobholders, making of life mere ‘empirical existence’ rather than ‘ontological affirmation’. But under the neoliberal conditions from which the NESC Life Cycle arises, Arendt’s particular analysis of homo faber assumes a new twist. While Arendt discusses homo faber as a producer of things, the ‘things’ to be produced by homo faber under conditions of neoliberal governmentality are now *other* ‘homo fabers’. This, one might say, is the engine of neoliberal government at a distance, and one in which education and training is allocated a central productive role.

This ‘organization of the life process itself’ which sees the atrophication of the human condition into homo faber is the foundation of a major focus of Arendt’s critique. Central to her critique of the collapse of the human into homo faber is what is ignored: the human conditions of embodiment and of plurality. For Arendt, this ignoring informs a particular

notion of privatisation, providing us with a political grammar from which to critique neoliberalism:

> The distinction between the private and public realms, seen from the viewpoint of privacy rather than of the body politic, equals the distinction between things that should be shown and things that should be hidden. (Arendt, 1958, p. 72)

The two conditions of being human which are absent from the NESC life cycle approach are both analysed by Arendt with regard to their being private and concealed.

Of the importance in providing for and caring for embodied humans under the category of 'labour,' Arendt writes, 'it is striking that from the beginning of history to our own time it has always been the bodily part of human existence that needed to be hidden in privacy, all things connected with the necessity of the life process itself' (p. 72). As mentioned in Chapter 2, Murphy and Kirby (2008) draw attention to the absence of a gender dimension or an analysis of care work in the NESC life cycle approach as its 'most troubling' aspect. Arendt (1958) also notes the association of this privatised sphere with women, although not dwelling on it and understating its persistence (pp. 72-73). At stake, however, in the neglect of care work is a deeper ontological violation around 'the bodily part of human existence'. In the NESC life cycle model, the material reality of *bodies* has disappeared, a normative disappearance which is underlined by the construction of a special, implicitly pathologised, 'stage four' for bodies that are disabled and so outside the 'life cycle' norm. The failure to recognise the human condition of embodiment is itself a manifestation of the neoliberal disregard for corporeal beings, as expressed in cutbacks in the fabric of social provision necessary for sustaining life. The needs of the body only become visible through the commodified terms of the market, and thus the body, and its care, lacks ontological significance in its own right. The rollback of the welfare state represented by the life cycle model reflects the ascendancy of an invulnerable homo faber which, in denying vulnerability, newly exposes individuals to wounding.

In tandem with this, Arendt's vita activa also highlights here the second major absence in the life cycle approach – that of action. The human condition of plurality through action is a vital correlate of the corporeal vulnerability attached to the ontological status of uniqueness. Arendt locates the philosophical conditions for the neglect of action in a larger history characterised by a 'remarkable monotony' of philosophical attempts 'to replace acting with making' (p. 221) which she summarises as 'an attempt to escape from politics altogether' (p.

222). The substitution of acting with making characterises the very notion of politics which is turned into the need for an 'end product', thus destroying the possibilities of action: 'the activity of the legislator in Greek understanding, can become the content of action only on condition that further action is not desirable or possible; and action can result in an end product only on condition that its own authentic, non-tangible, and always utterly fragile meaning is destroyed' (p. 196). The significance of this is 'the concomitant degradation of politics into a means to obtain an allegedly "higher" end [which] ... in the modern age [is] the productivity and progress of society' (p. 230). In collapsing the human condition into homo faber, for 'the advantages of stability, security, and productivity' (p. 222), action and speech become denounced, writes Arendt, 'as idleness, idle busybodyingness and idle talk' (p. 208). Indeed, this historical substitution of acting with making now finds its ultimate collapse in the conflation of homo faber and action, where the focus on '*activation* measures' (NESC, 2005, p. x) sees the root verb *to act* completely absorbed into the production of neoliberal worker subjects.

In regard to action, Arendt's (1958) conceptualisation of privacy as 'the distinction between things that should be shown and things that should be hidden' (p. 72) assumes particular significance, cutting across and unsettling the usual political grammar of private and political/public spheres. To appreciate this significance, it is necessary to clarify what Arendt means in constructing this distinction 'from the viewpoint of privacy rather than of the body politic' (p. 72). She writes that, 'In ancient feeling the privative trait of privacy, indicated in the word itself, was all-important; it meant literally a state of being deprived of something' (p. 38). For Arendt, 'The privation of privacy lies in the absence of others' (p. 58). It is therefore

> with respect to this multiple significance of the public realm that the term "private," in its original privative sense, has meaning. To live an entirely private life means above all to be deprived of things essential to a truly human life: to be deprived of the reality that comes from being seen and heard by others. (p. 58)

Clearly, Arendt's analysis here links with the privatisation of selves discussed in Chapter 2 as part of neoliberal government at a distance. From this perspective, the official 'body politic' can be recast as a privatised politic, which depends on 'things that should be hidden'. Arendt's analysis however goes beyond Foucauldian accounts of governmentality because, for her, the privatisation of self is not simply about social control at a distance but the denial of possibilities for action. Her concern is with 'deprivation' and its destructive effects on the

human condition: 'Under modern circumstances, this deprivation of "objective" relationships to others and of a reality guaranteed through them has become the mass phenomenon of loneliness, where it has assumed its most extreme and most antihuman form' (p. 58- 59).

The lack of a space of action constitutes for Arendt such a profound assault on the human condition that she calls it 'tyranny':

> Tyrants, if they know their business, may well be "kindly and mild in everything," ... their measures may sound very "untyrannical" and beneficial to modern ears ... But they all have in common the banishment of the citizens from the public realm and the insistence that they mind their private business while only "the rulers should attend to public affairs" ... It is the obvious short-range advantages of tyranny, the advantages of stability, security, and productivity, that one should beware, if only because they pave the way to an inevitable loss of power, even though the actual disaster may occur in a relatively distant future. (p. 222)

Arendt here anticipates the principles of neoliberal governmentality in the 'kindly and mild' social measures, the 'advantages of stability, security and productivity', not to mention the actual loss of citizen power. Such prescience gives weight to the ontological commitments which would name this as 'tyranny', registered here in 'the banishment of the citizens from the public realm'. The mundane technologies of neoliberal government at a distance (Rose & Miller, 2010) find expression in Arendt's account of 'the last stage of government in the nation-state' which is bureaucracy: 'Today we ought to add the latest and perhaps most formidable form of such dominion: bureaucracy or the rule of an intricate system of bureaus' (Arendt, 1970, p. 38). She describes it as follows: 'the rule by nobody is not necessarily no-rule, it may indeed, under certain circumstances, even turn out to be one of its cruellest and most tyrannical versions' (Arendt, 1958, p. 40 ). In *On Violence,* she reiterates these effects in even more unequivocal terms: 'rule by Nobody is clearly the most tyrannical of all, since there is no one left who could even be asked to answer for what is being done' (Arendt, 1970, pp. 38-39).

*Homo Faber and the Making and Remaking of Women*

Policy rationalities, and the neoliberal gender politics of the *National Women's Strategy* (Government of Ireland, 2007) in particular, can now be located as 'the traditional substitution of making for acting' (Arendt, 1958 p. 221). This is the homo faber time of endings and reifications of linear time: 'the Strategy spells out objectives, actions, targets and

indicators and it is intended that progress towards the achievement of these targets will be reviewed regularly' (Government of Ireland, 2007, p. 2).

Three consecutive sentences in the *Foreword* tie the making of women in the NWS to the making of the economy, registering in turn 'growth in the participation by women in the labour-market,' 'growth in our economy' and 'a need to ensure that all of our citizens feel a sense of true equality' (*Foreword*). For Arendt (1958), making islinked to a 'conformism which allows for only one interest and one opinion' (p. 46). In her view, this assumption that people 'behave and do not act with respect to each other ... lies at the root of the modern science of economics' (pp. 41-42).

The reified phenomenon known as 'the economy' – or, more affectionately, '*our* economy' – sustains the private 'things that should be hidden' through its own gendered chronotope. 'The economy' is a spatialised entity that women move 'in' and 'out' of, so that to be 'outside' the 'labour force' is to also be outside time itself: 'It is reported that women, *who take time out* of the labour force for caring, face considerable barriers when they seek to return to employment' (p. 27, my emphasis). But Arendt's private/public distinction also extends the privations of the household to wider society:

> It is decisive that society, on all its levels, excludes the possibility of action, which formerly was excluded from the household. Instead, society expects from each of its members a certain kind of behaviour, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to "normalize" its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement. (Arendt, 1958, p. 40)

This privatised public sphere finds expression in the psychologisations of 'self-belief' discussed in Chapter 2. From this perspective, the privations of neoliberal subjectivity are marked by a total collapse into homo faber, or what Elliott (2002) describes as 'a relentless process of privations' (p. 12) where privatisation should not be regarded only as an institutional matter: 'The intended or unintended consequences of deregulation of public agencies has been a thoroughgoing privatisation of life (or life-strategies) in general ... From one angle, then, privatised culture simply is that sixtie's maxim – "the personal is the political" lived in reverse. Today's politics is privatised, and privatised to the hilt' (p. 12).

Thus the NWS states:

> Some of these [required] changes are cultural, requiring a break from the traditional roles previously played by women who tended to operate behind the scenes rather than to the forefront of activity ... It may also reflect the lack of self belief and self confidence which is still found frequently, even among very successful women in Ireland, following years of socialisation in a tradition-laden environment. (Government of Ireland, 2007, p. 95)

Mixed in here with the psychologising concepts discussed in the previous chapter is a sociological bundle of ‘culture’, ‘tradition’, ‘roles’, and ‘socialisation’. These are all of course conceptually vague, but they work to bolster an individualistic construction of society and an alignment between neoliberal imperatives, individualism, gendered power relationships, and modernity. The notion of tradition performs a key discursive role, as the NWS summons up an alternative liberating vista of modernity for women in Ireland. This normative vision is of ‘a break’ or a rupture which would mark the emergence of modern, confident self-believing subjects. The particular work which the tradition/modernity duality performs in this context is to provide a temporal location – ‘tradition’, ‘the past’ – for the containment of gender oppression. The present is insulated from an interrogation of power or history; the present which the NWS addresses is problematic only insofar as it is contaminated by the past.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Fraser (2013) argues that the point of feminist challenges to neoliberalism ‘is not to drop the struggle against traditional male authority, which remains a necessary moment of feminist critique. It is, rather, to disrupt the easy passage from such critique to its neoliberal double (p. 115). But, certainly in an Irish context, part of the point here must be how the notion of tradition itself works to bring into being its neoliberal opposite, carried through a linear narrative of progress. This is the ‘easy passage’ which ‘actually replaces one mode of domination by another’ (Fraser, 2013, p. 115), or one abstract discursive register of the *what*for another what. Under these conditions, women are still ‘scapegoats of national identity’ and are still ‘the territory over which power is exercised’ (Meaney, 1991, p. 7), but are now, to paraphrase Meaney, transformed into progressive ‘gender equal’ symbols of neoliberal accumulation.

For Arendt (1958), ‘the victory of equality in the modern world is only the political and legal recognition of the fact that society has conquered the public realm, and that distinction and

difference have become private matters of the individual' (p. 41). In the context of the NWS, this is a statement which opens onto homo faber as, following Fraser (2013), the figure of feminism gone rogue. Arendt also permits an understanding of this homo faber feminism as premised on producing conforming, behaving, neoliberal subjects: 'This modern equality, based on the conformism inherent in society [is] possible only because behaviour has replaced action as the foremost mode of human relationship' (p. 43). The consequences of this are that 'deeds will have less and less chance to stem the tide of behaviour and events will more and more lose their significance, that is, their capacity to illuminate historical time (p. 43).

*The Smallest Act*

Yet, against these endings, there are still always possibilities of beginning: 'to act ... means to take an initiative, to begin' (Arendt, 1958, p. 177). This is the importance of Arendt's distinction between 'human nature' and 'the human condition' since action exceeds the boundary conditions of the embodied and fabricated world. Moreover, '[s]ince action acts upon beings who are capable of their own actions, reaction, apart from being a response, is always a new action that strikes out on its own and affects others' (p. 190). Arendt emphasises therefore the 'boundless' consequences of action: 'the smallest act in the most limited circumstances bears the seed of the same boundlessness, because one deed, and sometimes one word, suffices to change every constellation' (p. 190).

Arendt observes however that 'the various limitations and boundaries we find in every body politic may offer some protection against the inherent boundlessness of action' (p. 191). In this zone of protection can be located labour market strategies which limit and bound WCE. But such protections 'are altogether helpless to offset its second outstanding character: its inherent unpredictability' (p. 191).

> It is in the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before. This character of startling unexpectedness is inherent in all beginnings and origins ... The new always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability, which for all practical, everyday purposes amounts to certainty; the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle. (pp. 177-178)

The new of course is 'not the beginning of something but of somebody' (p. 177). The human capacity for action means that 'the unexpected can be expected' from a person who is 'able to perform what is infinitely improbable.' But this in turn is only possible because each person is unique: 'that with each birth something uniquely new comes into the world' (p. 178).

For Arendt (1958), beginning something new takes *risk*: one 'must be willing to risk the disclosure' (p. 186). It also means that the new beginning inherent in action takes *courage*: 'The connotation of courage ... is in fact already present in a willingness to act and speak at all, to insert one's self into the world and begin a story of one's own. And this courage is not necessarily or even primarily related to a willingness to suffer the consequences; courage and even boldness are already present in leaving one's private hiding place and showing who one is, in disclosing and exposing one's self' (p. 186). Moreover, she stresses that this courage does not have to assume grand heroic proportions: 'The extent of this original courage, without which action and speech and therefore, according to the Greeks, freedom, would not be possible at all, is not less great and may even be greater if the "hero" happens to be a coward' (p. 185-186).

Indeed, central to the 'inherent unpredictability' of action is the resultant story which 'begins and establishes itself as soon as the fleeting moment of the deed is past' (pp. 191-192). The story started by an act 'is composed of its consequent deeds and sufferings' (p. 191). Unlike the fabrications of homo faber, the importance of the story is linked to '[t]he whole factual world of human affairs [which] depends for its reality and its continued existence ... upon the presence of others who have seen and heard and will remember' (p. 95). The story is 'the light that illuminates processes of action, and therefore all historical processes' (p. 192).

All this provides for new understandings of the possibilities of women's community education through neoliberal times. WCE may be understood as '*ar snámh idir dhá uisce/* 'swimming between two waters' or, to adapt Fraser (2013), 'swimming between two feminisms.' One is the dry land rogue feminism of homo faber. The other is a feminism of newness and becoming, of unique and distinctive voices. With regard to *Flower Power* and understandings of the political, this can also be understood as swimming between 'politics-as-usual' which looks for endings, and the political 'diving' of risk, struggle, surprise, and the unexpected. At stake here is the difference between conforming neoliberal subjects and unruly actors who begin something new that confounds and troubles the imposed boundary-

rationalities of neoliberal governance. Arendt also highlights that not only is story-telling, which exposes the *who*, itself part of the risky terrain of action, but that political remembrance depends on story-telling for its historical illumination. This is not the biographical project of neoliberalism.

Nonetheless, Arendt (1958) suggests that story-telling carries its own hazards of 'making': 'The trouble is that whatever the character and content of the subsequent story may be ... its full meaning can reveal itself only when it has ended ... Even though stories are the inevitable results of action, it is not the actor but the storyteller who perceives and "makes" the story' (p. 192). This of course informs Cavarero's (2000) distinction between the narratable self and the story told. But it also highlights how action depends on particular story-telling practices in order to remember and not forget. This will be the focus of my next chapter.

Chapter 4

# Countering Neoliberal Biographies:
# The Narratable Self Through Neoliberal Times

The focus of this chapter is on narrative and narratability. The aim is to interrogate more closely what is at stake in the neoliberal biographical project, and to expand the possibilities of the narratable self as a feminist counter-rationality. I present a case study of one neoliberal biographical project which targets women's groups (the Equality for Women Measure), and follow this with a discussion of the alternative narrative practices of White and Epston (White, 2007; White & Epston, 1990). A critique of their theoretical assumptions regarding textuality, time and embodiment provides for a more extended discussion of feminist counter-rationalities (Ahmed, 2004; Bird, 2004b; Cavarero, 2005;Söderbäck, 2013; Tamboukou, 2008). This also opens up possibilities for a feminist pedagogy of nomadic narratable selves, and women's community education through neoliberal times.

## The Biographical Project of Neoliberal Subjects

### *The Equality for Women Measure*

In Chapter 2, I analysed policy, in particular the *National Women's Strategy* as a technology of neoliberal governmentality through privileging biographical projects of self-realization (Rose, 1999, p. ix). In this section, I analyse this regime at work in the Equality for Women Measure (EWM), a funding stream linked to realising the objectives of the National Women's Strategy (www.pobal.ie). The EWM is comprised of three strands: (1) Access to Employment (2) Developing Female Entrepreneurship (3) Career Development for Women in Employment. My analysis takes as its focus a research study, *Addressing Gender Barriers*

*to the Labour Market: Overcoming lack of confidence, low self-esteem and fear of failure as barriers to participation in Equality for Women projects'* (Irwin & McArdle, 2012), which evaluates 42 projects funded under the EWM for the period 2010-2013.

The labour market objectives of the EWM clearly align gender equality with neoliberalism. The title of the report flags the psychologising of the issues at stake: lack of confidence, low self-esteem and fear of failure. The theme for the research assignment was already set by Pobal[7], the funder. Project organisers were asked to identify the main issues for them, and the theme shared by all strands was selected. The other themes identified included caring responsibilities (women carry an unequal share of care work/household tasks); financial barriers, such as cost of childcare, social welfare trap, lack of transport; and the external impact of the economic downturn (Irwin & McArdle, p. 3). The collapse into psychological themes works to silence these structural questions. Selecting the common theme, 'regardless of socio-economic background' (p. 3), homogenises women's experiences, silencing in particular the voices of low income women. The task assigned to the researchers therefore needs to be set in the context of the power relations already containing and circumscribing the conversations that could be had. The researchers note the specificity of the theme, and also the tight timeframe available for conducting the study.

In common with other studies produced for government policy purposes, the study employs a positivist methodology which assumes a transparent rendering of experience. Using a mixed methodology of survey, interviews and focus groups, the researchers engaged with project co-ordinators, participants, a representative of the City and County Enterprise Boards Network, and a representative of the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI). The conclusions and recommendations of the study are framed in terms of limitations of the sample size of women and other stakeholders consulted.

With all these caveats in mind, the study nonetheless provides an account which usefully documents prevailing understandings among women in local women's projects about their roles and the notion of gender equality. My interest is in the discourses through which these understandings are constructed, and in particular how they exemplify the power of

[7] Pobal is a not-for-profit company that manages programmes on behalf of the Irish Government and the EU 'to support communities and local agencies toward achieving social inclusion, reconciliation and equality' (www.pobal.ie).

government at a distance by producing biographical narratives centred on a psychological lack. Despite the pre-defined psychologising focus, the report is clearly informed by a concern to push forward more critical narratives. It explicitly addresses structural issues and collective action, and attends to voices which articulate critical perspectives. Nonetheless, the overall effect is to reproduce neoliberal rationalities and government at a distance.

*Self-Esteem*

At one level, the analysis tells an apparently simple story of psychological change. Participants and co-ordinators were asked to 'rate overall levels of confidence and self-esteem' at the start of the project and the time of the research: 'the perception of confidence, self-esteem and fear of failure changed significantly ... and the majority of participants and co-ordinators attributed the change to the project interventions' (Irwin & McArdle, 2012, p. 13). The researchers do not use standardised measures, and in this sense invite women to assess 'self-esteem' on their own terms. However, in common with dominant psychological discourses, self-esteem is constructed as a relatively fixed, static entity. As an 'it', self-esteem and confidence can be 'lacking', and in some cases 'completely eroded'. Self-esteem can be 'high' or 'low' or otherwise rated as 'poor', 'very poor', 'good', or 'very good' (p. 13). The notion of self-esteem therefore provides a key discourse for the mythology of a core self which is required to be consistently resilient (Walkerdine, 2003). Of particular importance is that 'it' is deemed to have causal properties:

> [I]t [low self esteem and lack of confidence] caused loss of motivation and apathy, often causing a 'rut' from which it was very difficult to escape. Others stated that it constrains and limits the choices that women make and can result in them being 'stuck' in their lives. It can make taking the first step into education or employment very difficult ... (p. 10)

Women in the enterprise strand are reported as speaking of how 'lack of confidence and low self-esteem' can 'lead to women failing to fulfil their career potential or to underrating the potential of their enterprises' (p. 9). But for other women:

> Many did not believe that they had any *entitlement* to work or to access education or training. Others spoke of their lack of 'self-worth' and 'self-value' which they stated had been completely eroded. One of the interviewees spoke of the issue of 'self-belief' stating that women's lack of belief in themselves, their achievements and their potential to achieve acted as a considerable barrier to them moving towards employment or education. (p.11, their italics)

The majority of the project participants and co-ordinators identified direct interventions of their projects to address the theme of confidence and self-esteem: 'Examples of specific modules include assertiveness, personal development, communication, managing change, goal setting, conflict management etc.' (p. 12). Supports also included 'counselling or parenting services,' or sometimes 'a package of approaches', including 'specific modules and interventions that sought to support women to move from negative thinking to **positive thinking** such as *Mood Watchers* and the *STEPS* programme' (p. 16, their emphasis).

This array of interventions typifies what Rose (1998) calls the 'psy-complex'. This is further secured through Irwin & McArdle's recommendation for 'a more structured/prescriptive approach' for future EWM projects which 'should be encouraged to undertake where necessary and appropriate, strategies to ... address *lack of confidence, low self-esteem and fear of failure* with participants' (p. 21, their emphasis).

*Structures*

The report also complicates and problematises this focus on or understanding of psychological change. A section entitled 'Causes of lack of confidence, low self-esteem and fear of failure' (p. 9) begins as follows: 'The research identified the structural and all-encompassing nature of women's gender inequality as the leading barrier to progression or participation in the labour market or in enterprise development' (p. 9). It reports focus group participant observations that 'the individualisation of issues such as lack of confidence can cause women to understand the problem as their individual failure, rather than ascribing a structural cause' (p. 19). The NWCI representative also stated that this individualization can indirectly contribute to a sense that 'the problems/issues reside in the individual rather than in a society, that for the most part, is designed and dominated by men' (p. 19). This 'runs the risk of militating against collective action to find solutions (p. 18). The report adds, 'It was felt that the EWM provides a modest, but significant opportunity, to collectively address some of these issues' (p. 19).

The research locates these challenges in a larger historical context – 'an era of rapidly changing technologies and systems':

> In an era of rapidly changing technologies and systems, time spent outside the labour market can lead to a **loss of skills or to skills becoming irrelevant or redundant**. This in turn erodes confidence and self-esteem and can translate into a fear of failure. The increasingly competitive nature of work, particularly in recessionary times when employment opportunities are scarce, can also impact on women's fear of failure, of not gaining employment or to the fear of an enterprise failing. (p. 10, their emphasis)

But, to some extent, the attempt to open up a structural analysis leads to a circular argument: lack of self-esteem/confidence/fear of failure is a barrier to labour market participation, while being outside the labour-market produces low self-esteem.

The analysis also suggests different understandings of structure in alignment with women's socio-economic positioning. Projects that worked with women 'less affected by socio-economic and other disadvantages' spoke of lack of confidence and low self-esteem '"relative" to male counterparts' (p. 9):

> This, according to the projects, can lead to women failing to fulfil their career potential or to underrating the potential of their enterprises.The challenge was to support participants to believe that they can and should aim higher. For these projects, the issues of lack of confidence, low self-esteem and fear of failure as a barrier to women's participation tended to be viewed within the context of structural issues and barriers to women's progression. (p. 9)

For other women, other kinds of structures are at stake:

> For some, particularly in Strand 1, the issues are significantly aggravated by experiences of inequality, marginalisation and disadvantage as a result of a range of factors including socio-economic factors (such as low income, dependency on social protection or poverty), life experiences (such as domestic violence, low education or other negative experiences) or discrimination (because of their membership of certain communities or groups such as Travellers, migrants or those parenting alone). For many of these women their daily lives are characterised by what was described as an on-going 'struggle to cope' and when trying to get back to education or employment often experiencing further 'knocks along the way'. (p. 9)

However, although these structural analyses strain against the individualistic terms of self-esteem, they are themselves still trapped within the discursive confines of gender equality linked to labour market imperatives. For some women, the marker of equality and women's participation is career progression and becoming a successful entrepreneur. Meanwhile, in the case of other women 'struggling to cope,' issues of poverty, violence and racial discrimination, cast as 'aggravating experiences', implicitly derive their relevance from a primary framing of *the issues* of labour market participation and self-esteem.

At work here can be discerned the ‘new romance of female advancement and gender justice’ (Fraser, 2013, p. 220) where ‘the dream of women’s emancipation’ for women at both ends of the social spectrum ‘is harnessed to the engine of capitalist accumulation (Fraser, 2013, p. 221). These are the dreams which are harnessed by the EWM, where women’s expressed needs are located within a narrative of progression and upward mobility (Walkerdine, 2003). For projects supporting women ‘less affected by socio-economic and other disadvantages’, the emphasis is on supporting participants ‘to believe that they can and should aim higher’, to ‘lift their ambition’, and ‘to achieve the full potential of their career choice’ (p. 9). For women who struggle at the other end of the spectrum, the emphasis is also on ‘moving on’, albeit from a different starting point. The emphasis here is on ‘the first step into education or employment’, where the EWM is described as a ‘bridge’ and a ‘safe environment from which they could plan to move on’ (p. 10).

All of this illustrates Walkerdine’s (2003) argument that discourses and practices of social class as oppositional have now been replaced by those which stress the possibility and necessity of upward mobility – what she calls ‘re/classification’ – where low-paid workers are ‘constantly enjoined to improve and remake themselves as the freed consumer, the ‘entrepreneur of themselves’ (p. 243). These discourses position the female worker ‘as the mainstay of the neo-liberal economy’ and upward mobility through education and work as ‘the feminine site of the production of the neo-liberal subject’ (p. 238).

Nonetheless, in Irwin’s and McArdle’s (2012) study, some participants from projects that worked with ethnic minoritised women, particularly Traveller women and migrant women, ‘stated that lack of confidence and low self-esteem were only two barriers in the context of other structural barriers such as discrimination and the absence of supports for women returning to work and/or enterprise’ (p. 10). Irwin and McArdle note that issues of self-esteem, confidence and fear of failure are ‘undoubtedly compounded by socio-economic factors and negative life experiences’ (p. 20). But this seems to inform a suggestion for more intense psychological intervention: ‘The extent to which women are affected and impacted by these barriers obviously influences the type and intensity of interventions required/offered’ (p. 20). The trio of self esteem, confidence and fear of failure, are constructed as prior to and foundational to other questions, meriting focused and priority intervention:

> What emerged from this enquiry was a firm belief amongst many of the projects that **addressing the issues of confidence and self-esteem is a prerequisite** for any type of success in relation to progressing women into the labour market ... Many described work to address lack of confidence and low self-esteem in terms of 'foundation' or 'cornerstone' of the project and there was a general view that this was crucial as a building block to providing women with employment related skills. (pp. 15-16, their emphasis)

*Collective Action*

However, the study does make a case for the importance of collective action. It highlights suggestions from research participants that the formation of alternative networks for women in economic life is important 'to continue with a collective analysis of the way society treats women and to provide support to women to ultimately challenge and create alternatives' (p. 19). It also suggests that 'at a programmatic or collective level ... opportunities be explored for analysing, documenting and bringing to attention the challenges facing women and the roles and expectations ascribed to them in contemporary Irish society' (p. 19).

An interesting aspect of the study is how the process itself opened up new reflections about the theme: 'Most of the research participants mentioned that the act of bringing women together was in itself a confidence-building mechanism' (p. 19). Participants also highlighted particular practices and processes associated with their own projects, including:

> … the creation of a safe space where listening and a caring dimension is created and valued ... the importance of a woman-only environment where many of the participants had shared experiences and objectives ... the community-based, participant-(woman) centred nature of the projects ... the group learning nature was crucial in creating sustainable ways of working collectively, often leading to 'buddy' learning and peer support. The affirmation from other women was crucial to the development of confidence and self-esteem and to challenging fear of failure. (p. 17)

This opens up the possibility of alternative non-individualistic understandings of self-esteem. Articulated here is a language with its genesis in feminist consciousness-raising groups: women-centred spaces, shared experiences, mutual encouragement and support. Chatham-Carpenter and DeFrancisco (1998) argue for relational and contextual understandings of self-esteem, challenging the uncritical adoption of concepts of self-esteem which are individualistic, reified and acontextual. Women they interviewed regarded self-esteem as a complex, dynamic context-variable phenomenon, and sometimes a political site of resistance. Similarly, Steinem (1992) contests the notion that self-esteem is only ever a pacifying effect

of ideology, arguing that 'feminism needs self-esteem' because 'good self-esteem enables participation in the public domain, a prerequisite for effective political engagement' (cited in Stephenson, 2006, p. 80).

However, while these positions have merit in foregrounding how forms of subjectivity link with political action, such a link is severed in the binary analysis which implicitly informs EWM projects. Although the importance of collectivised analysis, critique and action is acknowledged, it is postponed into a vague future which is understood to require first of all a 'foundation' of self-esteem and confidence among project participants. A hierarchy of causes is constructed, with self-esteem as the 'worst'. This confirms 'self-esteem' as a personal deficit to be remedied, rather than recognising that the naming, the experience and the interventions are already saturated with political imperatives. The injunction to *first* work on self-esteem, confidence and fear of failure, involving a panoply of humanistic interventions, is to embrace a political, economic and social world premised on a 'strong', decontextualised, unitary self.

In part, the problem is created by the binary terms in which the problem is posed, which constructs low self-esteem and labour market participation in relation to each other: the fate of one is tied to the other. This framing and the solutions which emerge depend on the reification of both 'self-esteem' and 'labour market participation' as unquestioned givens of the modern era, as measurable facts of life, and as rendered meaningful in an explanatory causal account of psychological impacts and sociological correlates. This circularity is not interrupted by the grammar of the personal, extolling the 'sharing of experiences' in 'women-centred spaces.' Such interventions accord rather with what Walkerdine (2003) describes as a new neoliberal legitimacy to stereotypical discourses of femininity through values of care, relationality and interiority (p. 242) which are articulated in alignment with the rise of a therapeutic culture.

As presented in Irwin's and McArdle's research, the projects funded under the Equality for Women Measure appear unambiguously aligned with current conditions. Insofar as the political goals are centred around labour market imperatives, they are enjoined to produce the kinds of selves esteemed by markets. In particular, rather than critically challenging dominant discourses of failure/success which produce experiences of 'lack of confidence, self-esteem

and fear of failure', the projects are incited to embrace these discourses, strengthen them, and legitimise them through biographical projects of self.

*Narrative Questions*

Such neoliberal biographical projects open up questions about the politics of story-telling and story-listening. Thus, when *Flower Power* writes that WCE '[a]cknowledges and seeks to address the struggles women encounter in their everyday lives' by providing women with 'the opportunity to reflect on their life story' (AONTAS, 2009, p. 88), the very meaning of 'life story' must itself be regarded as a volatile site of ideological struggle. As Andrews (2004) asks, 'How can we make sense of ourselves, and our lives, if the shape of our life story looks deviant compared to the regular lines of the dominant stories? (p. 1). She highlights the unique contribution of narrative theorists as drawing attention to human subjectivity and history as specific dimensions of the process of cultural construction. The discursive resources through which people create narrative meaning are necessarily cultural, so that narratives are themselves cultural products which in turn impact culture. However, narrative theorists differ with regard to the extent of their engagement with power relations. This has implications for theorising narratives as potentially reproducing and reinforcing social norms, including the notion of a 'coherent' story: 'Narratives come in many kinds; they are contradictory and fragmented; there is no such thing as a coherent story' (Andrews et al, 2004, p. 8).

Such questions have implications for feminist education. Ryan (2001) presents a pedagogical practice which includes opening up new kinds of conversations, based on careful listening to women's stories to discern current understandings of power and control in their lives (pp.118-119). The story-telling process involves 'not so much telling new stories' but examining the same stories from different angles in ways which can question assumptions informing social practices (p. 119). For her, this includes openly questioning dominant discourses about women and men, naming power and the social nature of feelings and contradictions. Such a process generates 'new theoretical perspectives from which the dominant can be criticised and new possibilities envisaged' (p. 134).

An important contribution of Cavarero's (2000) narratable self is in foregrounding Arendt's distinction between the flux of action and the resultant story: 'the *who* appears in the tale as

an essence because the narration is always retrospective – it *halts* that which is, in the expressive flux of the existent, not stable or fixed (p. 71). There is therefore 'a flattening effect regarding the narrated identity in the form of a story' (p. 71). For Arendt (1958), as we have seen, the significance of 'the storyteller who perceives and "makes" the story' (p. 195) lies in the extent to which the story can 'illuminate historical time.' Others have posed similar questions. '[I]s there more to subjectivity than the storied self?', ask Andrews et al. (2004, p. 7). Andrews (2010) suggests that narratives 'are not and cannot be synonymous with life' (p. 152). She cites Ricoeur (1984) that, 'The emplotment of events and incidents into a narrative "grasps together" and integrates into one whole and complete story multiple and scattered events" (in Andrews, 2010, p. 152). This position is adopted by White and Epston (1990) who argue that narratives entail a selective process of 'pruning' out those events which do not fit with dominant evolving stories. The consequence is that, 'much of our stock of lived experience goes unstoried and is never "told" or expressed. It remains amorphous, without organization and without shape' (p. 12).

The very inchoateness can then also be storied out, as shown in the differences between the following verse written by Ní Dhomhnaill in Irish, and its English translation by Muldoon:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Bhí mórán acu* | There were quite a lot of them |
| *is níor éirigh leo an t-athrú saoil* | who never quite came to terms |
| *a chur i gceart díobh.* | with their great change of lifestyle. |
| *Ní raibh sé de ghus nó de theacht aniar iontu* | They didn't have the inner resources or the recuperative power |
| *na cosa a thaibhairt leo.* | to see them through. |
| *Bhuailtí taom trom orthu* | They were particularly susceptible |
| *is bhítí ag gabháil steallaidh dhóibh* | to severe illnesses |
| *le gach galar tógálach a ghaibheadh an treo.(l. 60)* | and any infectious disease that was doing the rounds. (p. 61) |

In Muldoon's translation, the plight of the merfolk is made available through dominant discourses of interiority. The failures of the body, and an inability to '[come] to terms with their great change of lifestyle,' are linked to a lack of 'inner resources' and 'recuperative power.' But the condensed imagery of Ní Dhomhnaill's Irish verse holds a more complex narrative which eludes a 'proper' translation. The Irish phrase, '*Bhuailtí taom trom orthu'* might roughly be translated literally as 'a strong seizure was struck upon them'. This opens onto dynamic contextual considerations which the Irish language makes available in a way the English language does not. Furthermore, the traditional Irish phrase, '*na cosa a thaibhairt*

*leo*', finding its English equivalent in 'to see them through', literally means 'to take the legs (or the feet) with them'. This too reflects the concrete imagery of the Irish language which contrasts with the more abstract tendencies of English. But in the context of the merfolk, this embodied image has a particular resonance. The image powerfully holds the memory of the history of a traumatic rupture, but also the alien legs which must now be walked with. This is the embodied living 'in between'. Ní Dhomhnaill's Irish verse holds this historical memory of dissociation carried by merfolk bodies in their attempts to adapt. The English translation 'to see them through' reinscribes the forgetting, and so heightens the dissociation.

The mermaid then poses a particular set of challenges for narrative theory concerning questions of exiled identities, the speakability of embodied histories of silence, of existing in the 'in-between', not to mention the disjunction between a language of discrete interiorities and a pelagic one of other times which knows no boundaries.

In the next section, I discuss White and Epston's (White, 2007; White & Epston, 1990) narrative therapy practices for facilitating the emergence of subjugated knowledges.

## Subjugated Knowledges and Narrative Practices

### *Storying Knowledge*

The theoretical understandings which underpin White and Epston's (White, 2007; White & Epston, 1990) narrative practices facilitate a direct engagement with Foucault's understanding of governmentality, since they draw on Foucault's theorisation of modern power. A foundational commitment is for conversations which challenge dominant 'interior self' explanations for the problems which people experience in their lives. White and Epston's Foucauldian critique focuses on the 'thingifications' of people, including classifications and normalizing judgements as a mechanism of social control.

To further locate their critical purpose, White and Epston (1990) draw on Foucault's (1980) notion of 'subjugated knowledges'. Foucault argues that 'global totalitarian' theories achieve their status of 'truth' by masking 'the ruptural effects of conflict and struggle' (p. 82) through which they have been produced. An effective critique of dominant knowledges therefore can

be developed through the re-emergence of the 'subjugated knowledges' whose subjugation dominant knowledge depends on: 'I also believe ... that it is through the re-appearance of this knowledge, of these local popular knowledges, these disqualified knowledges, that criticism performs its work' (Foucault, 1980, p. 82). Foucault argues for the 'insurrection' of subjugated knowledges against the effects of institutional power and knowledge, and it is such an insurrection which White and Epston identify as the purpose of narrative therapy. In the development of these practices, they augment Foucauldian ideas with a range of other theoretical perspectives (e.g. Bruner, 1986; Goffman, 1961; Myerhoff, 1982; Derrida, 1976; Vygotsky, 1986).

Following Bruner (1986), a central assumption of narrative practice is that 'persons organize and give meaning to their experience through the storying of experience, and that in the performance of these stories they express selected aspects of their lived experience' (White & Epston, 1990, p. 12). From this, White and Epston emphasise the constitutive role of stories in shaping lives and relationships. Bruner's (1986) theorisation of narrative as emphasising 'order and sequence,' sets the terms for the task of making sense of life: '[I]n striving to make sense of life, persons face the task of arranging their experiences of events in sequences across time in such a way as to arrive at a coherent account of themselves and the world around them' (White and Epston, 1990, p. 10). It follows therefore that, 'The success of this storying of experience provides persons with a sense of continuity and meaning in their lives' (p. 10).

A key organising metaphor for this understanding is that of 'text:'

> [T]he text analogy advances the idea that the stories or narratives that persons live through determine their interaction and organization, and that the evolution of lives and relationships occurs through the performance of such stories or narratives. Thus, the text analogy is distinct from those analogies that would propose an underlying structure or pathology in families and persons that is constitutive or shaping of their lives and relationships. (White & Epston, 1990, p. 12)

The text analogy introduces an intertextual world in two ways: firstly, through the proposal that persons' lives are situated in 'texts within texts' (p. 13); secondly, in the emphasis on performance whereby 'every telling or retelling of a story, through its performance, is a new telling that encapsulates, and expands upon the previous telling' (p. 13). This is an open understanding of textuality which emphasises the 'relative indeterminacy' of texts,

recognising that, ‘Stories are full of gaps which ... recruit the lived experience and the imagination of persons. With every performance, persons are reauthoring their lives’ (p. 13). In collaborating with this reauthoring, narrative practitioners are encouraged to ask ‘scaffolding’ questions (Vygotsky, 1986) to thoughtfully facilitate movement from what is ‘known and familiar’ to territories of possible knowledge which may be less familiar (White, 2007, p. 263).

*Unique Outcomes*

The emphasis on the particularity of a person’s own experience and understandings of life is captured in the notion of an ‘experience-near’ description. This is an account ‘that uses the parlance of the people seeking therapy and that is based on their understanding of life (developed in the culture of their family or community and influenced by their immediate history)’ (White, 2007, p. 40). In this emphasis on particularity, narrative practice can be located in Arendt’s discursive register of ‘who’: ‘In using the word *particular*, I am acknowledging the fact that no problem or predicament is perceived or received in identical ways by different people, or in identical ways at different times in a person’s life’ (White, 2007, p. 40). Also important to this discursive register is, following Goffman (1961), the conceptualisation of aspects of lived experience which fall outside the dominant story as ‘unique outcomes’. White (2007) notes in particular the importance of ‘initiatives’: ‘Such initiatives, like other unique outcomes, are ever-present in people’s lives, but they are mostly neglected or lost’ (p. 232). Nor can they be predicted by a reading of the ‘social strand’ or dominant story of a person’s life. Clearly, this is all in the Arendtian realm of action. Narrative practices then suggest an approach to supporting the appearance of the narratable self based on enlarging the discursive register of ‘who’ in tandem with challenging the discursive register of ‘what’ represented by totalising unitary knowledges.

A number of conversation practices support the possibility of identifying unique outcomes. Against cultural practices of objectification of people, based on the internalisation of problems, White and Epston employ practices of ‘objectification of the problem’ (White, 2007, p. 9) which they call ‘externalisation’. This is begun by asking persons about how *the problem* has been affecting their lives and their relationships by turning it into a personified noun. White (2007), for example, asks a child, ‘What color is your ADHD?’ (p. 14). Such

conversations make it possible for people to experience an identity which is separate from the problem. From this position, it is possible to deconstruct the normalizing 'truths' constitutive of experience and their effects. When such norms become dispossessed of their truth status, the possibility is opened for people to identify other purposes they have for their lives and the things they hold precious which are contrary to the agenda of normalising truths. In this regard, externalisation practices support a protest against unitary knowledges: 'persons are able to appreciate their unique history of struggle and more explicitly embrace these knowledges in the constitution of their own lives and relationships' (White & Epston, 1990, p. 32).

*Absent but Implicit*

It is important to note that unique outcomes are not conceptualised as a pre-social authentic self which calls out to be liberated from dominant discourses. A number of theoretical perspectives inform particular narrative inquiries which support and deepen social and historicised understandings of unique outcomes and counter individualistic understandings of identity. One of these relates to the 'absent but implicit', based on Derrida's (1976) challenge to 'the metaphysics of presence' and his theorisation of language as the 'play of differences'.

The 'metaphysics of presence' relates to a centuries-old philosophical conundrum with regard to the nature of time and identity, and the challenge to notions of identity which are posed by the ephemeral nature of time. Söderbäck (2013) describes the task of classic ontology as one of saving presence from always already becoming absent: 'Selfsame being (identity as presence in itself) can only be thought and grasped if exempt from the succession of time. Since time never truly *is*, being must be posited as somehow *other* than time, *immune* to time' (p. 254). It is this 'primordial present' and the philosophical logic of identity it secures which Derrida (1976) critiques as the myth of presence.

For Derrida, assumptions about language which assume a one-to-one correspondence between signs (words) and the signified (the world, experience) constitute the myth of 'presence'. He introduces a deconstructive move which posits *différance* as that which never *is* and never can *be*, and which must be articulated in terms of a 'past that has never been present' (Derrida, 1982, cited in Söderbäck, 2013, p. 254). As White (2003) states, 'there is

no moment that can be defined as “now” in which a spontaneous expression of our experiences and knowledge of things as they “truly are” is possible’ (p. 31). Différance escapes presence and essence and so ‘threatens the authority . . . of the presence of the thing itself in its essence’ (Derrida, 1982, cited in Söderback, 2013, p. 254). For Derrida (1976), words construct boundaries between privileged meanings and other subordinated meanings. They exist in ‘chains of signifiers’ so that their meanings are tied to and determined by other absent words, the meanings of which in turn are tied to yet other signs which are present yet absent. Derrida’s deconstruction of texts consisted in recovering the concealed subordinate of binary oppositions in order to locate a marginal text: ‘to dismantle in order to reconstitute what is always already inscribed’ (Derrida, 1976, cited in White, 2003, p. 32)

White (2003) draws on these assumptions about the relationality of all description to provide options for a re-engagement with history which brings forward multi-storied experiences: ‘It is that which is on the other side of singular descriptions of experiences of living – that which is on the other side of what is being distinguished or discerned, and upon what this discernment depends – that can be referred to as the “absent but implicit”’ (pp. 30-31). People’s expressions of living are understood to be made possible by distinguishing things and giving them meaning – by acts of ‘discernment.’ This invites questions which inquire into the foundations of interpretive acts, and the conditions that make it possible for people to attribute meaning to experiences that they have lived through.

White (2003) notes again the usefulness of the text analogy since ‘the idea that a chain of signifiers (words) can be likened to texts that can only refer to other texts that are absent assists ... an appreciation of the intertextuality of life’, and helps to sustain an open inquiry since final conclusions and end meanings will never be arrived at (p. 34). As narrative practitioners listen to a story, they must therefore engage in practices of ‘double listening’: ‘This is a responsibility for establishing the listening context as one in which these expressions of pain and distress are heard and acknowledged, but not in the way that limits these expressions to the revisiting of trauma through familiar signs’ (White, 2003, p. 33). Rather, one must listen in a way which inquires about the subjugated meanings which the story relies upon for its expression. As summarised by Carey et al (2009):

> [I]f a person is expressing emotional pain as a result of traumatic experience then we might ask: What does this pain speak to in terms of important beliefs about life that have been subjugated or violated? ... Such an inquiry, about what is in the background of this person's experience that will make sense of the distress that is being expressed in the foreground, offers an entry point to preferred or subjugated stories. From this point, we can go on to develop a rich account of the values, hopes, and commitments and so on that have been transgressed. (p. 321)

One paper in which White discusses the absent but implicit relates to a community assignment (White, 2003). In this context, White suggests that recognising expressions of frustration, despair, injustice or abandonment and desolation as 'discernments' can afford opportunities to find words for purposes, value and beliefs which make the discernments possible. This might for instance open onto hopes, dreams and visions which make possible the discernment of despair; conceptions of the just world which are made possible by the discernment of injustice; and so on. This supports the development of options for the renegotiation of specific meanings that deny community members the experience of personal agency. For example, 'inferiority' and 'inadequacy' might be newly appreciated as evidence of 'defiance' and 'non-conformity'; 'failure' might be newly understood to be a reflection of 'independent mindedness'; 'damage' and 'disability' might be taken to denote special insider knowledges of tyranny that contribute to a 'uniquely-abled life,' and so on (White, 2003, p. 35).

It is important to note that such renegotiations of meaning are not about the simple substitution of 'a positive' for 'a negative' story, or about limiting opportunities for the expression of experiences that are troublesome, painful or distressing. On the contrary, because a rich exploration of the absent but implicit affords the possibility for people to stand 'more firmly in some of the other territories of their lives', an alternative speaking position is created from which it becomes more possible to 'visit and give full voice' to painful experiences. For people who have experienced trauma, these experiences can be revisited without the risk of re-traumatisation and its consequences (White, 2003, p. 37):

> It is in the context of inquiry informed by understandings such as these that people find safe places in which to stand in the territory of memory – at first islands, then archipelagos, and then continents – that provide them with platforms for speaking of what hasn't been spoken about, for putting into more significant expression their experiences of trauma ... I]t becomes possible for people to bring their experiences of trauma into the storylines of their lives, and to allocate these to history as events with beginnings and endings. (2003, p. 44)

White describes how this contributes to a context in which 'the legacy that is represented in expressions of psychological pain and emotional distress can be significantly honoured and joined with by others' (p. 43).

*Re-Membering Practices*

This 'joining with others' is a central theme in White and Epston's practice. It is based on practices which support the social, relational and historical basis of an identity, opening opportunities for people to challenge the dominant and isolating Western notions of identity. One practice which is relevant here is that of 're-membering practices'.

The metaphor of 're-membering' is drawn from the work of anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff (1982, 1986), particularly her field-work with an elderly Jewish community in Venice, Los Angeles who had migrated to North America. Many had become relatively isolated as a result of losing extended families in the Holocaust, leading to 'the development of uncertainty about their very existence' (White, 2007, p. 180). With the assistance of a community organizer, Maurie Rosen, these people built a sense of community through forums where community members had the opportunity to tell and retell the stories of their lives. Myherhoff (1982) writes that, 'Definitional ceremonies deal with the problems of invisibility and marginality; they are strategies that provide opportunities for being seen and in one's own terms, garnering witnesses to one's worth, vitality, and being' (cited in White, p. 181).

According to Myerhoff (1986), remembering contributes to a 'multivoiced sense of identity' where people find that their lives are joined to the lives of others around shared and precious themes, so that 'their story is not wholly their own but lives on, woven into the stuff of other people's lives' (p. 284). This entails a particular social practice of memory which calls attention to 'the reaggregation of members, the figures who belong to one's life story, one's own prior selves, as well as significant others who are part of the story. Re-membering, then, is a purposive, significant unification' (Myerhoff, 1982, p. 111).

White (2007) draws on the notion of 'remembering practices' as one of remembering the significant connections of ones life. Remembering conversations are generally initiated through two sets of inquiry which facilitate recognitions of a mutuality of contribution. The

first set of inquiries invites a person to engage in a rich description of how a particular connection has shaped, or has the potential to shape, her sense of who she is and what her life is about. The second inquiry invites reflection on how the connection may have shaped the other's sense of self and purposes in life. In emphasising a mutuality of contribution, this two-way understanding displaces 'passive recipient' conceptions of one's identity and allows for a resurrection of a sense of personal agency (pp. 138-139). Remembering conversations facilitate rich accounts of knowledges and skills of living that have been cogenerated in the significant relationships of people's lives. Certain voices can be granted more authority with regard to matters of one's personal identity, and this has the effect of disqualifying other voices (White, 2007).

Myerhoff's account of definitional ceremonies also provides the basis for White's development of 'outsider witness' practices, a collective narrative practice based on a sequence of tellings and retellings which include 'outsider witnesses'. Such retellings serve 'to amplify and authorize' a person's identity claims (White, 2007, p. 184) A person tells their story to another, with outsider witnesses in the role of audience. The outsider witnesses in turn then retell this story with the person as audience. Then the first person retells the retellings. As an 'extended reflection', each retelling involves exceeding the boundaries of the previous one (White, 1997, p. 95). In these retellings, 'what people give value to in their acts of living is re-presented in ways that are powerfully resonant and highly acknowledging' so that 'people experience their lives as joined around shared and precious themes in ways that significantly thicken the counterplots of their existence" (White, 2007, p. 166). Echoing the emphasis which Arendt and Cavarero place on external exposure rather than an isolated interiority, the emphasis on the outsider witness is connected with identity as a public and social achievement.

*Implications and Applications*

These practices provide possibilities for engaging with the discursive registers of what and who as sites of ideological struggle, of history and memory. My own engagement with counter-stories has been deeply influenced by the narrative therapy practices developed by Michael White and David Epston. As narrative conversations, they are not limited to or by the disciplinary confines of 'therapy'. Narrative practices may be more usefully regarded as

relevant in any context where people want to have conversations which open up rich narratives of resistance to dominant discourses. Indeed, one of the most exciting developments of narrative practices has been their application in collective and community contexts (Denborough, 2008; Denborough et al., 2006). In a pedagogical context, Fleming (2003) argues that narrative therapy provides a new language for describing transformation, and so well-developed pedagogical tools for facilitating transformative learning. Methodologically, Speedy (2004) argues that the double listening practices advocated by narrative therapists are closely allied with the work of feminist researchers in excavating unheard and unhearable voices.

Nonetheless, although White's and Epston's narrative practices resonate with my own ontological, epistemological and political concerns, they do so imperfectly. The difficulty here is not the practice per se, but how certain important aspects of these practices are actually occluded by the supporting theoretical frameworks. This in turn, I suggest, limits the possibilities of narrative practices for feminist transformation as a realisation of the Arendtian political.

## Feminist Counter-Rationalities Through Neoliberal Times

In this section, I begin by opening two inter-related problems with the theoretical assumptions of White and Epston's narrative practices from a feminist perspective: the body and time. I then expand this to consider language, emotion and nomadic narratable selves.

### *Narrative and the Body*

A central difficulty concerns the status of the body in White and Epston's narrative therapy practices. The embodied voice is central to Cavarero's (2005) vocal ontology of uniqueness. This is not to say that White and Epston ignore embodiment. On the contrary, as outlined above, the idea of the 'absent but implicit' allows for a social and historicised exploration of embodied expressions, such as tears, without resorting to essentialised explanations.

But at times also, White describes explicitly responding to the embodiedness of voice, rather than linguistic content, as an opening for engaging with alternative stories. For example, he

recounts the story of Julie, a woman who had experienced recurrent abuse and trauma in her life (White, 2004). She describes a pervasive sense of emptiness, and of being overwhelmed from time to time by shame and despair. Julie's story, as told to White, was 'a chronicle of tragic and demoralising events' (p. 48), and included the experience of witnessing a child being run down by a car and of being unable to move to assist. 'In all of the stories that I had heard from Julie', writes White, 'this was the only one in which I thought I detected an expression of feeling, or affective tone' (p. 48). The inquiry that followed opened onto a new story of how Julie treasured children's lives. This moment of hearing described by White registers the intangible, embodied in-between relationality which joins voice and ear: 'In the voice both uniqueness and relation – indeed, uniqueness as relation – manifest themselves acoustically' (Cavarero, 2005, p 30). The moment also calls up the embodied, reciprocal dynamic of desire which sustains the narrative scene, affirming the ethic of *you* through the curiosity which informs the listening.

However, such moments of embodied responding, such as to the 'affective tone' of voice, do not enjoy a worked-out theoretical space. To the extent that they do, as in the absent but implicit, the body becomes absorbed into a Derridian 'chain of signifiers' rather than being afforded any ontological significance on its own terms. Cavarero (2005) argues that Derrida's work represents the voice as an acoustic signifier that is more or less collapsed with the signified, so that the voice, for Derrida, is complicit in the illusion of presence. For Derrida, it is writing rather than voice which offers subversive possibilities because its spatial organization undermines the absolute identification of signifier and signified that voice seems to present. This identification 'is broken when, instead of hearing myself speak, I see myself write or signify through gestures' (Derrida, 1973, cited in Cavarero, 2005, p. 222). But for Cavarero, Derrida's privileging of writing ties his treatment of the phone to a tradition of logocentrism-as-videocentrism (p. 222).

The consequence of this, of course, as discussed in Chapter 2, is to reproduce a gendered binary economy. Bird's (2004a, 2004b) therapeutic practices are, similarly to those of White and Epston (1990), informed by postmodernist theory. But for Bird (2004a), '*the making of meaning* in the present moment' (p. 54, her emphasis) requires attending to embodiment: 'When we listen to and for the body, the mind, feeling states, sensations, smells, we are better prepared to step cautiously with people into terrain that can hold the promise of liberation

[against] the terror of annihilation' (2004a, p. 69). Ryan (2001) also discusses the importance of 'a critical pedagogy of the body' (p. 126) since the body is one medium through which the world is experienced. She highlights how women are objectified bodies: 'Under constant critical surveillance by others, women begin to experience their own bodies at a distance. They view themselves as the objects of the intentions and manipulations of others' (Davis, 1996, cited in Ryan p. 126). Ryan argues that paying attention to the body in the collective setting is capable of beginning a critical pedagogical process which restores sensual authority for women.

Following Cavarero (2005), the relative neglect of the body by narrative practitioners and theorists can be linked to a general reliance on theorisations which dematerialise language and meaning. Painter (2008), for example, argues that the discursive turn in social psychology has informed what he calls 'a linguistic reductionism', or 'a residual cognitivism', which contrasts starkly with approaches that insist on the corporeality of the subject and on the material conditions of social life (p. 176). This in turn can be linked to a reliance on metaphors of textuality. As my discussion of White and Epston highlights, even for spoken narratives, textuality remains the guiding metaphor for engaging with meaning. The textual metaphor necessarily ontologises the embodied voice as a carrier of signifieds.

Yet, the whole diverse range of narrative theory and practice must necessarily be founded on 'the familiar sense of the narratable self' (Cavarero, 2000, p. 35). As discussed in Chapter 3, this familiar sense is 'not a result of text itself and neither does it lie in the construction of the story. It lies rather in a narrating impulse that is never in "potentiality" but rather in "actuality"' (p. 35). Unity is to be found then, not in the text, but 'in the *insubstitutability* that *persists* in time because it continues to present itself in time' (p. 72) as the narratable self exposes herself 'to the becoming-time of existence' (pp. 38-39).

This opens onto the dimension of time and narrative.

*Narrative Times*

Ermarth (1992) writes that notions of historical time, have enabled 'the articulation of certain "laws" of development' as 'a cultural absolute from physics to politics to narrative' (p. 16). Ricoeur (1984, 1985, 1988), in *Time and Narrative,* argues that human actions cannot but engage with time since human experience is itself arranged and bound in time (Andrews et al., 2004). Such engagements translate into particular assumptions about time, following particular principles of 'emplotment'; 'they describe sequences of events with beginnings, middles and ends, and generate intelligibility by organizing past, present and future in a coherent way' (Andrews et al., 2004, p. 7). Despite the variability of contemporary social-scientific definitions of narrative, Andrews et al. (2004) highlight that they generally share this idea of narrative as a sequence of events in time. Such understandings of narrative emplotments are reflected in White's and Epston's (1990) practice. Accordingly, alternative counter-stories are theorised as unavailable to the extent that they are not in linear time, and so do not form part of a sequential plot. The possibility of 'storying' counter-narratives or alternative stories, then, like the dominant stories which they counter, depends on this coherence. Tamboukou (2008) calls this 'the sequential canon' whereby the 'triangle of sequence-meaning-representation creates a conceptual framework within which narrative research is being placed' (p. 284).

However, Tamboukou (2008, 2010) contests these canonical understandings, drawing on Cavarero to highlight narrative as process: 'Narration is therefore a process at once ontological – constitutive of the self as narratable – and political in the Arendtian sense' (p. 288). Applied to White and Epston's practices, foregrounding actualised narrative process attends for instance to their emphasis on 'loitering' with particularities of meaning, allowing for the emergence of new meanings. Indeed, Ricoeur (1988) problematises his own assumptions and narrative emplotment in the final chapter of *Narrative and Time volume 3:* 'There comes a moment, in a work devoted to the power of narrative to elevate time to language, where we must admit that narrative is not the whole story and that time can be spoken of in other ways, because, even for narrative, it remains inscrutable' (p. 272). The mystery he discusses 'has to do with the ultimate unrepresentability of time' (p. 243). He asks: 'Is it consciousness that constitutes the flux or the flux that constitutes consciousness?' (p. 267-268). For Ricoeur, then, 'time seems to emerge victorious from the struggle, after

having been held captive in the lines of the plot. It is good that it should be so. It ought not to be said that our eulogy to narrative unthinkingly has given life again to the claims of the constituting subject to master all meaning' (p. 274).

But the terms upon which time might 'escape the lines of the plot' are also relevant. The puzzle Ricoeur poses - 'is it consciousness that constitutes the flux or the flux that constitutes consciousness?' – has historically been solved by inventing a transcendental consciousness which could step outside the flux altogether. This is a consciousness in an eternal present outside time i.e. the metaphysics of presence critiqued by Derrida (1976) through his deconstructive approach of différance. In challenging this privileging of presence, Derrida, with Irigaray, describes this metaphysical tradition as 'phallogocentric-patriarchal' (Söderbäck, 2013). Elaborating on this masculinised presence, Söderbäck comments:

> Man ... comes to view himself in terms of presence, fully "equipped" and self-sufficient, a being whose self-conscious mind gives him access to the ever-present beyond of a vertical transcendence understood as eternal divinity or ideal forms - a consciousness in a certain sense exempt from the movement of time, a synthesizing transcendental ego or unity of apperception that experiences time from a position outside of or beyond time. (p.14)

But, like Cavarero (2005) above, the terms of Irigaray's critique of this presence depart significantly from those of Derrida. As previously noted, Derrida's conceptualisation of différance challenges the myth of presence through a past that had never been present (Söderbäck, 2013). For Irigaray however, the difficulty with the metaphysical tradition is that it 'also has *covered over* the present, leaving us with an illusion of presence that in reality is nothing but a rigid and dead version of the *past*, or an idealized version of the *future'* (Söderbäck, 2013, p. 256). Söderbäck quotes Irigaray:

> Man has achieved presence by transcending the natural conditions of life (*metaphusis*), and this flight has put the burden of embodiment on woman. Just as everlasting presence needed to posit time as its negative mirror image, male disembodied transcendence has relied on the reduction of woman to mere body and immanence ... For woman, absence is 'the condition for entry into presence' - like time, she only 'is' insofar as she 'is not'. (Irigaray, 1999, cited in Söderbäck, 2013, p. 257)

Irigaray's solution therefore is not about the rejection of presence per se, but 'to *reclaim* it in different terms, to offer a different explanation of what it means for something to "be present"' (Söderbäck, 2013, p. 256). Her alternative account of presence is 'to think time

beyond the dichotomies of presence and absence' (p. 256). As Söderbäck describes it, in this account, presence is not in opposition to time but is 'at the very heart of the incessant unfolding of time' (p. 256). Beyond the dichotomies of presence and absence, this allows us to think 'the undecidability of the *in-between'* (p. 256). Indeed, Söderbäck describes how Irigaray, in her later work, constructs 'an ontology of two rather than merely deconstructing a metaphysics of the same' (p. 255-256) so that the present is reclaimed in temporal-relational terms: 'A different way of putting this would be to say that she seeks to provide an account of presence injected with *aliveness'* (p. 257). For Irigaray, the living present 'is incomplete, unrepeatable, and unpredictable' (p. 257).

If time escapes the lines of the plot on these terms, then so too must narrative.

*Language*

Clearly, all of this accords with Cavarero's critique of Derrida as reinstating a videocentric logos – a critique which is founded on Plato's devocalisation of the logos. The transcendental disembodied presence also has implications for language as a system of classification. In this regard, Bird's (2004a, 2004b) critique of language which produces the logocentric self, and her attention to the 'language of the in-between' (Bird, 2000, pp. 20-25) and 'talk that sings' (Bird, 2004b, p. x) permits an engagement with the mermaid whose pelagic language produces 'trouble with boundaries'(Ní Dhomhnaill & Muldoon, 2007).

Bird (2004a, 2004b) argues that the conventional grammatical structure of English creates the logocentric, self-referential self by positioning the self within a binary e.g. I am confident/I lack confidence. This position of absolute presence acts to totalise and internalise lived experience, creating 'a seemingly natural order of valued personality traits and characteristics' (Bird, 2004b, p. 6). The effect is to maintain systems of privilege. The contradictory and contextual nature of lived experience is obscured, along with the effects of social power. Privileged groups are supported in identifying their privilege as 'natural' and 'true' and as an attribute of self e.g. 'I set my goals and then achieve them'. People who belong to marginalised groups are also encouraged to consider these totalising truths, but now the 'I' is constructed within an absence e.g. 'I lack confidence;' 'I have low self-esteem' 'I have a fear of failure;' 'I do not have the inner resources.' They are drawn therefore towards

interpreting and reinterpreting experiences in ways which act to confirm and produce 'a failed, sick, injured and deficit self' (2004a, p. 57). Conventional language then 'obscures privilege while acting to colonise others at a profound level of identity' (Bird, 2004b, p. 6). This generates the traditional professional position which captures these people as solely responsible, and as available for scrutiny, evaluation, diagnosis and intervention by the detached psychological expert: 'The "other" is outside of normal, often medicated in an attempt to find normal, and counselled back to normal' (Bird, 2004a, p. 65).

For Bird (2004b), these impositions of meaning limit 'the possibilities for discovery with each unique person/people' (p. 54). Through reconfiguring language, she privileges 'the processes of journeying, composing and narrating with people,' rather than 'destination, composition or narrative' (p. 54). Bird calls this 'the language of the in-between', reflecting a commitment to processes for escaping the binary to engage with 'the process of making sense of the contradictory, fractional, intimate experiences of our lives' (Bird, 2004a, p. 54). Of particular importance is the 'creation of the continuous present' which is the 'making of change in the present moment' (Bird, 2004b, p. 54). Using the continuous present turns definitive positions into 'relational language which is fluid or moving' (p. 54). The statement 'I built myself up from the bottom,' for instance, might invite the inquiry: 'what or who has contributed to this building up process?' (p. 55). The emphasis on moving allows people to experience stepping away from definitive categories, and to 'express into existence the tentative, fragile, beginning, cautious, oscillating positions people can and do occupy' (p. 54). Once these tentative experiences are constituted through language, they can be re-searched as knowledge: 'This knowledge can then be developed, strengthened, resourced, built on, practised, appreciated, experienced, experimented with' (pp. 54-55). These movements in other words 'create the experience of *change'* (p. 55).

*Emotion*

The continuous present also opens onto embodied knowledge possibilities as an affective process. For Ahmed (2004), 'knowledge cannot be separated from the bodily world of feeling and sensation; knowledge is bound up with what makes us sweat, shudder, tremble, all those feelings that are cruciallyfelt on the bodily surface, the skin surface where we touch and are touched by the world' (p. 171). This point of contact with the world is alive and tense with

the confluence of histories which come before us and which have brought the world into being. Ahmed draws attention to the need to recognise emotional journeys as mediated rather than immediate, involved in reifying as well as changing the world.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Ahmed (2004) theorises the reification of the world as an 'affective economy'. One aspect of this is fixing subjects into social norms: 'Emotions may involve "being moved' for some by fixing others as "having" certain characteristics' (p. 11). For example, 'the figure of the bogus asylum seeker ... a ghost-like figure in the present ... is detached from particular bodies' as an object of hate that circulates as 'the scene of "our injury"' (p. 47). The circulation produces justifications for 'the repetition of violence against the bodies of others in the name of protecting the nation' (p. 47). Also fixed as the scene of 'our injury' are those who do not live up to 'the national ideal' (p. 108). The neoliberal ideal, one might say, is 'the successful worker'. The ideal involves judging people's success or failure to live up to it through feelings of pride and shame, and so 'sticks subjects together through aligning the "I" and the "we"' (p. 106). Shame therefore 'requires an identification with the other ... My failure before this other hence is profoundly a failure of myself to myself. In shame, I expose to myself that I am a failure through the gaze of an ideal other' (p. 106). The nation therefore 'is reproduced through expressions of shame' (p. 107). But these detachments from *particular* bodies mark for Ahmed a 'failure of presence' (p. 46) and the 'absent presence' of historicity (p. 45).

The work then for feminist pedagogy – *an obair* – is to restore presence. Distinguishing between 'feminist teaching' and 'teaching feminism,' Ahmed (2004) considers feminist pedagogy as a form of activism which is a way of 'being moved' (p. 182). She suggests that feminist pedagogy be thought of in terms of 'the affective opening up of the world through the act of wonder, not as a private act, but as an opening up of what is possible through working together' (p. 181). Such a pedagogic encounter is bound up with 'engendering a sense of surprise about how it is that the world has come to take the shape that it has' (p. 182). It is '[t]hrough the work of listening to others, of hearing the force of their pain and the energy of their anger, of learning to be surprised by all that one feels oneself to be against; through all of this, a "we" is formed, and an attachment is made' (p. 188). This 'we' is not innocent and does not stand still, but is 'affected by that which it is against, and hence also by

that which it is for, what it enables, shapes, makes possible' (p. 188). The opening to the future 'gathers in the struggle against "what is"':

> …with this opening, this pause or hesitation, which refuses to allow the taken-for-granted to be granted. This opening is an interval in time, and that interval is the time for action: it is now, when we must do the work of teaching, protesting, naming, feeling, and connecting with others. For the opening up of that which is possible does not just take place in time, in that loop between present and future. The opening up also *takes time.* (p. 182, her emphasis)

*The Nomadic Narratable Self*

Tamboukou's (2008) project of 're-imagining the subject of feminism' (p. 287) holds for me the crucible of all of these feminist counter-rationalities. She locates her sense of the feminist imaginary explicitly in Arendt's conceptualisation of the political (p. 290), drawing on Cavarero's narratable self: 'The very act of narration is immanently political, relational and embodied, as Cavarero following Arendt (1998) has forcefully shown' (p. 288). Tamboukou also reworks Cavarero's (2000) notion of the narratable self in a way which responds to my own concerns as outlined in Chapter Three. Her reconceptualisation is of a 'nomadic narratable self':

> I am going beyond Foucault's configuration of the self as an effect of power relations interwoven with certain historical and cultural practices or *technologies* (Foucault, 1988). In following Deleuzo-Guattarian (1988) lines of flight I am considering the self as a threshold, a door, a becoming between multiplicities, an effect of a dance between power and desire, nomadic and yet narratable. (p. 285)

While the technologies of neoliberal governance are about the capture of its subjects, Tamboukou's project is about escape. Indeed, her rendering of the narratable self *is* the scene of an escape-route: 'a threshold, a door'. This 'dance between power and desire' creates a dynamic stage for the struggle between the discursive registers of what and who. It also provides for another take on Fraser's (2013) notion of the 'disconcerting dance of ... two feminisms', where feminism as social movement is confronted with a rogue neoliberal 'shadowy version of itself' (p.12).

Tamboukou's shift from the ontology of 'what is' (p. 284) constitutes a move away from the more usual feminist concern with 'molar sociocultural formations' such as patriarchy or heterosexual love, and their dialectic oppositions (p. 287). For my purposes, this is a crucial

move which radically unsettles forms of gender analysis that are amenable to, and have been appropriated by, neoliberalism as 'gender equality.' Tamboukou's analysis opens up a subversive route through the problematic presented by this neoliberal takeover. In rejecting the idea that women's condition be understood through such molar formations, she argues instead for an engagement with 'what has escaped them ... the molecular counter-formations, its lines of flight' (p. 287). She draws on Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) philosophy for a project which is about 'freeing thought from deterministic essentialisms and showing that what has been actualized in women's lives cannot close down possibilities of other ways of being or rather of becoming a woman' (p. 287). Conceptualising the subject of feminism as a 'nomadic narratable self', Tamboukou introduces movement to the very notion of subjectivity, regarding narratives as 'entities open to constant becomings, stories in becoming' (p. 284).

For Tamboukou, the emergence of meaning is 'an effect of power/knowledge relations and forces of desire' which are 'intertwined in *the form and content* of narratives' (p 285, my emphasis). This is important because it provides for an explicit intervention in the biographical project of neoliberalism. Central to the regard for both narrative form and content is an 'analytics of becoming' which displaces canonical understandings of narrative as sequence. Attention instead is focused on 'how narratives evolve as stories in becoming and meaning emerges in the flow of narratives' (p. 290). The stories of the nomadic narratable self are imagined as 'events, prisms refracting actual and virtual possibilities of becoming' (p. 288). Understood as discursive events, narratives express 'a limited set of lines of thought interwoven around *moments of being* temporarily crystallized into narrative forms' (p. 284).

Such moments of being in turn reflect 'a conception of time as simultaneity and duration, an immeasurable concept of time where past, present and future co-exist' and which allows for 'heterogeneous space/time configurations' (p. 284). Through this analytical lens then, a particular expression of pain would not be inscribed 'within an immobile patriarchal and heterosexualsegmentarity' (p. 286). The expression is understood rather as 'a narrative trace' which shows how 'the silenced, the non-said – still inheres in what has been said, expressed or articulated' (p. 284). Such silences create within narrative 'a depository of forces that can take it elsewhere, divert it from its initial aim or meaning, create bifurcations, sudden and

unexpected changes, discontinuities and ruptures in the sequential' (p. 284) or allow 'explosions' to occur (p. 286).

In Tamboukou's account, 'the work of listening, hearing and learning' (Ahmed, 2004, p. 188) turns to how, 'Working with narratives creates an assemblage of power relations, forces of desire and intense pleasures for narratable selves to make connections, sense their vulnerability and become exposed to their dependence on others' (Tamboukou, 2008, p. 290). Tamboukou's description of the narratable self explicitly highlights intersectionality: 'Although unique and unrepeatable, the narratable self emerges within collectivities and carries the marks of multi-levelled differences. Embedded within the fluidity of its social, cultural and political milieu, the narratable self is always provisional, intersectional and unfixed (p. 288). Her attention is to how actualized narratives do not stay still but 'create conditions of possibility for more stories to emerge' (p. 287). This then is all about the 'heterogeneity, meshworks and flows of stories and subjects' (p. 287).

This analysis takes the narratable self, and the story-telling of women's community education, to alternative space-times which provide for counter-rationalities that erupt through the in-between counter-formations of neoliberal governance. The nomadic narratable self is a feminist subject who is already constituted in movement, always already poised to escape capture. Given the affective intensities involved in this 'dance between power and desire', it follows that a practice of women's community education which locates itself self-consciously and reflexively in this Arendtian notion of the political sets the stage for a powerful ideological struggle and confrontation with the neoliberal order. This is the scene which offers Ní Dhomhnaill's mermaid on dry land a hearing, and where her in-between existence becomes a powerful source of possibilities for other times and other worlds. What is at stake is 'opening up possibilities for life yet to be actualized in a feminist future that is radical and open (Tamboukou, 2008, pp. 289- 290).

In this chapter, I have opened up the process of story-telling of women's community education as itself a site of struggle between the discursive registers of what and who. In particular, I have identified Tamboukou's conceptualisation of the nomadic narratable self as a 'dance between power and desire' in offering a radical feminist political of story-telling processes for women's community education through neoliberal times. This

conceptualisation accords with Ní Dhomhnaill's mermaid who is *arsnámhidirdháuisce/*swimming between two waters.

Part I of my thesis is also already a theoretical response to Lady Gaga's, Alice's and Clare's concerns to foreground the importance of certain dimensions of feminist praxis. Let us now meet these women in Part II.

# Part II

*Bhí trioblóidí speisialta aici i gcónaí i dtaobh teoranna/*
She always had special troubles with boundaries

Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, my transl.

Chapter 5

## Listening to the Voices

> There's really no such thing as 'the voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced or the preferably unheard.
>
> Arundhati Roy

My research methodology can be located in the broad tradition of narrative and feminist research (e.g. Andrews et al., 2008; Byrne & Lentin, 2000; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Speedy, 2008). However, as Squire et al. (2008) note, narrative research offers no clear starting or finishing points unlike many qualitative frameworks. Nor is there any self-evident analytic focus, since the definition of 'narrative' itself is in dispute. Nonetheless, such challenges also afford the kind of creative and open possibilities which Part 1 of my thesis has centred.

I employ as a research methodology the narrative practices of White and Epston (White, 2007; White & Epston, 1990) and Bird (2004b) outlined in Chapter 4; Speedy (2008) also concurs with this methodological approach. In this chapter, I present a background to my own engagement with these practices and I then outline the ethical and reflexive considerations which I brought to the inquiry, followed by an account of my initial engagements with my participants. Following this, I present an account of the narrative inquiry itself, with examples of the kinds of questions I asked which formed the basis for my inquiry. I then draw together some of my reflections with regard to the polyphonic, nomadic narratives of Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare, after which I focus on two issues which drew me to problematise some key assumptions of conventional research. The first issue was the question 'how many is enough?' and the second issue was my rejection of the notion of 'data'.

**Becoming the Listening 'Me' of 'Tell Me a Story'**

In her analysis of the politics of listening, Butterwick (2012) includes a story of a conversation with a First Nations woman:

> Reminding me that I have two ears and only one mouth, she went on to suggest that I think of my ears as elephant-like, big, and able to pick up all kinds of sounds. She was emphatic that I not think of listening as the opposite of speaking; if I was concentrating on being quiet, my energies would be misdirected. What was needed was that I listen fully to others with curiosity and sensitivity. (p. 62)

As a relational concept, 'voice' is inextricably linked with listening, and understandings of 'voice' find their corollary in understandings and practices of 'listening'. Writing of her research conversations with people whose lives have been marked by acute political change, Andrews (2007) notes that, 'Among the skills necessary for undertaking research of this kind, none is more important than the ability to listen, with a full recognition of the challenges that lie in such an endeavour' (p. 14). However, she also argues that the professional training of researchers 'focuses our attention away from those human qualities which might enhance our ability to discern intended meaning in the expression of others' (p. 14). The skills of critical analysis, for instance, teach the engagement in a very selective form of listening which is 'sensitised towards ferreting out the inconsistencies in the stories offered us' and to 'keep focused on our research agenda' (p. 14). She states that, 'Listening is hard work, demanding as it does an abandonment of the self in a quest to enter the world of another; and it takes time' (p. 15).

In some ways, this failure to take listening seriously finds expression in a focus on textual matters, rather than unfolding conversations. The 'real action' of research takes place, as it were, at a remove from the research conversation when the research moves into an analysis of texts. Even the *Listening Guide* developed by Taylor et al. (1997) applies to the post-interview analysis of texts, rather than the interview itself. For Speedy (2008), this presents a contradiction in most narrative research. Many researchers, she notes, have argued convincingly that the research interview is not a neutral exchange, and have demonstrated multi-storied, multi-intentioned, multi-positioned facets of these exchanges in their subsequent analysis of interview texts. Such analyses often involve deconstructive reading of texts for unconscious silences and unspoken assumptions. However, Speedy argues that few

have demonstrated an active interview practice consistent with these ideas: 'we still know very little about how poststructuralist, co-constructed interviews with people might have been, or might yet be, ethically and engagingly carried out *in practice'* (p. 29, her emphasis).

I stumbled upon the narrative practices developed by Michael White and David Epston one day when I happened to Google 'narrative' and 'Ireland' and found a link to the *Narrative Training* of Keith Oulton and Mark Hayward which offered training in the narrative therapy of White and Epston (White, 2007; White & Epston, 1990). The possibility of a conversational practice which explicitly engaged with the Foucauldian ideas I had been immersed in for many years excited me. I subsequently attended the Narrative Training workshops in Maynooth, as well as in the Dulwich Centre in Adelaide, Australia.

Because I have described narrative practices in some detail in the previous chapter I will not do so here. In summary however, the interviewer assumes a collaborative, relational and conversational position which is de-centred but influential. Centrally important in this is the practice of 'double listening' in order to support a 'double-storied' account which supports both a rich naming of dominant stories and their effects, and 'alternative' stories of strategies of resistance, along with their supporting values and knowledges (White, 2007).

Of particular importance to me was the respect these narrative practices afforded for the meaning-making of another person which departed from attempts to 'explain'. Perhaps one of the most radical 'listening shifts' which the training facilitated for me was a move to a more embodied appreciation of, and attunement to, the sociality of selves. Where previously I might have sat with a woman and listened to her voice as somehow emanating *from her*, I suddenly became more attuned to a sense of her as surrounded by, and speaking through and with, the many voices of her life – even as I too carried with me my own polyvocal surround. In some ways, the difference was akin to that between hearing a piano note as producing a unitary sound, and hearing the pool of sound it creates through the reverberations of all the strings.

I quickly realised that this conversational practice could provide me with a research practice which addressed the ethical dilemmas of my previous psychology research encounter, particularly the tension between my desire not to impose my interpretations on research

participants' narratives, and a concern to analyse dominant discourses. This narrative approach recognises people as experts in the meanings of their own lives, and encourages a position of curiosity in regard to these meanings. Such a position includes a collaborative exploration of taken-for-granted ideas, their histories, and effects. In this sense, the interview context is itself a site of analysis and knowledge co-production. As highlighted in the previous chapter, Speedy also notes the interest of White and Epston in the meanings generated in the *there and then* of the conversation, rather than the more usual research practice of data analysis *at some later juncture* when researchers are more interested in 'describing and theorising our social world' (Reissman, 2005, cited in Speedy, 2008, p. 61). In this sense, Speedy notes that narrative therapy contributes a conversational practice that positions people 'alongside each other as emotional (and other kinds of) ethnographers and archaeologists' (pp. 64-65). Speedy's work also introduced me to Johnella Bird's (2004) relational use of language, and her attending to 'talk that sings' in people's expression of their lives (use of evocative, lyrical and poetic words and phrases). Nonetheless, I did not engage with this research as an experienced narrative practitioner, having had little experience of narrative practice apart from training contexts, and the collective narrative practice I employed in my facilitation of what became Mná Sasa[8].

In the previous chapter, I problematised certain theoretical assumptions of White and Epston's narrative practices with regard to embodiment and time as occluding embodied narrative processes. However, narrative practices themselves are also congruent with my ontological and epistemological assumptions based on Cavarero's (2000) narratable self and necessary other. Moreover, as a practice based on Foucauldian theorisations of modern power (see White & Denborough, 2011), narrative practices enact a counter-rationality to neoliberalism. Through an engagement with uniqueness, relationality, histories and an openness of meaning, they establish conditions for nomadic narratable selves since 'actualized narratives ... create conditions of possibility for more stories to emerge (Tamboukou, 2008, p. 284 ). They also then provide a basis for further opening onto counter-rationalities which support stories of voice, facilitating a collaborative inquiry into this 'dance between power and desire' (p. 285). As discussed in my introductory chapter, my question, 'Tell me a story of voice which has some significance to you as a feminist community

[8] I discuss the Mná Sasa Manifesto further in Chapter 6.

activist' already carries this generative recursiveness. This is a question which is newly-valenced, and becomes an entirely new question in its address to each unique 'you'.

Nonetheless, moving narrative practices from therapeutic/community settings into a research context effects some significant changes in purpose, with contingent ethical concerns. In particular, while the concerns of the narrator are the 'given' centre of a therapeutic process, this cannot be said to be unproblematically the case in a research process which is inevitably shaped by the concerns of the researcher. This raises particular ethical issues.

## Ethics

As part of the university requirements for this thesis, I completed an ethics protocol (see Appendix 1) for the NUIM Social Science Research Ethics Sub-Committee which was approved. However, consistent with a feminist political ethic, my ethical concerns went beyond the traditional ones.

With regard to consent, research participants did not sign a written consent form. I emailed an explanatory document entitled *Research Study on 'Stories of Voice of Feminist Community Activists': Some Information for Participants* (in the form of a dialogue with myself …)' (see Appendix 2) to each participant, outlining in as much detail as possible the purpose, process and ethical issues entailed in my research project. This included a clear statement of their right to withdraw from the research at any time. However, traditional assumptions regarding 'informed consent' are problematic in the context of the current research, particularly the implicit assumption that it is possible to know in advance the processes which will unfold. In a narrative inquiry, this level of knowledge is not possible: to a large extent, it is a journey into the unknown. While preliminary consent could be obtained on the basis of some initial information, a notion of consent was required which could do ethical justice to that which is yet 'unknown' as well to that which is 'known'. Following Etherington (2007) therefore, I regarded consent as 'an ongoing process rather than a once-off event' (p. 603). Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) description of the decision to consent as 'a continuing emotional awareness that characterises every interaction' (p. 88) is perhaps more pertinent since it recognises that the ongoing process of 'consent' goes beyond explicit verbal discussion. Moreover, consent is not an either/or question of participation.

Each participant in this narrative inquiry, Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare, has contributed a wide and rich range of words and stories whose inclusion necessarily involves a process of selection. The issue of which contributions were included in the final research were all subject to each woman's agreement, and consent will also be ongoingly sought for the inclusion of contributions in any subsequent publications, presentations or other forums for the dissemination of my research.

However, my appearances and reappearances in relation to the 'three of all the world's passionate women' who participated in this study are not confined to the interviews and then some 'final' research. I also approached the research process with a commitment to an ethic of collaboration. This commitment is informed by feminist approaches to research in terms of addressing power relations (see Byrne and Lentin, 2000), as well as a recognition of the social and relational basis of knowledge production. It was not intended to mask power relationships, or my responsibility for managing the complexities of the research process. A commitment to close collaboration was also important to me in order to ensure that the research would be relevant to women's community education, so that my ethical commitments involved a concern for the political investments of my three participants. In this regard, the power relations at stake in this particular process of collaboration cannot be reduced to a question of 'whose concerns' are more central, the researcher's or the participant's, since intrinsic to the political context of this study has been a sense of shared political purpose between Lady Gaga, Alice, Clare and me. Moreover, the very 'sharedness' of such political purpose is not based on assumptions about some preconstituted interests, but has actively emerged and grown through the research process.

Burdick and Sandlin (2010) also argue that the ethical obligations of educational researchers who focus on critical pedagogies extends beyond basal understandings of beneficence and harm towards

> a deeper relation of how ones very research practices might undermine the political possibilities of these sites, diminish the transformative potential that public pedagogies hold for educational research and practice, and ultimately reinscribe normative, limiting notions of pedagogy, effectively transmuting any productive possibility to the realm of the already known. (p. 351)

I regarded my ethical obligations, therefore, as extending to an openness to, and appreciation of, the transformative possibilities of the pedagogical practices and knowledges of Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare. Indeed, my hope was that the research process would facilitate a bridging of the intellectual worlds of women's community education and academia, through, for instance, future collaborative work in terms of publications and presentations.

This last consideration implicitly problematises assumptions about the anonymity of research participants as a given. I did not assume anonymity as a given. The possibility of using ones own name was addressed from the outset of this research. I recognise Lady Gaga's, Alice's and Clare's contributions as intellectual contributions which, in relation to the development of my own critical consciousness and my own purposes, are at least as significant to me as those of, say, Cavarero, Arendt, Tamboukou or Foucault. It behoves me, therefore, from an ethical perspective, to recognise my intellectual debt to them. Issues of identity and the use of personal names come to the fore here. However, given the narrative form of their contributions, this raised other ethical dilemmas, particularly with regard to other people who are inevitably referred to in the narratives. It also opened up political tensions with regard to the desire to have certain stories included for political reasons, but the possibility of individuals in the story being identifiable if the narrators are identifiable. In the end, all three women opted for anonymity in order to balance ethical commitments to others with political commitments to the research. In all cases, the names of people and agencies referred to in narratives have been changed, as well as the names of some education courses. The organisation with which Lady Gaga and Alice work will be referred to as 'the Women's Project' as requested by them in order to protect anonymity. Occasionally, narrative details have been changed in order to protect identities. In some cases, explicit permission was obtained from people referred to in the stories.

My encounters with Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare also underlined a mutuality of care not recognised by one-directional ethical frameworks. My experience was one of being another woman coming to the women's centres, and receiving encouragement and support from Clare, Alice and Lady Gaga. Such acts are rendered invisible by dominant research methodologies. In addition, while my initial image of collaboration involved an idealised notion of regular 'communication', this ideal was itself caught in the paradoxes of voice and

silence as the messiness, unknowness, instability and openness of my research rendered it incommunicable for long periods, even to myself.

All of these concerns shift ethical assumptions about a set of 'rules to follow,' to that which is dynamic and reflexive. Etherington (2007) describes reflexivity as, 'an ability to notice our responses to the world around us, to stories, and to other people and events, and to use that knowledge to inform and direct our actions, communications and understandings' (p. 601). While reflexivity is generally regarded as important in assuring rigour in qualitative research, it is also now increasingly regarded as a central dimension of ethical practice. According to Guillemin and Gillam (2004), 'Being reflexive in an ethical sense means acknowledging and being sensitized to the microethical dimensions of research practice and in doing so, being alert to and prepared for ways of dealing with the ethical tensions that arise' (p. 278). As these authors note, reflexivity does not prescribe specific types of response to research situations, but it is 'a sensitizing notion that can enable ethical practice to occur in the complexity and richness of social research' (p. 278). However, these definitions of reflexivity invite their own problematisations.

## Reflexivity

As the definitions above indicate, researcher reflexivity involves recognising the inevitable involvement of researcher subjectivity in the research process. Such a recognition has been a central contribution of feminist epistemologies in challenging normative positivist assumptions of a neutral, objective researcher. I recognise therefore that my own subjectivity is centrally-involved in all these dimensions of the research process, including the interviews, transcribing, and practising a collaborative ethic. I too am part of the telling of stories of voice. However, how I understand my own subjectivity in these practices, and therefore how I practise reflexivity, is not as straightforward as simply becoming simultaneously subject and object to myself. Given that my theoretical assumptions involve questioning the notion of a unitary self-contained self, then this also introduces attendant problematisations of reflexivity: of the 'subject' who reflects, and the 'object' of self she reflects on. Moreover, given that a unitary self is intrinsic to the epistemic assumptions of neoliberal rationalities, then practices of reflexivity become a central site in which such rationalities are either reproduced or interrupted.

Burdick and Sandlin (2010) note that reflexivity has become so commonplace that it is rarely explicitly defined or problematized. However, a number of authors have raised questions about 'the confessional turn' in practices of reflexivity (e.g. Burdick & Sandlin, 2010; Davies & Gannon, 2006; Pillow, 2003; Swan, 2008). Swan (2008) describes the 'confessional turn' as referring to 'the idea that personal, autobiographical and confessional modes ofexpression have expanded exponentially across a wide range of social spheres,including education, the legal system, the media and the workplace' (p. 385). She notes that such reflexive modes have been critiqued as 'narcissistic, psychologistic and de-politicising' (p. 385). Pillow (2003) asserts that this is the most widely-accepted and practised form of reflexivity, but typically involves tendencies to familiarize. In this sense, reflexivity becomes a source of 'power to *know* the other in a more complete, bounded fashion, thus rendering the other more *understandable'* (Burdick and Sandlin, 2010, p. 354). This 'works against reflexivity's critical possibilities, ultimately causing qualitative researchers to rely on and to have their worked judged by – colonized by, we could argue – traditional conceptualizations of validity and reliability' (p. 354).

Davies and Gannon (2006) usefully outline two ends of 'the spectrum' of reflexive research as ranging from 'authentic', realist self-narratives, to analyses of discourses which foreground the limits of researcher consciousness. In terms of foregrounding the limits of researcher consciousness, the following quote captures what I think is the nub of the challenge:

> Given the slippery theoretical ground that this takes us into, reflexivity turns out to be more complex and demanding than we had at first thought. Not only must we engage in such an apparently fraught practice as reflexivity, but we must, in our engagement with research, invent our own methods of meaning-making as we go, and catch ourselves in the act of engaging in old practices and modes of meaning-making that we are in process of deconstructing and moving beyond. (p. 90)

They describe Lather's (1993) definition of reflexivity as 'seeing what frames our seeing' (cited in Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 92) as 'a process of establishing a dialogue with readers about which discursive policy is being followed, which regimes of truth the work is located within, which masks of methodology are assumed' (p. 92). Lather's quotation of Bennett (1990) particularly resonates with my interest in linking critique with new possibilities. Bennet suggests that such critical processes of reflexivity can contribute to 'an "unjamming"

effect in relation to the closed truths of the past, thereby framing up the present for new forms of thought and practice' (cited in Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 92).

Pillow (2003) also argues for practices of reflexivity which are not 'a tool of methodological power' (p. 192). Instead, she calls for an approach to reflexivity which is 'interruptive of practices of gathering data as "truths" into existing "folds of the known"' (p. 192). These practices, according to Trinh (1991) 'interrogate the truthfulness of the tale and provide multiple answers' (cited in Pillow, 2003, p. 192). Pillow calls such practices 'reflexivities of discomfort' (p. 188). These involve acknowledging unfamiliar and perhaps uncomfortable tellings, and of inhabiting 'unease, tentativeness, and uncertainty' (Burdick & Sandlin, 2010, p. 354; c.f. Ward & Wylie, 2014). Questions of discomfort also open up the role of emotions within research (Burman & Chantler, 2004; Cross, 2009; Gray, 2008; Holland, 2007; Jaggar, 1989; Kilty et al., 2014; Ryan, 2001; Speedy, 2008), but one which recognises that emotions already involve interpretations. Jaggar (1989), for example, argues that, 'Time spent in analyzing emotions and uncovering their sources should be viewed ... not [as] a kind of clearing of the emotional decks… Instead we must recognize that our efforts to reinterpret and refine our emotions are necessary to our theoretical investigation' (p. 164).

Drawing on Pillow's (2003) notion of 'reflexivity of discomfort,'Burdick and Sandlin (2010) propose a 'methodology of discomfort'for researchers in critical public pedagogy. This is in order to step outside the institutional constraints of formal education:

> By both expanding and inhabiting this uncomfortable space, researchers with/in critical public pedagogy work in a mode of consciousness that Said (1984, 1993, 1994) termed *exilic,* a space that transgresses the inherited script of dominant narratives. (p. 354)

In developing their proposal, they link postcolonial thought, poststructural feminist and performative methodological writings, and the literary contributions of Bakhtin (1990), and Volosinov (1973). Each of these perspectives assumes a specific ethical positioning to the notion of alterity, 'collectively calling for attentiveness to the irreducibility of Otherness (Silverman, 1996) as a crucial component of developing any semblance of resistant, counterhegemonic consciousness' (Burdick & Sandlin, 2010, p. 351).

These critical considerations afforded me a particular disposition in regard to reflexivity as I approached my research, although I was not quite sure how this would work itself out in

practice. I certainly did not want to be 'boxed in' by taken-for-granted practices, and yet I was not quite sure to what extent I would be able to 'catch myself in the act' of reproducing the familiar. These considerations of reflexivity seemed to open up the space in between Arendt's (1958) discursive registers of *who* and *what,* inviting a reflexive process which would look to the uniqueness and irreducibility of my own *who-ness* rather than the sameness of *what.* In this regard, I was aware that narrative practices also offered me non-individualistic modes of reflexivity for analysing my own thoughts and affective responses in the research process, as well as possibilities for reframing the present in order to open new thoughts and practice.

In any case, I aspired to a practice of reflexivity which recognised that my own meaning-making is constituted through a discursive web. But being interested in new possibilities of knowledge, I wanted to be prepared to challenge the limitations of what I myself took to be 'knowledge' in order to move beyond the certainties of what was already 'known' to me. To restate Lather's (1993) definition of reflexivity as 'seeing what frames our seeing' (cited in Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 92), I hoped that I could 'listen to what attuned my listening' and trouble the edges of my own taken-for-granted certainties.

### Listening to the Voices of Three of All the World's Passionate Women

My initial plan was to have conversations with nine women, followed by three group interviews in order to collectivise the process. I wrote the afore-mentioned nine-page Research Study document for the perusal of the prospective participants, entitled '*Research Study on "Stories of Voice of Feminist Community Activists": Some information for participants (in the form of a dialogue with myself...)*'. The document was written in a conversational style which adopts a question-and-answer format. It was not addressed directly to prospective participants, but was more like an opportunity for them to 'eavesdrop' on a conversation I was having with myself about my research, referring to prospective participants as 'she' or 'the woman'.

The document is fairly lengthy because, in order to support decisions about whether to participate, and to strengthen the collaborative possibilities of the research, I wanted to equip participants with some of the more theoretical and political understandings informing it. The

‘readability’ of the document – in the sense that the document might hopefully ‘engage’ a reader – and my self-presentation in it, are linked to my theoretical assumptions about language, thinking and selves. Since I do not regard language as some transparent reflection of reality, then the notion of providing some kind of fixed, ‘objective’ account of my research which is a transparent reflection of my own thoughts becomes problematic. Presenting an account of a dialogue with myself accords with my assumptions about thinking in Bakhtinian terms as an internal dialogue drawing on different voices. It also facilitates a style of language where I generally try to be open and fluid, rather than fixed and absolute. This style is intended to allow the possibility of evoking engaged responses from the reader, reflected in the last line of the document where I state, ‘And now I think it’s time to bring more voices into this conversation ...’

The document describes my own background in women’s community education and my academic history, as well a background to some of my own political and personal concerns which have drawn me to focus on ‘voice’. These include, for instance, my ‘unshakeable belief in the critical contribution which feminist community activists are making and can make to social transformation’, my concern that their ‘knowledge, experience, struggles, dreams and voices’ would be at the centre of my research process’, the sidelining and lack of recognition of these ‘knowledges of voice’, how the values of the market have come to dominate so many facets of our life through neoliberalism, and how I thought this denies space for meaningful voice (Research Study Document, pp. 1-2).

The document also introduces the notion of ‘stories of voice’. Rejecting the notion that there is any agreed feminist definition of ‘voice’, I emphasise that ‘I am interested in what different feminist activists think counts as ‘voice’, and the uniqueness of each participant’s story. Here is what I wrote:

> I’m guessing that the word ‘voice’ might speak to each woman in a way that calls up particular experiences in her own life. These may be about times when she had a sense of ‘having a voice’, or times when she felt she didn’t or couldn’t, or perhaps times when both of these senses were somehow mixed together. She might even remember an experience and then wonder if it was about voice at all. Another person or other people will probably be involved. The experience/experiences she recalls may relate to a sense of ‘personal voice’ or ‘collective voice’ or both. She might recall a sense of enabling the voices of others, perhaps as a facilitator. In short, there are many possible ways the idea of ‘voice’ might strike a chord with a woman who identifies as being a feminist community activist, and evokes experiences from her own life. (p.3)

I also highlight that I will be listening to and responding to each woman's story in a particular way. I briefly describe the philosophy of 'narrative practice', the notion of dominant and alternative stories, why I am drawn to this practice, and my own narrative training (pp. 4-5). While I clarify the fact that I do not have a fixed set of questions, I also describe briefly the kinds of questions I am likely to ask so that 'the story will go back and forth in time, and accumulate new – or maybe forgotten – meanings, stories and questions which can shine a light on her struggles and resistances' (p. 5). I try to emphasise the collaborative nature of the inquiry by highlighting the importance of the participant's own interest in the questions and direction of the interviews. This includes the fact that the woman does not have to answer particular questions if she does not want to. I also address the issue of language, and the importance for me of being guided by the woman's own words.

I got in touch with Lady Gaga who had already expressed an interest in participating in my research (see Chapter 1), to check if she was still interested and she confirmed that she was. At this point, she also suggested that I get in touch with Alice, her co-worker, and Clare, another friend and colleague in another women's organisation.

I surrendered the concept of 'voice' then to the world of these three other consciousnesses by sending each a personal email which included the question I would be asking, 'Tell me a story of voice which has some significance to you as a feminist community activist', along with the information sheet attached. Alice and Clare confirmed their interest also. I followed this contact up with a phonecall to each to arrange initial interviews, all of which were in the women's community centres. The conversations were held over the period of April to October 2012.

In that first phone conversation, each woman briefly indicated to me her particular interest in 'voice'. For Lady Gaga, it was the issue of consultation which had come up in a training session where participants had discussed it as a 'pretence of voice'. For Alice, it was the lack of voice with regard to trauma and abuse, which became labelled as a 'mental health issue'. Clare also wanted to talk specifically about silence, and the silencing of women's voices.

These expressions of interest were communicated with passion and gravity. They immediately shifted me from my somewhat indulgent world of books and philosophies of

‘voice’, and back into the world of voice and silence as embodied, lived and politically urgent. The question, ‘*Tell me a story of voice which has some significance to you as a feminist community activist’* became three questions, each addressed to a particular, embodied and historical ‘you’, as the space of this ‘you’ was taken up firstly by Lady Gaga, then by Alice, and then by Clare.

In the *now* time of writing this, when these conversations are in some way history, I can confidently refer to the clock time of the conversations, registered as it is in the technology of a digital recording, and report that I had four conversations with Lady Gaga (1 hour 20 mins, 1 hour 8 minutes, 42 minutes and 48 minutes), then two with Alice (1 hour 41 minutes, 3 ½ hours), and then three with Clare (1 hr 40 minutes, 1 hour 32 minutes, 1 hour 45 minutes). But this is where the linearised time of clocks and of historical closure obscures the open and sometimes risky temporalities involved in the production of these recordings. When I read my notes written before my first research conversation with Lady Gaga, I had written, ‘I just do not feel ready to do this interview. But need to trust the process’. In the same interview, while speaking about a practice of letting go of agendas, Lady Gaga makes the following aside: ‘Now sometimes there’s a discomfort in that, no more than there was for me coming here this morning – what the hell do you want me to talk about?’

## Conversations

The first conversation with each woman began with me speaking a bit about the research purpose and the process insofar as I could imagine it, and a restatement of ethical issues such as the right to withdraw at any time. I invited questions, and there were none. I restated my interest in the question ‘Tell me a story of voice which has some significance to you as a feminist community activist’, and that I had no other pre-planned questions – all other questions would emerge from the conversation. I asked therefore for permission to take notes as she was speaking in order to hold onto key words and expressions as a basis for my questions, and this was willingly granted.

I opened the narrative part of our conversation with a restatement of the expression of interest as I had heard it on the phone, inquiring if this was still a subject of interest to the woman. Each confirmed that this was the case, and then provided a more elaborate account. From this

opening account, our inquiry grew and expanded as words called out other words, and stories called out other stories. My questions were in response to the particularities of each woman's own expression.

As the opening expressions of interest suggest, these were three of all the world's passionate women who were highly attuned to and critical of dominant discourses and their effects. This political and ideological critique, and deconstruction of norms, characterised our conversations as shown in the following examples:

> From time to time when I hear the way we talk about the whole area of community work, and that unless we're rushing out doing stuff, and fixing stuff, and getting people back to work, that's it. Whereas it's much more than that for me. That sometimes it is just sitting, talking, it is hearing. It's genuinely letting the people you work with guide the work, and it's very very hard for us to have that space legitimised. (Lady Gaga)

> We hear stories, horrific stories, from people who've gone for counselling and stuff in terms of ... women who are survivors of domestic abuse being told from the counsellor, "Well, were you behaving yourself?" It's almost like they're responsible for the violence ... [W]e really haven't come that far at all if those kind of throwaway comments can still be made to women. (Alice)

> What I'm finding in the last couple of years is that no matter what the issue is you're talking about, people of an officious nature want to bring it to a gender neutrality, a gender neutral position. And the whole idea for me of gender is it's a lack of neutrality. It hasn't got a neutral space. (Clare)

Here, Lady Gaga challenges discourses of 'rushing', 'fixing', and 'getting people back to work', as distinct from delegitimised discourses of 'sitting, talking, hearing and letting the people that you work with guide the work'. Alice challenges discourses in some counselling contexts which suggest women are responsible for the violence in their lives, and opens up a larger historical context in which such 'throwaway comments' can 'still be made'. Clare also explicitly opens up the idea of 'gender', naming and challenging official discourses of gender which assume gender neutrality. She historicises her finding of these discourses as a phenomenon of 'the last couple of years', and claims a position which recognises gender as 'a lack of neutrality'.

In my practice of 'double listening', I was interested in hearing rich accounts of these dominant discourses and their effects, but also opening up and engaging with the alternative stories they were in dialogue with – in Bakhtinian terms, the 'ideological struggles'. The quote above from Lady Gaga exemplifies this where the delegitimised, internally persuasive

discourse is one of 'just sitting, talking, it is hearing'. I was interested in opening up accounts of the foundation of these alternative preferred stories – the commitments, principles, dreams/hopes, values/beliefs and purposes. White (2008) refers to these as 'landscape of intention questions' which inquire about why we do the things we do. I was also interested in exploring their social and relational foundations, and the contributions of others through 'remembering' practices.

It is impossible to convey the detail of our conversations, and of my questions which I tried to 'scaffold' in order to facilitate movement from what is 'known and familiar' to territories of possible knowledge which might be less familiar (White, 2008). Below, I offer some examples of the kinds of questions which formed the basis of my inquiry, and the utterances which they were in response to. However, these should not be read as simple statements followed by questions. For the most part, these utterances were embedded in more extended narratives. My listening was for openings which might enrich the narrative possibilities. This involved holding onto multiple possible story openings (hence the importance of my notes!), whilst engaging in conversation. In some cases then, there was a considerable 'time lapse' between the utterance and 'its question'.

*Effects of Dominant Discourses*

In the following example, I inquire of Clare about the effects when others challenge gendered understandings, as exemplified by her when raising the issue of violence against women:

C Gender is challenged all the time ... where if you for example bring up around domestic violence, it would not be unusual for the immediate response in the room - and this could be from either other women or men - that "Oh well, men are the victims of violence as well" ...

S What is the effect of that on what it is that you want to say? Or how do you experience that when that response comes back to you?

*Alternative Stories and Resistance*

The following is an example of an inquiry into an alternative story, where LG represents Lady Gaga and S represents me, Siobhán:

**Ex 2**

LG: So it was a consultation where we were given a form and you had to go out and y'know you had to ask people. Myself and Alice adapted it as much as we could, but we did have to ask people under four goals which is the new way you know ...

S: So when you got this first of all ... how did you start having a conversation about changing or "adapting" these?

Lady Gaga's account here is part of a much more extended narrative about the silencing effects of formal consultations. My inquiry is a response of curiosity to the embedded detail, 'Myself and Alice adapted it as much as we could', as an opening onto a story of resistance, and of the alternative values and skills involved in this act of adapting.

In the following example, I open an inquiry with Alice, represented as A, about 'a sense of courage' because of the emphasis and value which she seems to accord to it as part of a basis for affirming alternative knowledge and questions, and supporting political action:

**A:** It's sometimes it's hard to kind of have the courage of your convictions. And I think having an understanding that these were human rights issues, and that there was these processes in place to try and make sure that they didn't happen or whatever, gives you a sense of courage I suppose. Or a sense of, you know I'm not chasing windmills.

**S:** "A sense of courage". Can you talk to me about that?

The intention of the following question is also to acknowledge and thicken Clare's account of a critical childhood initiative by inviting her to name it:

**S:** And what would you call that action that you took in that meeting [when you were twelve]? ... like what would you call it now when you look back on it?

**C:** Well, I'd probably call it 'early activism'! (*laughing*)

*Relationality/Remembering Practices*

In the following examples, my responses are intended to open up and acknowledge the relationality of lives and the contributions of others:

C ... I'm still grateful
**S** You're still grateful.
**C** Yeah yeah that she said that to me yeah yeah.
**S** And what is that still being grateful about, that she said that?

* * *

**LG** So they said, "Look, you know you can't bring people in to be telling us how to live our lives". And they were a great inspiration, the women, to me ...
**S** So it sounds like you learnt a lot from those women. And you said you were "inspired" by them.

* * *

**A** And it was somebody else that kind of pointed it out like, "You've been doing this all your life" ...
S Who pointed that out?
A It was a friend of mine
**S** And how did she come to point that out?

*Relational Language*

In the following examples, I draw on Johnella Bird's 'relational language' in order to ask questions which position each speaker in a relationship with that which she is describing, and therefore open up new possibilities of experience and agency:

**Ex 1**
C ... because they're participating in something that is joyful to them ...
S ... How do you witness joyfulness?

**Ex 2**

A ... and kind of at the end of it just all of a sudden this woman became troubled, and just became more and more anxious and then started to have an anxiety attack ...
S ... And how did you notice that she was troubled and anxious?

**Ex 3**
LG ... It was absolutely real. That was not a roleplay. That was just, everybody looked at it and everybody recognised it ...
**S** Could you talk to me a little bit about that ability that you had to recognise what was going on – where do you think that came from?

In example 1, ‘something that is joyful to them’, is re-languaged in order to reposition Clare in a relationship with joyfulness through the act of witnessing. In example 2, I turn Alice’s description ‘this woman became troubled and ... anxious’ into a question which repositions her in an active relation to this statement through the verb ‘noticing’. In example 3, ‘everybody recognised it’ is transformed into Lady Gaga’s own ‘ability to recognise’, facilitating a historicised inquiry into the foundations of this act of recognition.

*Absent but Implicit*

In the following example, I open an inquiry based on Michael White’s practice of ‘the absent but implicit’, in order to explore the values and commitments which provide the foundations of Alice’s expression of ‘shock’:

**Ex 5**

**A** So it’s like when I do [the women’s studies course as a facilitator], throughout the course I’ve yet to be not shocked by something I hear ...

**S** What does that speak to for you ... that sense of shock, of being shocked? That you can hold onto that sense of being shocked?

*Deconstructing Ideas*

Here, I engage in a process of deconstructing feminism through externalising it and opening up a history:

S and I’d be really interested to know how feminism came into your life, or what you remember around that?

Similarly, I open a deconstructive inquiry with Lady Gaga about Freire’s notion of ‘active listening’, by constructing it as an idea with a personal history of engagement:

**S** So when that was introduced, that Freirean idea, that “active listening”, did that make sense to you? ...

**LG** When I first read about it and first did it?

**S** Yeah

Similarly, I denaturalise 'taking the time' by turning it into an idea and a practice and opening it up as a subject of inquiry with Lady Gaga:

LG Taking time to just be with people and just hear their stories isn't really, it's become "non work" ...

LG ... it links in also with the whole exchange trip to Tanzania, how real that makes any kind of development education work after that. You think completely differently because you've you've taken the time, you've heard it ...

**S** And talk to me a little bit cos you've said a couple of times about the idea of "taking the time' ... Is there something that goes on in that "taking of the time"?

*Historicising*

In the following example, I initiate an inquiry of historicising Clare's 'privileged position' of hearing stories in order not to take her being in that position for granted:

C I just feel that I'm in probably a very privileged position, both personally and professionally, in terms of hearing people's stories ...
**S:** And can you talk to me about how you got into what you would see as a "privileged position" to listen to women's stories?

In the following example also, I richly acknowledge Alice's questions, and then move into a recognition of her agentic act of question*ing*, opening up a historicised inquiry into the foundations of her questioning:

**S** There are these questions that are or that seem to be very present and alive for you.

**A** ummm

**S** And have you always had that kind of questioning there in regard to these issues, or how did it - ?

*Talk that Sings*

Johnella Bird describes 'talk that sings' as poetic phrases. In the following for example, I am drawn to Alice's phrase 'clear the waters' as a beautiful description of a process of seeing an issue (of violence):

A So there was a need to kind of clear the waters, to get to that sense, because lots of other people that I knew or would know wouldn't see it as an issue.

**S** Sorry when you say "clear the waters", how what do you mean?

*Custodians of the Space for Voice: Resistance Knowledge*

'I could go off on a tangent', commented Lady Gaga at the end of our conversation. The methodology I adopted was one which followed, expanded, opened up and explored precisely the multiple openings and associations of thought offered by 'tangents' in order to 'grasp the living moments of the subject's subtle interrelatedness with their world' (Tamboukou, 2010, p. 21). Such living moments were involved with the past and future through practices of remembering: the moment of telling of a story invoked other tellings, other moments open and alive with possibility, resolving into other stories. This facilitated non-linear narratives which emerged 'as stories in becoming, taking unpredicted bifurcations, being interrupted or broken, remaining irresolute or open-ended' (Tamboukou, 2010, p.21).

After each interview, as I re-listened to and transcribed (see below) the recorded conversation, I wrote copious notes and reflections. My starting point was statements each woman made to me in order to highlight for me what it was that she saw as significant, and what she valued, in relation to voice. I attended to intertwining narratives of critique, resistance and alternative counter-stories, becoming more sensitised to the ideological struggles at stake.

However, as I started making these notes and reflections after my first interview with Lady Gaga, I felt a sense of discomfort in the move from the I-you relationality of our conversation, to writing *about* her in the third person. This raised for me the Bakhtinian questions of audience and addressivity, as I pondered the question, 'to whom am I writing?' and 'who is this for?' Here too was the question raised by Cavarero regarding the 'morality of pronouns' which renders the y*ou* superfluous. Concerned therefore that my reflection practices were dangerously poised to carry me away from the discursive register of *who,* and away from a dialogical engagement, and perhaps eventually into an addressivity far removed from feminist community education, I adopted a kind of letter-writing practice of reflecting on each set of narratives which addressed each *you.* Indeed, I also subsequently wrote a long

letter addressed collectively to Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare with thoughts and reflections about my research process, and this informs much of the content of the current chapter.

The second conversation with each woman involved my offering a retelling of the first conversation, framed in terms of the dominant stories identified in the narrative, as well as narratives of resistance and alternative knowledges. These I mapped out on a flipchart or whiteboard:

S Is that okay?

C Yeah yeah it's fine it's great it's lovely to see it drawn out like that. And it kind of gives you an idea about you know maybe where it might go or could go or what it's going to facilitate or

S Yes yeah yeah yeah.

C And also not to

S What?

C And also not to, to avoid repeating and duplicating as well. It's good to see it that way.

***

**S** So there's on the one hand there's there's this. What would you call this? Trying to maybe something like 'keep alive your dream'? or?

**LG** Yeah yeah. I like what you've put: "strategies of resistance".

**S** Well you used the word "resistance" yourself.

**LG** Yeah yeah.

**S** And there definitely were very specific strategies around that.

**LG** Yeah.

**S** But then on the other hand there's that and so there's these kinds of you know ... Having to deal with the idea that this is "nonwork", "skiving", it's not a "proper job' "sitting, talking with people" "wasting time", "sitting drinking tea".

**LG** Yeah! (chuckles)

**S** These are you know, so those are kind of this kind of voices that come in around you know how this is seen from this perspective.

**LG** Yeah yeah ... yeah it's amazing looking at the list I mean ... it could either be my work now or it could be nursing ... I never even noticed that before.

Although the conversations following the first one were an opportunity to deepen the narrative inquiry, and expand on some of the themes of the earlier conversations, I did not stay in 'narrative practice mode'. These conversations were also an opportunity for me to share some of my own emerging theoretical and political responses to these narratives and to 'bounce ideas'. However, in slipping out of my 'narrative practice', I also inadvertently slipped into producing the following off-hand interpretative comment to Alice with regard to her childhood passion for reading:

**S** Like even the very fact of seeing "the child at the centre of the story", it almost suggests that, well as far as you were concerned you were right there at the centre of the story!

**A** (*laughs)* Yeah. And no actually I think I wasn't and I think that's important because, to the work that I do now, it's always an intrigue around the other person, around this character, whether it's somebody I'm listening to in a group or somebody – it's always about them.

Although I have at least the grace to say '*almost* suggests', the substance of my offering here is to absorb a particular detail of Alice's account of the importance to her of reading into my own interpretative framework. However, the totalising nature of this comment is overshadowed by, and perhaps redeemed by, the beauty of Alice's resistant response. Here, it is she who assumes the 'narrative mode', in both historicising her own narrative work, and in naming the importance of a decentring of herself through 'an intrigue around the other person'.

Throughout this process, I became increasingly attuned to a notion of voice as intricately layered. In part, this was because of the polyphonic character of each narrative, whereby each woman's voice in telling her story was complexly interwoven with other voices (including mine), other conversations, other stories and other tellings of stories. Central to this polyphony, and entering into the space between us, were the voices and stories of other women Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare had worked with. Such a polyphonic notion of voice and identity is of course intrinsic to Cavarero's concept of 'the narratable self', as well as Bakhtin's social notion of identity. In accordance with these ontological commitments, therefore, my own narrative methodology was chosen in part because of an ability to explicitly acknowledge and engage with such a polyphonic ensemble.

However, there was more than this ontological 'givenness' involved in the kind of polyphony I became attuned to as I immersed myself in these three sets of narratives. Inextricably linked with stories about listening to and hearing other stories, were also narratives of creating conditions for women's stories to be heard, including critical pedagogical spaces. Indeed, such meta-narratives constituted the substance of the 'alternative stories' opened in our conversations, along with accounts of some of the skills, understandings, values and histories which sustained them. In this sense, while I turned to Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare as narratable selves, their narratable selves in response were also intertwined with their being the 'necessary others' for other women.

As I listened to and reflected on the narratives, both in the embodied space of the interviews as well as in their traces in the recordings and transcripts, I came to recognise each of the three women as the custodian of a space for voice with could honour the 'unique existent' of each woman she encountered. Such commitments were also articulated as ideological struggles to protect and expand these spaces, through critique of, resistance to, and subversion of the dominant institutional voices, practices and agendas of a patriarchal, neoliberal world.

One of my foundational commitments was that of recognising the particular knowledge of feminist community activists – a commitment for instance reflected in my question which centred 'of significance to you'. Through the telling of their stories, I came to recognise Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare as critical thinkers, reflective political actors, skilled facilitators, and listeners of many years to many other women's stories. I position each of these women as a knower who has contributed a rich body of important narrative knowledge to my thesis. I refer to 'narrative knowledge' here in the dual sense of knowledge which takes the form of narrative (a methodological artifact), and knowledge which takes narrative as its object – knowledge about listening to and critically engaging with narratives. Gramsci's (1971) notion of 'organic intellectual' is especially relevant here, with the notion of 'organic' assuming a particularly dialogised inflection. Thus, the intellectual contributions to my thesis of Lady Gaga, Clare and Alice have been produced from the accumulation of years of embodied listening, attention, and critical reflection and analysis – a multiplicity of moments of actively linking their own lives with those of other women. Indeed, I found that, in our conversations, my listening disposition of inquiry was more than one of curiosity, but became orientated

towards hearing a kind of knowledge which perhaps finds some cultural recognition as wisdom.

The narratives fed into a flow of new responses, new moments and new becomings. One flow of these responses was my own. When I listened to the women's stories again, and when I read them, I responded to them anew. They reverberated with me in all kinds of ways and created new ripples of thought. They challenged me, stretched me, moved me, provoked me. They connected with, illuminated, deepened and enriched parts of me, my thoughts, understandings. They brought forward and made available certain stories and voices in my own life. They stimulated me to ask new questions, and explore new paths of inquiry. They spurred me to read in certain directions, and invite dialogues with, critiques of, and connections with other 'academic' voices.

*Focus on Violence against Women*

Our conversations resulted in hugely rich, polyphonic narratives which confirmed Arendt's insistence on the generative principle of uniqueness in plurality. However, it also presented me with difficulties: how was I to draw all of this together into a 'thesis' which, after all, must have some semblance of coherence, however problematised? I realised I needed a theme to hold all of this together, and to find a way to engage with diversity. The single theme shared by Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare was the issue of violence against women. This was the issue I felt called upon to engage with.

This was not an 'easy' calling. In many ways, I felt inadequate to the task. I had not had any specialist training in the areas of 'domestic' and sexual violence. Nor had my own life been marked with violence in the way it has been for so many other women. Yet, even as I pondered upon what appeared to be these gaps in my own knowledge, I also questioned the normative assumptions upon which they were premised.

However I might intellectually critique 'expert' knowledge, my own sense of inadequacy for the want of specialist training clearly reflected the seductions of expert knowledge. I reaffirmed my task to be guided by Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare. In this regard, I realised that not having 'specialist' training allowed me to be open to other knowledges.

But I also found myself very quickly questioning the idea that violence was not part of my own life as a woman embodied in a patriarchal, heteronormative world. With a shock, I realised how easy it was to fall into the notion that violence against women was a feature of 'other' women's lives. So I held up some of my own particular knowledges from my own slice of inhabiting the world, and some of the many patriarchal incursions on my trying to get on with ordinary business of being 'me:' a male boss stroking my thigh; five male colleagues in the kitchen where I worked as a dishwasher grabbing me and lifting me up in the air; waking up in the middle of the night to find myself being kissed by one of them saying, 'ich liebe dich;' being groped on Curracloe beach by a man with a sprained ankle I had stopped to assist; a co-tenant knocking and then banging on my locked bedroom door – 'Siobhán, I know you're in there' - as I lay frozen in terror on my bed, my heart thumping, thinking, 'oh my gosh, this is what so many women live with everyday!;' being approached by a man on the streets of Oxford politely asking me if I would allow myself to be carried down the street by a group of men having a stag party.

Perhaps the most important memory was a walk in our local Derrycrag Wood by myself at night when I was fifteen. I met nobody. Nothing happened. Nothing happened? What happened was the light of a full moon on thick, thick snow, when my desire to walk through the woods in such a scene was greater than my fear. I remember the amazing stillness amplifying occasional animal rustles, the fall of a frozen withered leaf, the crunch of my own footprints breaking the pristine whiteness, my own heart beating in awe and wonder. I have since often hugged this memory as a kind of symbol of freedom.

But now with a start I realised the silence which fused the memory. I *knew* to tell nobody. I *knew* the normative spectre of 'stupid' and 'irresponsible,' and the chain of woman-blaming linked to the threat of male violence. Perhaps this act of remembering above all sensitised me to violence and freedom as part of an architecture of silence.

**How Many is Enough? Towards Infinity**

Some of these epistemic recognitions, their supporting ontologies, and indeed my own political attachments, came into sharper focus through destabilising two questions thrown up by my research process. One of these was the question, 'How many research participants do I

need for a PhD?!' The exclamation mark here is intended to convey that my deliberations in this regard were saturated with affective/intellectual desires, anxieties, tensions, and contradictions. As indicated above, my initial 'plan' was to have conversations with nine women. Yet, after my conversations with Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare, I found myself resisting and anxiously struggling with the still 'pulling' effect of these intentions. In part, there were practical concerns here: already these conversations had produced pages and pages of narrative and I was unsure how I would be able to manage even more. This was particularly the case since, given the openness and uncontainedness of my narrative inquiry, the narratives were also of a highly idiosyncratic nature. As a consequence, they were also rich in poetic detail, and my deep desire was to give myself over to as full an immersion as possible.

But I still found myself troubled by this question, 'How many research participants do I need?' Clearly, the answer to this question depends on ones ontological and epistemological assumptions, so that I felt called upon to clarify the assumptions at stake in my already felt answer of '*these* three'. But more than a concern with producing a warranted answer to the question, I found myself troubled by my asking of the question: by the vague unspecified audience I was responding to in my uncertain feeling of being called upon; by the sense that a numerical question was on a different plane to the one I was inhabiting from a vocal ontology, and yet still had me somehow captured; by my concern that, even by asking the question, I was in some way acceding to an 'acceptability' held in place by notions of knowledge I was trying to challenge. I therefore decided to arrest the question as suspect, and to interrogate it from that suspicious place as a site of ideological struggle between authoritative discourses and what was internally persuasive to me.

In their review paper, 'How many qualitative interviews is enough?', Baker and Edwards (2012) gather and review responses to the question of 'how many?' from fourteen renowned social scientists and five early career researchers. Although responses varied, and were marked by a recognition of the answer as contingent on methodological and epistemological assumptions, an emphasis on commonality underpinned many responses: 'many experts agree that saturation is ideal' (p. 5). Some of the social scientists offer numerical guidance for achieving this ideal: Adler and Adler (2012), for example, advise graduate students tosample between 12 and 60, while Ragin (2012) suggests the glib answer of '20 for an M.A.thesis and

50 for a Ph.D. dissertation' (p. 34). Jensen (2012) identifies the issue as causing her anxiety in completing her PhD and she came to understand that, ultimately, what she valued was research that was "written up with dignity and care for the respondents; and because the researcher has *taken their time* (p. 39, her italics).

Regardless of how one ultimately responds, what is of interest is the extent to which the question, the potential anxiety, and the responses all seem to be derived from and in dialogue with - whether by acceptance or refusal - the authoritative discourse of 'enoughness' required by the ideal of saturation. In the interstices of this question, and its ultimate reference point in commonality and categorisation, lurks the universalising discursive register of *what*. The very notion of 'saturation' itself highlights the ideal of closure, and a final answer. As St. Pierre (2013) writes, the values that enable methodological instrumentalism and practices of formalization, including individuating, sorting and categorizing, are '[d]esigned to reproduce the same rather than encourage difference, they trap us in the *given,* the myth of Science' (p. 226). Isin (2009) too notes how this concern with order and established, routinised patterns, rather than with rupture, is endemic to the social sciences.

Numbers of course have a pragmatic usefulness. But Jensen's (2012) realization of values of 'dignity, care and time' opens onto larger questions about the chronotopic conditions of the question, 'How many is enough?' In one sense, the problem with the formulation, 'How many?' is not that of numbers per se, but the act of counting itself, the preconstituted reality it depends upon, and the relationalities it produces and occludes. All of these depend upon assumptions about forms of time. There is a cluster of issues at stake in this. Grosz (2005) points out that the strength and usefulness of numbering lies in its process of abstraction that transforms quality into quantity. But this is a process that necessarily neglects particularity:

> When we say 'six sheep' or 'six thousand women,' what we articulate is a commonality, real or imposed, between 'sheep' as a category or 'women' as a category ... To make things countable, they must be rendered identical, at least in one term or element; their individuality or particularity neglected or bracketed off, they become part of a set, a category of resemblance. (p.207)

Drawing on Bergson's (1992) notion of the numerical as a spatialised 'field of extensive magnitudes', Grosz (2005) argues that, 'Since individual differences are ignored, space becomes the means of separating units, as well as of constituting them as a whole, as a set'

(p. 208). Indeed, as I recall my own early childhood learning of numbers, I can see the 'number line' gracing the classroom wall, and a picture with three identical teddies in triangular arrangement to represent the number '3'.

But Grosz draws on Bergson's critique of the misapplication of the numerical to the nonnumerical, as the representation of the temporal by the spatial: '[Bergson] argues that the numerical, that is, the field of extensive magnitudes, is the proper approach only to the domain of objects and of space: it is incapable of explaining intensive magnitudes or qualities' (Grosz, 2005, p. 208). For Bergson, the 'intensive' is identified primarily with the domain of lived experience, extending to all life and not only human, 'which contains no units, and which flows in time' (p. 208). When the numerical is applied to this domain, 'we get the illusion of science, the illusion of objectivity and of countability. We come up against the central dilemma of knowledges that aspire to the status of social science' (p. 208).

Critically engaging with Grosz' analysis facilitated me to inhabit more fully my own 'internally persuasive discourse'. To ask the question, 'How many?' is to breach the ontological assumptions of the human condition upon which my vocal ontology is based, and the discursive register of *who*. In the business of counting, one person (in a particular category) can be substituted for any other. It depends on a rendering of each one into a unitary, bounded isolation. This is the individualism upon which neoliberalism depends: individuals understood as abstract units, separate, substitutable, measurable, categorisable, knowable, predictable and therefore governable. However, the relationality of a vocal ontology transgresses these assumptions in its attention to particularity, dialogicality, polyphony, becomings, and unfinalisability. The possibilities here are not enabled by numbers, but by relationality, since the realities of voices depend not on 'counting' but on 'listening'.

The temporalities of vocality abandon the 'number line', and involve offering oneself to the embodied moment, to the here and now of being physically present in a 'becoming' which cannot be predicted. This is where newness and novelty can enter in all its *trína chéile/*through-other unruliness, and with it the vitality of change and transformation.

Indeed, as I reflected on this question of ‘How many?’, occasioned as it was by the pages and pages of unique and uncontainable narratives, of unrepeatable and ungeneralisable particularities, and as I reflected on the fabulous confusions of Lady Gaga’s story (see Chapter 1), I realised that more relevant to me than the notion of ‘a number’ was the notion of ‘infinity’. In *Mathematics: From the Birth of Numbers,* Gullberg (1997) writes,

> In ordinary conversation, *infinite* means something that is very great in comparison with everyday things. In mathematics, however, infinity is not a number but a concept of increase beyond bounds ... Although the concept of infinity is difficult to grasp, we may simply define it as *not finite,* where *finite* means something that – at least in theory – is completely determinable by counting or measurement. (p. 30, his emphasis)

Through the concept of ‘infinity’ then, mathematics itself parts company with the numerical in order to open onto horizons of unboundedness and of that which is not ‘determinable by counting or measurement’. Although Gullberg suggests that ‘ordinary conversation’ understandings of the concept of infinity involve distancing infinity from ‘everyday things’, from a narrative perspective one might say that infinity is not in opposition to, but thrives in the locus of the everyday of ordinary conversation when that ordinariness is rendered un-ordinary. In writing about the story of Scherazade and *The Arabian Nights,* Cavarero (2000) writes that, ‘the number one-thousand-and-one, in medieval Arabic culture, represents infinity. The mechanism internal to the narrative plot is potentially capable of proliferating the tales infinitely’ (p. 124). The ‘narrative plot’ then opens a notion of ‘many-ness’ which is not about counting; it is a polyphonic profusion. But in the case of feminist community activists who have ‘heard so many stories’ from so many other women, the narrative plot thickens and becomes amplified beyond all boundaries. Such an amplification is inextricably linked to the political distinctiveness of feminist community activism and feminist community education. Once more, we are back to Arendt’s (1958) notion of the political, based on uniqueness in plurality.

### ‘Data’ and Time

The second issue which I found I had shed was that of ‘data’. In writing about this, I require no accompanying exclamation mark. As already mentioned, my embodied engagements with Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare were founded on epistemic commitments based on recognising them as knowers. However, under the sign of ‘data’, such conversations are called ‘data

collection'. Nonetheless, insofar as the notion of 'data' had any actual bearing on these conversations, it occupied the postponed space of writing about my research.

But when the time of writing about my research methodology came, and necessarily involved me with the concept of 'data', I found that I was now looking towards it from an estranged distance. It had become an alien, ludicrous even, non-sense notion, one that was entirely irrelevant to my methodology, except insofar as it was an intrusive nuisance I had to deal with. From this positioning, as I read again my ethics form (Appendix B), I surprise myself at all my uncritical references to 'data'. Significantly, this may be a question of 'audience' since the information sheet I wrote for participants contains no reference to 'data'. Yet, the following sentence in my ethics proposal also carries my incipient dis-contents of/towards 'data':

> Moreover, my fundamental recognition that through the narrative inquiry participants are not simply contributing 'data' but are contributing 'knowledge' entails recognising the intellectual contribution which participants are making to my research. (App. B, p. 21)

On the surface of this text, the concept of 'data' appears to happily share a discursive space with a notion of 'knowledge' which recognises the intellectual contributions of (as yet somewhat notional) research participants. However, I have introduced a certain tension with the phrase 'not simply contributing data'. The data/knowledge distinction was one noted with interest by my supervisor, Dr Anne B. Ryan, and this undoubtedly had the effect for me of strengthening and affirming it, until eventually data simply ... dissolved. My eventual dissolution of 'data' is linked to considerations of power/knowledge, and as anathema to the politics of hearing the knowledge of feminist grassroots activists.

Clearly, to refuse data places me in a somewhat heretical position with regard to methodological convention. Happily however, I found some company. A special issue of *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* (August, 2013) which set out 'to provoke discontinuation of data as we have come to know of it through postpositivism, empiricism, text books, research training, and other grand narratives' (Koro-Ljungberg & MacLure, 2013), challenged its authors 'to problematize conceptualizations of data as known, familiar, and inert objects, and to imagine more complex, creative, and critical engagements with data in the conduct of research' (p. 219). The contributors adopt various approaches to problematisation, with some putting data 'under erasure' as an inaccurate but perhaps nec-

essary concept, and others proposing that data is always in making and 'can be only found in its becoming, wonder, doing, or in its materialization' (p. 220). My own position in this thesis is aligned with that of the two authors (Denzin, 2013; St. Pierre, 2013) who advocate giving up the concept of "data" altogether, although I address the question specific to my own research context.

My critique was less from a position of looking forward to 'giving up' data, and more from the perspective of one who had already 'given up' data. Although the narratives were indeed research conversations, they were also characterised by an ontological continuity with the kinds of narrative spaces of women's community education with which all four of us are familiar. For the four of us women, then, this scene of telling, listening, responding to and reflecting on a story has the familiarity of the ordinary. However, it is not an 'ordinariness' that can be taken for granted. It is the very 'everydayness' of this activity which is key to recognising the significance of the knowledge of grassroots feminist activists. What is clear too though is that in our rhythm of telling, listening and responding, we are also *thinking and reflecting together*.

This is what Bakhtin (1981) describes as 'the zone of contact with an inconclusive present' (p. 35) i.e. with 'a world-in-the-making' (p. 30). It involves 'a relationship – in one form or another, to one degree or another – to the ongoing event of current life in which we, the author and readers are intimately participating' (pp. 30-31). In this ongoing event is 'a zone of maximally close contact between the represented object and contemporary reality in all its inconclusiveness' (p. 31). It is one characterised by semantic instability where 'sense and significance are renewed and grow as the context continues to unfold' (p. 30). In the temporality of such a world, 'there is no first word (no ideal world), and the final word has not yet been spoken ... time and the world become historical: they unfold ... as becoming, as an uninterrupted movement into a real future, as a unified, all-embracing and unconcluded process' (p. 30).

If I now however rhetorically introduce 'data' into this processual world, a radical shift is effected in this ensemble of relations. St. Pierre (2013) notes, as follows:

> First, it is important to understand that data appear, come into being, exist (or not) in a particular ontological, epistemological, and methodological structure. The meaning and function of data depend on the meaning and function of a constellation of other concepts with which it is imbricated, for example, the concepts *reality, evidence, warrants,claims, reason, knowledge,* and, of course, *truth.* (p. 223, her italics)

I argue however that 'data' is also imbricated with hegemonic notions of temporality which it installs in notions of 'knowledge', with perverse consequences for the possibilities of social transformation. I frame this argument through Bakhtin's notion of 'epic time' which involves a bifurcation of temporalities out of 'the common time of collective life', where exist '"I myself" and "my contemporaries" "my time" ... in an everyday environment, in the low language of contemporaneity' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 21).

This bifurcation involves transforming the time of collective life into individualised life-sequences on the one hand, and 'above them, but *outside* of them' another time-sequence that is valorised as historical, 'the zone of an absolute distanced image, beyond the sphere of possible contact with the developing, incomplete and therefore re-thinking and re-evaluating present' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 17). I argue that, as the gateway to knowledge, 'data' is also the gateway to what Bakhtin calls 'epic time' through a bifurcation and hierarchisation of temporalities, enabled by a heroic quest.

Epic time is characterised by tightly sealed temporal boundaries. It has its beginning and its conclusive end. This, I suggest, is also 'data-time': I finish the interviews, turn off the recorder and *now* I have 'my data'. Here marks the beginning-point for what can become 'knowledge': 'It is as closed as a circle; inside it everything is finished, already over' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 16). Such a 'finished' quality must now take the form of a 'thing'. As 'data', a story has a given form. It lies there now on the page. The eye can even look ahead to take in all the written words, because the story is now a 'thing' in itself. It occupies the space of paper. 'Experience' is fixed in the form of this story. It can now, must now, be an object of discussion, analysis and interpretation. Shotter (1998) calls this a 'retrospective-objective' stance i.e. where one is not responding in the moment, but looking back on lived experience as something complete: the Cartesian sensibility which comes from within a 'disciplinary-representational' genre (p. 37).

It is in this data-moment that a bifurcation of temporalities occurs: a rupture which breaks the connection between the story and the telling of the story, and therefore between the story and the living of life. This rupture is constituted through a forgetting, and a repression of the scene of telling. Such an ontological rupture is also an epistemic one, because concealed now also is the activity of two feminists, thinking and reflecting together in a rhythm of listening and responding. But 'data', in some significant way, relates to 'that which is not-yet (but will become) knowledge'. It requires then the heroic emergence of a researcher who can transform it into 'knowledge'. As such, it constructs and privileges epistemic boundaries which, in valorising the emergence of the researcher as an individualised knower, then also actively denies the status of 'knower' to those who have contributed their embodied voices. Such boundaries are temporally constituted through a repression of the embodied becoming-time of risk and unknown-ness, and by appropriating it for the epic time of linearity and closure. Thus, even if I acknowledge that the *data* has been produced in a relational context, 'data' is discursively and relationally constituted to ensure that the *knowledge* is *my* preserve.

Such hierarchies are also reproduced by the narrative conventions which inscribe voices in research writing. 'Data' accomplishes this hierarchical enactment in research writing, so that the 'data voices' of qualitative research are segregated from the knowledgeable 'academic voices', and become discursively removed from the symbolic space which regulates what gets called 'knowledge'. A hierarchy between different kinds of knowledge is established then, not only by calling some voices 'data' and others 'knowledge', but in the very structure of segregating one set of voices: on the one hand is spoken knowledge (which doesn't get called knowledge), and on the other hand is written academic knowledge. To some extent, such hierarchies are also in tandem with a cultural delegitimisation of oral knowledges. This has particular implications for grassroots feminism, given that most of the richness of grassroots women's knowledge is not written, but is spoken in conversations over cups of tea, and in small groups in the form of narrative.

In the previous chapters, I highlighted time as a central dimension of neoliberal rationalities. I now further suggest that 'data' is one of the linchpins which secures the boundaries of neoliberalism through its constellation of ontological, epistemological and temporal assumptions which support the emergence of 'heroic' experts. Expert knowledges occupy a central position in the rationalities of neoliberal governmentality. As St Pierre (2013) notes,

'*data* is a concept with enormous significance in our data-driven and evidence-based economy' (p. 224). In the ruptures and bifurcations involved in the appearance of 'data' are carried the investments of neoliberal governmentality which claims a hegemonic 'time-sequence that is *historical,* serving as the channel for the life of the nation, the state, mankind' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 217). 'Data' speaks to a domain of politics-as-usual which conceals the conditions of its own emergence.It has no resonance in the political of Arendt. It flouts the conditions of the narratable self and necessary other, fixing dynamic becomings into closed life-sequences, and, following Bakhtin (1981), denying loopholes through which a future might be glimpsed.

However, to conceptualise and contest 'data' as produced through a power-saturated process of temporal bifurcations opens onto possibilities of restoring the political in all its unruly, affirmative, living and unfinalisable becomings. St. Pierre (2013) similarly draws on Deleuze's philosophy as 'fundamentally a matter of living rather than knowing ... and thought enables rather than represents being' (p. 225). Such an ontological approach, she writes, is affirmative in that it requires 'a belief in the world' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1991/1994, cited in St Pierre, 2013, pp. 225-226) and 'belief in the possibilities of world(s) we haven't yet thought' (p. 226). St. Pierre continues,

> So what about data? If being is always already entangled, then something called *data* cannot be separate from me, "out there" for "me" to "collect," and, with that astonishment, the entire structure of conventional humanist qualitative inquiry falls apart—its methods, its process, its research designs, and, of course, its ground, data. And this is where the normative comes in: if thinking enables living, then one can longer be/do/live what one can no longer think. (p. 226)

It is with a sense of astonishment that I too consider the effects of the simple ontological recognition which has brought me to this point, and how it pulls the ground, 'data' from under 'the entire structure of conventional ... inquiry': the recognition that thinking and living are intertwined in my conversations with Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare. Yet, the larger political significance of this for me lies in the contextual specificity of this recognition: the familiar, shared, narrative conditions of feminist community education. Indeed, to imagine a move into a discourse of 'data', along with its contingent 'heroic' separations from my own epistemic and political community, and from my own feminist history, is to imagine becoming adrift from the conditions of my own political agency. By the same token, it becomes for me yet

another affirmation of the possibilities offered by feminist community education for developing counter-rationalities to neoliberalism.

In this chapter, I have presented an account of those aspects of my narrative research methodology concerned with 'listening to the voices,' based on the narrative practices of White and Epston and Bird. This is based on my commitment to engaging with subjugated knowledges. Developing again the theme of time, my own reflexive engagements with the question of 'How many is enough?' have opened up the notion of *possibility* by displacing the question of 'How many?' with questions of infinity. All of this has been part of the process of developing my understanding of the nomadic narratable self (Tamboukou, 2011). Relatedly, my intervention in power/knowledge relations has led me to question and abandon the notion of 'data' as discursively controlling and containing the question of who can be a knower, and whose knowledge 'counts'.

However, these questions and abandonments have implications for turning listening to writing. This is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 6

## Writing Voices/Troubling Thesis

This chapter focuses on the writing of voices. My concern is my passage from hearing the particular voices of Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare, to the thesis as a written text. My specific purpose is to open up questions and dilemmas which inhere in this radical ontological move from the acoustic world to the written world, with regard to documentation, representation and responsivity.

### The Power of Writing

*Disciplinary Writing*

Foucault (1979) argues that the 'power of writing' is 'an essential part in the mechanisms of discipline' (p. 189). The power at issue here, as Frohmann (2004) notes, is not simply one of transcribing pre-existing, objective individual characteristics into written form, so that 'information' can be communicated. Its effects rather are constitutive, constructing individuals as objects of knowledge. 'This turning of real lives into writing,' writes Foucault (1979), 'functions as a procedure of objectification and subjection' (p. 192). Disciplinary writing situates individuals 'in a network of writing ... in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them (Foucault, 1979, p. 189). The 'innovations of disciplinary writing' include 'a whole series of codes of disciplinary individuality' which enable homogenization: the 'correlation of these elements, the accumulation of documents, their seriation, the organisation of comparative fields making it possible to classify, to form categories, to determine averages, to fix norms' (Foucault, 1979, p. 190).

In their narratives, Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare each contests *inter alia* a particular domain of knowledge: academic, medical/therapeutic and bureaucratic, respectively. Each of these domains finds expression in practices of disciplinary writing.

With regard to academic knowledge, Speedy (2005b) states that even counselling and psychotherapy research, despite the multidisciplinary origins of many of its practitioners, remains for the most part 'captured by the traditions of "scientific report writing" that have, for several centuries, set themselves apart from more literary texts' (p. 63). She argues that, 'The report style of writing presents itself as if the "worded world", the "studied world" and the "lived world" are more or less accurate translations of each other' (p. 63).

Lady Gaga invokes the absence of a worded world of verbal feedback to people in communities who are 'researched to death'. She also suggests that violence against women is a 'hot topic' which sees local women as the objects of research:

> We see that so much working in communities. Like you have every now and then, like it's the Travellers and they're researched to death. And you know people don't even come back and feed back. And the same with violence against women. Y'know, there's certain things that are very hot topics and they're researched to death.

She highlights the alienating effects of academia:

> And I know you're quite academic. But it's quite alienating for an awful lot of people.

Alice's concern is how women who are already denied a voice about abuse in their lives become further silenced through 'mental health' labels:

> My issue I suppose is around women not having voice that then turns into "mental health", or is labelled as "mental health".

The domain of 'mental health' of course has its own documentation and discursive practices, central to which is the medical notion of 'diagnosis'. White and Epston (1990) cite Harré's (1985) concept of 'file-speak' which describes how, in the psychiatric document, everyday language descriptions of problems are transformed into the 'official knowledge' of a diagnosis e.g. 'feeling miserable' might become 'displays low affect.' For Harré, the file has

a life of its own: 'A file has an existence and a trajectory through the social world, which soon takes it far outside the reach of its subject' (in White & Epston, 1990, p. 179).

The trajectory of the file through the social world is also enabled by bureaucracy. Clare speaks about its typical documentary practice:

> In everyday life, people have to deal with bureaucracy in terms of getting social welfare payments, signing up for Fás[9]. Y'know you'll have to fill in a form for this or you'll have to, so we're involved, we're immersed in bureaucracy.

A form, of course, is by definition based on pre-constituted categories and norms. An act such as 'signing up for Fás' or for social welfare may be regarded in Foucauldian terms as a 'code of disciplinary individuality'. Clare also states,

> I believe the community sector hasn't - and some of this is also bureaucratic – hasn't documentedin a way that tells the story of the people.

A Foucauldian perspective on documentation clarifies that the issue is not one of of asserting a 'more accurate reflection' of reality, but of inserting people into the circuit of power/knowledge. Tied to the discursive register of *what*, the *who* is silenced and uncared for. But for Cavarero (2000), '[t]o tell the story that every existence leaves behind itself is perhaps the oldest act of such care' (p. 53). This act of care is traceable in Lady Gaga's concern that many academics do not 'feed back' to the people of their research; in Alice's concern for women 'not having voice that then turns into mental health'; and in Clare's concern for community practices that document 'in a way that tells the story of the people'.

Yet, can it be said that my own writing about disciplinary writing, quoting words from Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare, has had regard for their each 'being this and not another' (Cavarero, 2000, p. 90)? The words of *Alice, Lady Gaga, Clare* are disembedded from their own web of narrative associations, and from their living of life. Relatedly, the words lie on the page for the eye, already devocalised, their semantic content sundered from the embodied voices of their speaking and the ear of hearing.

[9] Fás (*An Fóras Áiseanna Saothair* or the Training and Employment Authority) was a state agency in Ireland with responsibility for those seeking employment. It was dissolved in 2011.

And what of *my* authorial voice? What are the tensions established by Lady Gaga's whispered, indeed barely audible, utterance, 'you're quite academic'? Indeed, in moving from the narrative situation of her whisper into the act of writing about disciplinary writing, have I ironically already started to produce a document which 'captures and fixes' Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare in the discursive register of *what*?

*Written Language and the Vocal*

For Cavarero (2005), the point of course is not the text: 'The voice, which is embodied in the plurality of voices, always puts forward first of all the who of saying' (p. 30). As discussed in Chapter 3, her account of the devocalisation of the logos is a critique of the antiacoustic and videocentric mark left by Plato on western philosophy. Cavarero therefore brings another perspective to 'the power of writing'. She draws on Havelock's (1963) characterisation of 'this battle between the philosopher and the epic poet' in terms of the historical transition from orality to writing. While speech had heretofore been a sonorous event, through the technology of writing it becomes 'an image and makes itself available to a visual organization that positions it in discourse according to a spatial, linear, analytical, and permanent process' (Cavarero, 2005, p. 81). Rather than the laws of sound which informed the Homeric narratives, this is a new structure which joins words 'in a causal, ordered, and controllable chain' (p. 81).

The principles of '*joining'* are of importance in understanding this shift. Cavarero highlights how the word logos derives from the ancient Greek verb *legein* which means 'speaking' and 'gathering,' 'binding,' 'joining' (p. 33). She describes how philosophy's focus of attention is in 'the order that rules the "joining", or rather in language as a system of signification' (pp. 33-34). The acoustic opens for Cavarero other joinings: 'Beyond the visionary dreams of metaphysics, the "linking" (legare) in legein is at the same time a "speaking", which announces the relation between mouths and ears that logos carries inside of itself from the beginning' (p. 34). But by entrusting itself to writing, 'philosophy can afford to turn its attention exclusively on sight in a way that renders the vocal aspect of speech secondary or superfluous ... [T]he written sign translates sound and eliminates it' (p. 82).

For Cavarero, however, this does not translate into a binary opposition between writing and speech. She theorises the relationship between vocality and textuality from a perspective that 'traces both spoken and written language back to a vocal sphere that is the common matrix of both' (p.132). She highlights this through the writing of Cixous (1994) for whom 'voice and writing here come together against a certain systematic and normative conception of language ... [T]he voice penetrates and invades writing' (p. 132). In Cixous' writing, vocal rhythms decide the movement of the text, 'letting language flow in the musical rhythms of language, listening to words as they vibrate, so that they can begin to signify and resound in one another' (Cavarero, 2005, p. 141). This 'disorganizes language's claim to control the entire process of signification' (p. 132). It results in 'the proliferation of a sense that does not coincide with the phallogocentric dominion of the signified, but rather flows from the movement that combines words according to the laws of rhythm, echo, and resonance' (p. 141). Cavarero quotes Cixous (1994): 'I do not write, I curl up in a ball, I become an ear, I am a rhythm" (in Cavarero, 2005, p. 143).

Ní Dhomhnaill (1986) also maintains that Irish is written primarily for the ear, unlike English which provides images for the mind's eye (in O'Connor, 1996, p. 70). Her decision to write in Irish was because it was as if 'there were certain codes of sound stored in our bodies' (cited in O'Connor, 1996, p. 70). An extract from Ní Dhomhnaill's poem, '*An Murúch agus an Sagart Paróiste*/Mermaid with Parish Priest', alongside its English translation, illustrates the subversive nature of writing for the ear. This is a disturbing poem about child sexual abuse. The eleven year old mermaid in school writes a brilliant essay about birds ('They were like fish, swimming in air like supernatural things') which attracts the interest of the parish priest. He arranges for her to visit the Parochial House and sexually abuses her on a weekly basis. There follows an account of nausea and self-loathing, terrified dreams, anxiety and giving up Irish. In the final verse, she tells her mother:

*Is níor stad an damáiste ansan. Nuair*
*d'éirigh léi é insint*
*blianta ina dhiaidh sin dona máthair, 'sé an freagra*
*a fuair sí uaithi ná 'An sagart bocht, nach fear*
*é siúd chomh maith le duine.' 'Sé a dúirt sí ina bolg ná 'Bhuel,*
*sin é an rud deireanach a déarfad riamh leat'.*
*Agus mar a tharla, b'in mar ab ea.* (l. 112)

But the damage didn't just stop there.
When she finally plucked up the courage,
years later, to tell her mother what had happened, the response
she got from her was 'Oh, the poor priest, isn't he a man
like any other?' 'Well,' said the mermaid inwardly,
'that's the last thing I'll ever tell you'.
And, as it happens, it was. (p. 113)

From the English translation, it is clear that the child's story opens with the courage of a telling and closes with a commitment to silence. It is an account of ongoing damage, and a process of silencing effected by her mother's response to her story which centres 'the poor priest' as victim. Recognising him as 'a man like any other' invokes a naturalised discourse of male sexual drives (Hollway, 1984) which 'the poor priest' is at the mercy of. The effect of this is to naturalise sexual abuse. It also removes the young mermaid from the terms of the address, outside the ethic of you. But the mermaid's final inner words draw attention to silence as an active strategy of resistance.

Nonetheless, Ní Dhomhnaill's Irish verse raises deeper questions about the politics of this silencing and the power relations at stake which heighten the terms of the resistance. The politics of personhood is much more pointed. As a mermaid, the child's human status is already in question, but this is considerably reinforced and gendered in the Irish verse. While the English, 'isn't he a man like any other?', positions the priest as a man among other men, the Irish, 'nach fear é siúd chomh maith le *duine*', translates literally as 'isn't he a man like any *person*'. This exposes the equivalence between personhood and malehood in a patriarchal order which simultaneously legitimises abuse and silences those who are abused.

The punctuation difference here is also of interest. While the question mark of 'isn't he a man like any other?' carries the semblance of a dialogue, Ní Dhomhnaill's original gives it the authoritative finality of a full stop which refuses an answer. These punctuation differences can be linked to different requirements regarding grammar and syntax. In the English verse, the *form* of a question grammatically demands a question mark. In the Irish version, the punctuation marks are rather for the requirements of breath to facilitate an oral reading aloud. The effect is a rhythm which appeals to the ear, marked by a rhythmic flow with regular stresses. Such concerns do not characterise the English verse, the spoken rhythm of which is halting and staggered. However, the Irish punctuation allows attention to the unfolding speaking situation as an embodied encounter. The first comma announces the moment when the mermaid has just told her mother what happened. It is therefore a moment of possibility. The second comma is part of her mother's response: 'An sagart bocht,' (the poor priest). But the harsh guttural of 'bocht' (poor) rips through the flow of sound and aurally enacts this ruptural moment of awful significance. The word 'bocht' chimes with 'bolg' and so aurally connects the moment of rupture with its response: *'dúirt sí ina bolg'* (lit, she said in her

belly). But here too, the English translation ‘said the mermaid inwardly’ fails to pick up the embodied nature of the silence in the belly, and therefore silences the body. In silencing embodiment, the English verse is ontologically dislocated from the theme of the ‘damage [that] didn’t just stop there’. Ní Dhomhnaill’s verse, in contrast, is ontologically in accordance with the initial abuse, so that her account of the ongoing damage is also one which challenges mind/body boundaries.

Ní Dhomhnaill’s verse provides a powerful example of writing from a sonorous matrix, simultaneously highlighting ontological vulnerability. This discussion of the connection between writing and the vocal sphere, however, also opens up questions about the links between form, content and the possibilities for new meanings.

*Novelisation and Heteroglossia*

In his essay, ‘Epic and Novel’, Bakhtin (1981) argues that the kinds of narratives which are possible, and the kinds of connections which can be made, are inextricably linked with understandings of time: ‘What interests us is the *form of time,* only insofar as it is the basis for possible narratives (and narrative matrices) in subsequent life’ (p. 214). These temporal considerations are inextricably linked to the question of *genre*, and the extent to which some genres work to close meaning and others to open. The *epic* genre is characterised by tightly sealed temporal boundaries: ‘inside it everything is finished, already over ... Absolute conclusiveness and closedness is the outstanding feature of the temporally valorized epic past’ (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 16). The significance of the novel as a genre for Bakhtin, and what sets it apart from the epic, is that it attends to process rather than product. He refers to ‘the phenomenon of novelization,’ noting ‘its spirit of process and inconclusiveness’ and how it ‘best of all reflects the tendencies of a new world still in the making’ (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 8).

At the heart of these possibilities is a transformed literary representation of the individual. In the writing of Dostoevsky, Bakhtin finds the fullest realisation of novelistic possibilities because of a new form of hero: ‘Dostoevsky’s most significant heroes ... cannot be understood as amalgams of fixed, static traits; nor are their actions and thoughts wholly predictable. They not only react but act; sensitized to their own surroundings and to their situation, they are existential beings who are fully responsible for their own deeds and words’

(Gardiner, 1992, p. 26). Rather than being ideological tools of the author, Dostoevsky's heroes are 'imbued with the "power to signify" because they are privileged with a "fully weighted semantic position"' (p. 26). The central point here is the connection between individuals and ideas. Novelisation focuses attention on the importance of a dialogical text which does not merely re-present ideas and thoughts. For Bakhtin, such abstract, logical connections between ideas were 'secondary to the embodiment of ideologies in distinct characters and personalities which is a central characteristic of the polyphonic text' (Gardiner, 1992, p. 28). Emphasising dialogic principles of human relations which he regarded as realised in the writings of Dostoevsky, Bakhtin distinguished between the 'idea' as a reified object of representation, and the 'hero' as a concrete personality who embodies and lives out ideas through interacting with other consciousnesses. Gardiner (1992) writes, 'If the idea is extracted from this interaction of consciousnesses and subjected to a process of reification, then it is "forced into a systematically monologic context" and lapses into a sterile solipsism' (p. 30).

The dialogical task of the novel from a Bakhtinian perspective is the 'novelization of other genres' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 7) in the zone of contact with the present: 'contemporary life as such, "I myself" and "my contemporaries" "my time" ... It is precisely here that a fundamentally new attitude toward language and toward the word is generated' (p. 21). Thus, while '[i]n the high genres all authority and privilege, all lofty significance and grandeur, abandon the zone of familiar contact for the distanced plane' (p. 21), the process of novelisation means that 'it is brought low, represented on a plane equal with contemporary life, in an everyday environment, in the low language of contemporaneity' (p. 21). Bakhtin's concept of *heteroglossia* is of central importance. Language as 'heteroglossic' means that it is composed of diverse social languages and speech genres, including 'the professional jargon of psychologists or lawyers, the argot of teenage peer groups, the bureaucratise of government officials' (Skinner et al., 2001, para.7). Social languages are associated with particular social groups, and carry the mark of inequalities in power, prestige or authority. But because it operates in the midst of heteroglossia, language at any given moment is marked by 'the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 291). The totalizing voice of disciplinary practices can only be one among countless others, including formal and informal voices, all of which carry particular evaluative views of the world.

Bakhtin's account of genres provides a useful a framework for considering genres of knowledge production. Thus, the 'standard' social science research study, with its predictable narrative of gathering 'data', analysing 'it', producing results and – of course – *conclusions*, can be located in the epic genre. The epic genre is illustrated in the following statement:

> Outside the world of feminist activism it is difficult to see what impact this study could possibly make. There is an interesting and worthwhile study to be made of 'feminist activism so far' in Ireland, which might engage with a wide public audience. This does not look like it, however ... There is a strong sense of the methodology and proposed analysis being very driven by theoretical concepts that have yet to be fully digested and integrated in the research ... There may be some slippage in time as a result.
>
> (Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS) 2010, personal communication from anonymous reviewer/s)

This was my feedback from IRCHSS on refusing my application for a Government of Ireland scholarship. Beyond the merits or otherwise[10] of my initial proposal, this statement provides a useful foil for considering the implications of tightly-sealed temporal boundaries of knowledge production for 'the world of feminist activism'. On the one hand, the statement appears to suggest that the only possible 'impact' my study might have is in 'the world of feminist activism' – the world, of course, which is precisely the point of my study. On the other hand, it implies that, because 'it is difficult to see' any impact 'outside' this world, the study is somehow invalidated. A series of surreal dissociations is set in motion: between my thesis and its purpose, and between the world of feminist activism and its purpose of changing the world. But the horizon of these dissociations lies in that which is 'difficult to see'. What cannot be absorbed into a future which is already known, already *seen* – that which is 'yet to be digested' - cannot exist, cannot have epistemic status. It is from this transcendental position that reality can be controlled, can have a predictable *impact.* The notion of *possibility* then is already foreclosed. This is the logos of prediction, order, and control.

Of particular interest is how the statement offers what might be called my 'alter thesis', or its 'dry land' version. In the manufactured quote (not in my proposal), of 'feminist activism so far' in Ireland, we have a notion of 'feminist activism' which is now historically demarcated

[10]Of course, such evaluative questions are linked to a complex of epistemological assumptions embedded in power/knowledge relations. My IRCHSS proposal was 'ranked' in the 'bottom 15%'. The proposal itself was the development of a proposal previously submitted as an assignment for an Open University postgraduate course on Discourse Analysis; in that context, that proposal was 'graded' with a 'distinction'.

and closed off from the struggles of the present. This facilitates 'its' reified construction as an intellectual curiosity for an amorphous 'wide public audience', whose hypothetical engagements set the terms of 'interesting and worthwhile'. Particularly revealing is how the statement exposes and privileges a point of view *'[o]utside* the world of feminist activism'. In so doing, it constructs an outside/inside boundary, bringing into being 'the world of feminist activism' as a strange, incomprehensible and irrelevant alien world, outside the implicitly 'real world'. The statement appears to be premised on the incongruity of scholarly knowledge and feminist activism. The corollary of this is that feminist activism might dangerously leak into and contaminate the 'purity' of ideas and the knowledge hierarchies upon which it is premised.

The IRCHSS feedback therefore is already marked by the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions, and with always present counter-hegemonic voices that threaten to weaken and subvert more authoritative ones (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 240). It also points to the 'slippage in time' afforded by novelisation, and the possibilities of a knowledge genre which might open onto **'**a new world still in the making' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 8). In such a text, Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare must have fully weighted semantic positions. This underscores the notion of a thesis text which does not set out to merely re-present but, more importantly, to respond to and engage in dialogue with their ideas and thoughts.

In the rest of this chapter, I present three different genres informing my thesis, and the possibilities they create for writing as an intervention in the social world as counter-rationalities to neoliberalism. I first contextualise these interventions through a discussion of the manifesto genre of Mná Sasa which provides part of the connective tissue for the four of us women who participated in my research. I then present the three specific writing interventions of my thesis. I discuss the poetic form which informs my transcription practice, or rather that of a particular poem – *I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,* by Emily Dickinson. I then discuss the epistolary form theorised by Tamboukou as an intervention into power-knowledge relations which holds the ethic of I-you. Finally, I outline how these support me to write my thesis as a heteroglossic confrontation of rationalities, staging the ideologically charged narratives of Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare as a subversive confrontation with the disciplinary regime of government policies on violence against women and community education.

## The Manifesto Genre

My own first engagement in experimental writing, and one which sets part of the political and theoretical context of my thesis, was being involved in writing a manifesto to support grassroots global feminist solidarity in resistance to neoliberalism. This developed out of a two-day workshop I facilitated for Banúlacht in Dublin in 2011 which brought together twenty feminist grassroots activists from Tanzania and Ireland as a part of a feminist solidarity exchange. The manifesto was written based on Lyons's (1999) discussion of the manifesto genre, and the practice of collective narrative documentation (Denborough, 2008). The Mná Sasa Manifesto – '*mná*' being the Irish word for women, and '*sasa*' the Swahili word for 'now' – is a multi-authored, collective narrative document (Banúlacht, 2011). Its substantive content weaves together narrative fragments written or spoken over the days of discussion and reflection. It concludes by invoking internationally-agreed commitments to women in the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals. The draft manifesto was subsequently finalised in a follow-up exchange visit to Mwanza in 2011 where it was also translated into Swahili. The challenge of documenting the manifesto raised questions for me about the connections between language, representation, time and power which have informed my thesis commitments.

### *Manifesto as a Document of Modernity*

Like other manifestos, the Mná Sasa Manifesto bears all the hallmarks of a document of modernity. Lyons (1999) locates the historical emergence of the manifesto genre in the political and economic developments of post-Enlightenment Europe. These made possible the ideal of citizenship, and an ideology of a universal subject with universal rights and sensibilities. In this context, the manifesto genre emerged as 'the preeminent organ of counter-statist dissent' (p. 13). As a public genre geared to contesting or recalibrating the assumptions underlying a 'universal subject', it is 'neither outside of nor excluded from the universalism by which "progress" is measured' (p. 34). Lyons describes the manifesto as 'the genre of the broken promise' (p. 31), and one which narrates 'the incongruous experiences of modernity by those whose needs are ignored or excluded in a political culture that promises equality and autonomy' (p. 31). A cumulative narrative of manifestoes serves as 'a rebuke to modernity's narratives of progress', making legible 'the recidivist failures of the

Enlightenment' (p. 34). The Mná Sasa manifesto joins this cumulative narrative, highlighting global and gender inequalities, ongoing poverty and violence against women, and the broken promises of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals.

The manifesto genre turns on 'a resounding invocation of an apocalyptic present tense. *Now* is the time for action; *now* is the moment when history begins anew' (p. 30). Lyons connects the emphasis on 'now' to Bhaba's (1996) argument that 'Now' marks 'both the continuous present tense of Western ideological regimes and the "lag-time" experienced by the colonial and postcolonial worlds for whom "the new" comes too late and only in ineffectual fragments' (Lyons, 1999, p. 31). She notes too how, although women were invited rhetorically into the revolutionary moment of the Sixties, their demands were vetted at the door by the New Left leadership: 'They were told that their time was "not now, not yet", even as the discourse of the manifestoes through which those radical invitations were made promised changes in time "now, immediately"' (p. 205). In our own workshop, when I presented this history of the manifesto form based on Lyon's analysis, the historical emphasis on 'now' ignited an insistence and urgency, so that 'now' became inscribed into the very name of our movement: *Mná Sasa!* (Women Now!). The Mná Sasa Manifesto invokes histories and struggles of both colonialism and patriarchy. This typifies the manifesto form's declaration which Lyons argues takes the form, 'Our history is the unthought chapter in your history ... and now your history will be justly superseded by our unfolding future' (p. 15).

Lyons frames her analysis through postcolonial and feminist critiques of modernity's linear temporality, and the vantage points it privileges.

> Modernity is not a seamless temporal entity characterized by period, progress, and development, though its narratives often prefer that plotline. It is, instead, subject to the very discontinuities of time that its narratives seek to disguise: different 'times' coexist within the same discrete historical moment, just as surely as homologous 'times' exist across centuries. (p. 203)

The manifesto's emphasis on 'now, not later' creates 'a simulacrum of rupture in the dominant political order' (p. 16). It turns *modernity* on its axis to reveal its history 'not only as one of progress, but also as one of conflicts and repetitions' (p. 205). The point is that the 'now' of the manifesto is not the 'now' of those who are privileged by modernity's narratives of progress:

> [B]y placing a group's apocalyptic present tense at the fulcrum of a self-ordaining future, the manifesto breaks up statist versions of 'progress' that justify modernity's historical narratives. What the dominant order calls 'progress', the manifesto aims to expose as aberrance or mythopoesis or hegemonic opportunism; to what the dominant order relies on as 'the real', the natural', 'the thinkable', the manifesto counters with its own versions of 'the possible', 'the imaginable' and 'the necessary'. (p. 16)

Manifestos, therefore, argues Lyons, mark the moments 'when seemingly cogent historical moments break into nonsynchronous shards' (p. 204). In the Mná Sasa Manifesto, the dominant narrative of justifying cutbacks and austerity is held up to highlight its effects on women's experiences of poverty and violence. It exposes the reliance on women's community groups to 'plug the holes' of neoliberalism, claiming alternative times of women's education, grassroots activism and global solidarity.

In struggling both within and in opposition to a culture's foundational narratives, the manifesto creates new speaking positions which provide a foothold in a culture's dominant ideology. It does this by offering a 'textual field for the selective declaration of beliefs and the formation of principles' (p. 16). Key to the new enunciative positions is its signature pronoun of 'we', through which the power of the people's voice is produced and deployed: 'We are Mná Sasa!' This is a *we* which positions itself in opposition to dominant cultural narratives: 'We refuse to be "foot-soldiers" plugging the holes of neoliberal policies' (in Banúlacht, 2011, p. 6).

This declarative passionate voice marks the manifesto genre. The manifesto form exemplifies 'plain speech' (Lyons, 1999, p. 2). Indeed, it is precisely this which marked its enthusiastic reception by grassroots women in both Ireland and Tanzania. But Lyons argues that the very form itself should be understood as more than 'plain talk'. The manifesto, she argues, is a complex, convention-laden, ideologically-inflected genre which is part of an *overdetermined* history of modernity (p. 34). The epigrammatic, declarative speaking voice of the manifesto is not, she notes, that of Habermas' (1981) discourse. In challenging named oppression, and in uniting its audience in an exhortation to action, there is more at stake: this is about 'bodies in struggle rather than simply ideas in contention' (p. 34). Indeed, Lyons argues that it is the refusal of the manifesto to be absorbed or recuperated into the communicative ideal of the public sphere which places it in a unique critical position: 'the public performance of "we" in polemical tracts provided an edge of urgency that was sharply at odds with the gradualist agenda of political modernity' (p. 11).

However, Lyons also problematises the manifesto's signature pronoun of 'we'. Black feminists in particular have highlighted questions of power and privilege at stake in control of the pronoun 'we'. Lyons describes some more recent manifestos written from poststructuralist perspectives that challenge the totalizing we and a rhetoric of foundational wholeness (e.g. Haraway 1985, in Lyons, 1999, pp. 196-197). These 'cautiously negotiate the form's characteristic use of revolutionary discourse by deliberately foregrounding the pronoun "we" as an index of multiplicity rather than as a signifier of univocality' (Lyons, 1999, p. 202). The 'We' of 'Mná Sasa', brings such questions sharply into focus, when 'We' is a joining of diverse women from the radically different cultural and geopolitical locations of Tanzania in Sub-Saharan Africa, and Ireland in the European Union aligned with Western political powers. Mohanty (2003) challenges ways in which Western feminist discourse applies 'women' as a category of analysis to women in the global South, assuming an ahistorical, universal unity between women. She argues that, 'Sisterhood cannot be assumed on the basis of gender; it must be forged in concrete historical and political practice and analysis' (p. 24).

The feminist praxis of solidarity out of which the Mná Sasa Manifesto emerged was an outcome of a number of years of exchange between women involved in Banúlacht, Kivulini and the Tanzanian Gender Network project. This politics of solidarity is registered in the recognition that 'our struggles are connected. Our issues are connected'. This is a We with a history and a future: 'We come together from our shared histories of patriarchy and colonialism in a refusal to accept the deepening injustices we witness against women ... Inspired by our exchanges of knowledge and experience, and the historical struggles of women who came before us, we claim back feminist activism and direction' (in Banúlacht, 2011, p. 4). Moreover, the manifesto registers a We of multiplicity rooted in particularity: 'The story of We is the story of I and the story of She' (p. 4).

This is a phrase which carries its own enunciatory history. It is a revoicing of words spoken by Liepollo Lebohang Pheko, Black South African feminist activist and poet, on International Women's Day in Dublin 2006, at Banúlacht's conference. Telling her story in a political speech, Pheko opened her story with the words, 'The story of Me is closely linked and interspersed with the story of She and We'. In our solidarity workshop over five years later,

Pheko's speech is one of a number of diverse feminist narratives laid out on the floor - our 'Feminist Gallery' – a heteroglossia of speeches, polemical tracts, poems, academic papers, and statements of principle produced by feminists in primarily African and Irish contexts. Each woman present is invited to pick one that she is drawn to. One woman picks up Pheko's speech. She speaks about this phrase. In her speaking, she reinflects it, newly transforms it, evokes responses from the rest of us present. The phrase, dialogised and infused with new voices, becomes woven into the manifesto as one of many significant and resonant phrases.

*Manifesto as Collective Narrative Document*

The phrase, 'The story of We is the story of I and the story of She' also functions to reference the importance of multiple narratives upon which the document is based. Denborough (2008) links collective narrative practices to Freire's (1997) idea of 'unity in diversity', opening the question, 'How can we enable people to find links and work together towards a broader good, while also enabling an ever increasing diversity of memory, imagination and contribution?' (Denborough, 2008, p. 143). The workshop drew on Denborough's account of 'time-lines' as a collective narrative practice. At the centre - or multi-centres - were stories from each woman about the spark that lit her feminist activism, and the hopes and dreams held by the spark. Time-lines are 'maps of history' that 'can link participants current efforts to their own significant places, history, community, and culture' (Denborough, 2008, p. 158). Simultaneously, they 'link participants' stories and histories to a collective shared theme, a shared purpose' (p. 158). All of this enables individual and collective re-authoring without homogenising history.

Through this process, double-storied accounts were created of the effects of poverty and gender-based violence, but also resistance through community education and feminist solidarity. We explored together the theme of feminist solidarity, naming some of the knowledges and skills that support it. In preparation for the Manifesto, the key points for the introductory statement were agreed, as well as the framework in general terms.

With these guidelines, and swimming in a sea of multi-authored words, I set out into the unknown to weave and craft an initial draft document which would include contributions from everyone present. The writing was based on a practice of counter-documents developed

by White and Epston (1990) to challenge disciplinary writing. These include letters and certificates as well as collective narrative documents (e.g. Denborough, 2008; Denborough et al., 2006; Newman, 2008; Speedy, 2005a, 2005b; White & Epston, 1990). These writing practices are centrally informed by the notion of '*rescuing the said from the saying of it*', a phrase used by White in paraphrasing Geertz (see Newman, 2008).

In my writing, I tried to have regard for Denborough's (2008) account of collective narrative documents as written to be understandable and powerfully-resonant for two audiences: those who contributed, and others in similar situations not present when the material was generated (p. 37). In addition, he writes that collective documents are '[c]rafted in a way that leaves space for diversity of experience. They do not assume that all members experience the same suffering or utilise the same forms of sustenance. The reader may engage with some themes more than others. There is room to enter into the text in a variety of ways' (p. 38). Thus, the document shifts between 'we' and 'I', between personal and collective, a 'we,' that shifts in context, and calls out new becomings: 'But if you push on one side and we push on the other, we can join our efforts to have a stronger voice and move a step ahead' (Banúlacht, 2011, p. 6).

While this discussion highlights the importance of *genre* in considerations of political writing, it also opens up two specific questions with implications for the relationship between writing practices and the political.

The first question concerns the relationship between the Saying and the Said which informed the narrative documentation. This is informed by Geertz's (1970) account of ethnographic description as 'trying to rescue the "said" of such discourse from its perishing occasions and to fix it in *perusable terms'* (in Newman, 2008, my emphasis). But in this account, we now find ourselves faced with a position regarding the Saying and the Said which is the antithesis of that of Cavarero (2005): 'In the voice both uniqueness and relation ... manifest themselves acoustically without even taking account of what is Said. The voice ... always puts forward first of all the who of saying' (Cavarero, 2005, p. 30). For Arendt (1958), however, the fixing of intangibility opens up possibilities for remembering action, speech and thought which their own intangibility disallows. This requires 'the transformation of the intangible into the tangibility of things ... sayings of poetry, the written page or the printed book ... all sorts of

records, documents, and monuments' (1958, p. 95). But for Arendt, this reification comes at a price: 'The materialization they have to undergo in order to remain in the world at all is paid for in that always the "dead letter" replaces something which grew out of and for a fleeting moment indeed existed as the "living spirit"' (p. 95). However, as Cavarero makes clear with regard to writing and thought, this opposition between the 'dead letter' and the 'living spirit' is already historically constituted and mediated through the Platonic devocalisation of the logos. While the Saying and the Said can never meet, they can at least find some accommodation where the Said can remember the embodiment and flux of the Saying. For my own study it opens up questions about the politics of transcription.

Cavarero's vocal ontology also opens up a second question. This pertains to the politics of pronouns, and the I-you relationship which inheres in the Saying. In her problematisation of the Manifesto's 'we', Lyons (1999) highlights the connection between the 'pronouns of public declaration' and the public sphere of politics. But for Cavarero (2000), it follows that the pronouns of public declaration require a *you:* 'She is the *you* that comes before the *we,* before the plural *you* and before the *they'* (p. 90). To pick up again, to deepen and to expand, the ontological premises of the announcement in our manifesto that, 'The story of We is the story of I and the story of She' requires the story of You. In my study, the ontology of you finds expression in the genre of letter-writing (Tamboukou, 2011).

## The Poetic Narrative and Tran-scribing with an Ear

### *In the Kitchen*

The question of the relationship between the Saying and the Said has immediate consequences for understandings of transcription. Hymes (1981) writes of the linguist Leonard Bloomfield that he 'used to tell students that in published work one should not bring the reader into the kitchen. But it is in keeping with the canons of science to let the kitchen sometimes be seen. Always to conceal the turmoil behind the scenes is ultimately to be misleading' (cited in Buscholz, 2000, p. 1462). In this quote, the kitchen is a symbolic space for the work 'behind the scenes', the preparation that makes possible the final product but which is often itself concealed from view. Of course in real terms, the kitchen is usually a highly-gendered work-space, and its privatised concealment is also highly political.

In the following quote from Lady Gaga, transcribed in 'regular prose', the space of the kitchen opens onto other possibilities:

> [M]y dream was that it was never going to be dry and stale, that it was going to be open and fluid ... And some days, like yesterday was a gorgeous day here. We had a crowd of women in. It was lovely. The chat was great. The talk was unreal what people were talking about. And you know then you say, I was sitting listening to the women, some women in the kitchen having conversations, and it was just so lovely. And I thought, "This is what we have to fight for".

The kitchen here is a space in the women's centre where a group of women are having conversations. Now, the kitchen is a space for Arendt's notion of the political. It is also the scene of a thought in the dance between power and desire: '*This is what we have to fight for'*. What must be fought for is the space of women having conversations together, and this struggle is shaped by a dream of openness and fluidity, which is opposed to dryness and staleness.

But there are tensions here: the openness and fluidity of the Saying is now bounded and contained in the Said, in what one might characterise as the dry and stale norms of taken for granted written prose. The dreams, the fight, the conversational spaces to be fought for, the voice which speaks of them – all are already absorbed, domesticated, tidied, and fixed into the space on the page. This then raises the question, not of how the Saying word can be more 'accurately' represented, but how one might represent voices in a way which can somehow, however imperfectly, gesture towards the ontological possibilities and temporalities of openness and historical becoming of which Lady Gaga speaks.

*Transcription Dilemmas*

The process of moving from the relatively open, embodied, temporal site of spoken conversation to the relatively closed spatial site of a written piece of academic research threw up a number of dilemmas. These included questions about representations of language and knowledge, and the kinds of authorities, addressees and subjectivities inscribed by different writing practices (Halasek, 1999). Following Ochs (1979), I regard transcription as both theoretically and politically constituted. However, Speedy (2001) notes that transcription in qualitative research has received inadequate attention so that what is an interpretive process is

naturalized, with transcripts presented as transparent. Indeed, the very concept of 'transcription' may be regarded as a restaging of the historical conflict between Homer and Plato, complete with the victorious emergence of the videocentric logos (Cavarero, 2005). Thus, while the 'trans' of transcription highlights the crossing from the oral to the written, the word itself privileges the written word, with the oral and acoustic from which it emerges remaining the silent other of the *trans*.

In my own prior experience of transcription, I had become very aware of its interpretative nature. This was because, in the first instance, I was unprepared for the shock of the ontological shift involved in the *trans* of transcription as I moved from the aural to the visuality of the written word. As I actively erased words and positioned commas, full stops, dashes and capital letters, I quickly became aware that I was in fact making subtle decisions about meaning. In doing so, I was separating myself from much of the richness in meaning which had guided me during the interview. These were live questions which I carried into the present study. The issue of transcription raised questions about the ontological status of voice, words and of silences; of the dynamic and open qualities of language; of the embodied voice and ear in the moment of speaking and listening; of the kinds of speaking selves invoked by different writing practices, and the different kinds of responses which might be possible from a reader.

From the outset of my research, my theoretical assumptions helped establish some transcription parameters. Recognising that language is not a transparent medium of reality, I did not regard the process of transcribing the interviews as a technical job of writing words. Concerned with dialogicality and relationality, I was also committed to transcribing my own utterances as well as those of my participant. I intended to use quotation marks where speakers quoted other voices, linked to Bakhtin's polyphonic of appropriation and dialogue with other voices. I found myself becoming averse to using 'full stops' – they seemed to violate the openness and unfinalisability of the utterances. The jury was still out on the issue of question marks and commas.

I had decided that the act of transcribing would be an embodied process of 'writing with an ear' (Cavarero, 2005), involving multiple careful listenings. In order to transcribe in a way which would attend to the musicality of speech, and help foster conditions for ongoing

dialogue with participants (and readers), I decided to adopt a form of poetic transcription by writing interviews in stanza form (Etherington, 2004; Gee, 1991; Mazzei, 2007; Speedy, 2001). Researchers using poetic transcription have reported that participants expressed a sense of pleasure seeing their words in poetic form. For example, Speedy (2001) quotes one research participant as stating, 'I found it clearer, not so rambling and clumsy, and I could hear myself speaking in those phrases' (p. 139). From my own perspective, the poetic genre facilitated an approach to language loosened from the rules of grammar and punctuation, and permitted writing with an ear to attend to pauses, silences, rhythms and emphases. My initial transcription attempts employed 'poetic lines' to register both pauses and the taking of breath in order to inscribe a sense of embodiment into the transcript (see Mazzei, 2007).

But still I was dissatisfied. The words on the page seemed somewhat flat. They lacked the vitality and inflection of the words in the moment of being spoken. Moreover, in my transcribing thus far, I had also decided to omit all our 'ums' and word stumblings for ethical reasons, and in order for the women's articulations to shine through. This certainly lent a clarity to our utterances which the 'ums' and other so-called 'speech disfluencies' would have distracted from. Yet, I was concerned that perhaps the smooth surface of language I had created was *too* smooth, and was collapsing into taken-for-granted notions of language which threatened to undermine the argument I am trying to make.

Turning away from the literature on transcription, I looked for inspiration from poets who had experimented with writing practices. Almost immediately, I rediscovered the poetry of Emily Dickinson.

*Emily Dickinson's Punctuation*

In her poetry, Dickinson challenges conventional beliefs on nature, religion, and marriage in women's lives. But in expressing these challenges, she also challenges the conventions of punctuation practices. Her punctuation includes dashes, unusual capital letters, and commas in places which do not accord with the received rules of punctuation, and several authors argue that her punctuation was a critical engagement with the hierarchies of conventional punctuation and writing practices (e.g. Denman, 1993; Ladin, 1994; Crumbley, 1997).

Turning to my collection of Dickenson's poetry, the book opened onto the following poem which I remembered from school:

*I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,*
*And Mourners to and fro*
*Kept treading – treading – till it seemed*
*That Sense was breaking through –*

*And when they all were seated,*
*A Service, like a Drum –*
*Kept beating – beating – till I thought*
*My Mind was going numb –*

*And then I heard them lift a Box*
*And creak across my Soul*
*With those same Boots of Lead, again,*
*Then Space – began to toll,*

*As all the Heavens were a Bell,*
*And Being, but an Ear,*
*And I, and Silence, some strange Race*
*Wrecked, solitary, here –*

*And then a Plank in Reason, broke,*
*And I dropped down, and down –*
*And hit a World, at every plunge,*
*And Finished knowing – then –*

(Poem 280, in Dickinson & McNeil, 1997, p. 15)

This poem drew me in because it seemed to immediately resonate with the core of my thesis. The oppressive character of the first three verses seemed to me to be transformed by a shift to a sense of sound, announced by Space tolling as if a Bell, and Being as an Ear. I was captivated and excited by 'a Plank in Reason, broke', and the last verse where a plurality of Worlds becomes newly available. The brilliantly paradoxical last line - a Finish which is not a finish because of the openness of the dash - itself seemed to hold a World of possibilities for notions of time.

The immediacy of this reading encounter marked an utter displacement of the interpretation I had 'learned' for my Leaving Cert, which is that in this poem the poet is describing an experience of 'a mental breakdown'. It would appear that this interpretation is still offered to students as 'the truth' of the poem today. In an online learning website for exam students

called ‘http://www.skoool.ie’[11], which ‘leverages the expertise of the top teachers in their fields, as well as key members of the syllabus and examination boards’, students are told, ‘The poem uses a funeral as a metaphor for the stages of a mental disturbance or breakdown’. Similarly, the Dublin School of Grinds[12] in its educational material advises that the poem is about ‘a progressive breakdown where everything gets worse - it is a funeral procession leading to a final sinking’.

Of the first stanza, skoool.ie offers the following interpretation of this line in three bullet points which depends on securing Dickinson’s notion of ‘sense’ to the idea of ‘normality’:

- The ‘sense’ that the poet is aiming to attain is beyond the realms of normality.
- The complete poem, like this first stanza, is on the edge of a breakthrough.
- However, nothing of any ‘sense’ breaks through and the stanza concludes with the intensity of feeling intact but the brain isolated from any ultimate understanding.

The phrase, ‘Being, but an Ear’ is depicted in terms of a reduction: ‘all the senses are reduced to the intensity of the sense of hearing’.

Dickinson uses eleven dashes in this poem. Significantly, skool.ie lends significance only to the last one, and this because of the absence of a full stop: ‘The poem ends, not with a full stop signifying closure, but with a dash that points onward to an experience beyond the comprehension of this life’. Little attention is paid to Dickinson’s disregard for conventional rules of grammar and punctuation, or what this might mean for the interpretation of the poem. Indeed, skoool.ie actually *changes* Dickinson’s punctuation in its line-by-line analysis of the poem, quoting in a way which accords to received rules. Such changes mirror the practices of editors in the early publication history of Dickinson’s poetry. Denman (1993) notes that, ‘Dickinson's punctuation is either obscured in earlier editions and made to conform to conventional rules ordisplayed as a curiosity in later editions and then condemned for deviance’ (p. 2). She highlights a range of interpretations of Dickinson’s punctuation among critics: some who oppose the view of Dickinson as a ‘grammatical reprobate’ have rescued

[11]http://www.skoool.ie http://www.skoool.ie/examcentre_sc.asp?id=5270, downloaded 17/09/2013

[12] http://www.dublinschoolofgrinds.ie/phocadownload/ref%206-eng-h-hb-emily%20dickinson.pdf downloaded 17/09/2013

her as ‘an eccentric transcendentalist’ (p. 24); still others interpret her use of dashes variously ‘as the result of great stress and intense emotion, as the indication of a mental breakdown, and as a mere idiosyncratic, female habit’ (pp. 27-28).

Yet, Dickinson’s punctuation challenges the very notion of linear progression upon which conventional interpretations of the poem depend. Conventional punctuation, with capital letters at the start of sentences and full stops at the end, implies that a sentence has a logical beginning and end. Crumbley (1997) argues that Dickinson’s punctuation introduces disjunctions and dislocations, and a ‘verbal instability’ (p. 8), which challenge and disrupt ‘the syntactic linear progression suggestive of specific linguistic destinations (p. 20). In challenging unified notions of language, Dickinson’s punctuation also challenges unified notions of self. The very notion of a ‘mental breakdown’ depends of course on normative assumptions that mental life is/should be unified and whole. But Crumbley (1997) argues that Dickinson’s dashes can be read as an indication that Dickinson has rejected the myth of wholeness: ‘Rather than being a painful symbol of loss and division, the dash suggests that disjunction, to Dickinson, is one of the defining characteristics of the self in language’ (p. 15).

Drawing on Bakhtin (1981), Crumbley (1997) argues that once we are sensitive to the range of voices Dickinson signals by means of dashes, we can understand the poems as ‘her refusal to silence the many rebellious voices that registered clearly in her own mind despite the considerable social pressure of more orthodox opinion seeking to enforce conformity’ (p. 20). He argues that the feminist implications of her poetics register with greatest force in her refusal to silence the voices informing the self: ‘Because the voices conventionally attributed to a patriarchal “other” are shown to exist within and not outside the speaker’s mind, any power associated with those voices is in some sense accessible to the speaker’ (p. 21). The effect of editorial normalization of Dickinson’s punctuation has the effect of ‘muffling forces that urge polyvocality and the multiplication of meanings crucial to dialogic readings’ (p. 18). For Denman (1993) too, the publication history of Dickinson's poems chronicles attempts ‘to contain her explosive language’ (p. 23), particularly in the editing of her punctuation.

*And Being, but an Ear*

My reading of this poem is of a horror evoked in a moment when the rebellious voices are muted, and indeed seems to be 'felt' as 'a Funeral, in my Brain'. The authoritative voices of convention seem to threaten to overwhelm the I of this poem, when 'it seemed/ that Sense was breaking through –'. In this poem, Dickinson capitalises 'Sense'. For Ladin (1994), her unconventional capitalizations 'concentrate attention, implying that the capitalized words have additional meanings that cause the poet to single them out in this manner' (p. 46). This move lifts 'Sense' from abstraction to something substantial with immediate presence which belies any attempt to fix meaning.

The particular meaning of 'Sense' in this poem confounds any universalised notion of 'sense' when listened for with regard to the emotional force created by the web of associations which Dickinson weaves around it. The words, 'till it seemed/That Sense was breaking through', follow from the oppressive sense of the 'Mourners to and fro' who 'Kept treading - treading - '. This oppressive sense becomes heightened in the second stanza when, 'A Service, like a Drum –/ Kept beating – beating –'. Here the echo of 'till it seemed/That Sense was breaking through' is carried on into the words 'till I thought/ My Mind was going numb - '. These associations suggest that the emotional tone of 'Sense' here is an oppressive one linked to a numbness of mind. Having regard to the larger import of Dickinson's poetry as suggested by Crumbley (1997), these associations suggest that Sense is linked to those voices urging conformity.

Conventional interpretations of this poem locate an awful climax in the last stanza, but for me, the horror of this poem lies in the third stanza: 'And then I heard them lift a Box/And creak across my Soul/With those same Boots of Lead, again,'. This is an image of a terrible violence. The 'Boots of Lead' carries forward the unrelenting rhyming echoes of 'treading – treading –' and of the consonants of 'beating – beating'. They now seem to invade at a profoundly spiritual 'Soul' level, weighed down with the confinement of 'a Box'.

But the line, 'Then Space – began to toll', marks for me a kind of turning point in the poem. Crucially, this turning point is an ontological one where Space turns from physical confinement to sound: 'Then Space – began to toll/ As all the Heavens were a Bell'. The

terms of psychic and sensory life shift correspondingly from Brain, Mind and Soul, to that of 'Being, but an Ear'. From the bounded confines of a Box, there is a new sense of Space and of 'all the Heavens'.

Of particular significance is the blurring of boundaries of interiority and exteriority achieved by the notion of 'Being, but an Ear'. This is a responsive embodied Being who enters into a new kind of relationship with her surroundings. As Crumbley (1997) notes, in Dickinson's poetry, 'normal oppositions between self and other, inner and outer that depend upon a clear and present "I", distinguishable from its surrounding environment, are impossible to maintain' (p. 20).

At first glance, such a conclusion appears to be at odds with the poet's self-depiction in this stanza: 'And I, and Silence, some strange Race/Wrecked, solitary, here - '. But Dickinson's capitalisation of Silence imbues it with substantive presence. Silence here is not nothingness. As if to give Silence an even stronger presence, Dickinson personifies it and establishes a relationship with it: 'And I, and Silence, some strange Race'. There is a sense here in which the ontological shift to 'Being, but an Ear' permits the poet to hear and to give voice to Silence. Indeed, if one has regard to what Crumbley (1997) describes as 'her refusal to silence the many rebellious voices that registered clearly in her own mind' (p. 20), then what is at stake in this poem, when conventional Sense seems to overwhelm, is a refusal to silence Silence.

It is therefore 'I, and Silence' *jointly* who are 'strange', and who are 'wrecked' and 'solitary' in the strangeness rather than in the silence. But this wreckedness and solitariness is contextual rather than total: it is '*here - '*, i.e. in *this place.* But it is not 'here' with a full stop: it is 'here - ' with a dash.

There is then a certain ambiguity about 'here -'; a place of being wrecked and solitary, but the dash also creates an openness.

In addition to grouping words, indicating tone, and marking rhythms, one of the effects of Dickinson's punctuation is to create 'places of silence in the pauses between words' (Denman, 1993, p. 38). For Denman, Dickinson's punctuation of silence and the unexpressed

is integral to her exploration of language: ‘Dickinson's poems are accompanied by a punctuation of varying pauses, tones, and rhythms that extend, modify, and emancipate her words, while pointing to the silent places from which language erupts’ (p. 4).

Denman’s depiction of Dickinson’s language as something which ‘erupts’ draws on the image of a volcano in one of Dickinson’s letters: ‘Vesuvius don’t talk — Etna — don’t — one of them — said a syllable — a thousand years ago, and Pompeii heard it, and hid forever —’ (in Denman,1993, p. 22). For Denman, this is ‘an image of devastating linguistic expression erupting out of silence’ (p. 22) and ‘an unpredictable, subversive force, more appalling when it erupts because it has been so long silent’ (p. 23). In the same way that a volcano is not limited by its constraining rock, Dickinson too is ‘writing from within the confines of her society, exploding the language by which her culture seeks to limit and define her’ (p. 23).

*Silence and Time*

This attunement to language as erupting from silence also challenges a reading of the poem as a simple chronological unfolding of events. Certainly, the surface narrative and texture of the poem, marked by ‘and then ... and when ... ’, suggests such a chronological unfolding secured in linear time. But although Silence in this stanza is now newly named and so might seem to suddenly appear, the pauses and the dashes which mark the rhythm of the poem mark silence as being present throughout the poem.

So when Dickinson writes, ‘And then a Plank in Reason, broke,’ there is a sense in which Dickinson is exposing the scaffolding which holds together what gets called ‘Reason’. What *appears* foundational and absolute is not so after all, and this includes notions of time. This opens an invitation to the reader herself to enter into ‘Being, but an Ear’, and to read with an Ear for Silence. New meanings are illuminated in this reading which permits an alternative story to emerge from the surface narrative of the poem.

Dickinson’s writing practices suggest that neither Sense nor numbness is complete; her punctuation maintains a voice of refusal through an inscription of silence. In the space

between each 'treading –', between each 'beating—', in the spaces after 'Sense was breaking through—' and 'numb—', is a dash which points to silence.

It is surely of significance that the horrific subject matter of the third stanza begins in a manner which accords most closely with conventional punctuation. This is almost a 'proper' full sentence without breaks or dashes: 'And then I heard them lift a Box/And creak across my Soul/With those same Boots of Lead'. In the awfulness of this violent and oppressive imagery, it seems as if even Silence has abandoned the poet.

But it is surely of further significance that these lines are articulated through the sense of hearing. It is as if the very possibility of articulating the horrificness of this 'creak across my Soul', intrinsic to which is the absence of Silence, depends on an acute and penetrating clarity about what is at stake which is made available through the sense of hearing.

The starting point of 'And then I heard them lift a Box' suggests that this moment of hearing the lifting is a new event in a chronological and cumulative series of events. But to end the account of this event with 'again' introduces the surprise that this event has been, after all, ongoingly occurring. This small cadence of ', again,' introduces an instability to the chronological narrative of 'and then ... and then', disrupting a sense of linear chronology.

*With those same Boots of Lead, again,*
*Then Space – began to toll,*

The commas, and the lingering pauses which they create around 'again' go beyond anything required by conventional rules of punctuation. For Denman (1993), it is 'the spaces between words that lend resonance and emphasis to poetry' (p. 4). From this 'again', the poem moves into 'then Space – began to toll—'. It is as if the pauses of 'again' call out their own naming as 'Space' and enter into language. But there is another space after Space marked by a dash. This suggests a moment of openness and possibility: the words which follow, 'began to toll' do not follow inevitably or automatically.

The dash of course is also a rupture in the steady flow of words. And yet, this is not a violent rupture. Denman suggests that to regard Dickinson's punctuation purely as a disruption of

language is to miss its musical dimension, ‘where the semantic and rhythmic disruptions are smoothed through an implied melody’ (p. 35).

In the ‘tune’ which Dickinson here tells, the words ‘a*gain* ... *then* ... be*gan*’ sound a continuous tone which smoothes any sense of rupturing. But these internal rhymes also acoustically accomplish the blurring and undoing of a linear narrative of time. This is a beginning which emerges out of the routine of ‘again’.

In fact, sound and imagery work together in these lines in a way which is not simply disruptive of linear notions of time, but where past, present and future mutually inhabit each other in a generative temporality. In musical terms, the sibilants which surround the vowel of the word ‘Space’ also carry their own echoes in the larger context of the poem: ‘Sense ... Space ... Silence’.

These linguistic transformations draw attention to the importance of language for Dickinson as a process rather than a product. Weisbuch (1972) argues that dashes are a ‘means by which Dickinson takes us backstage to view the struggle of poetic process, a struggle to find the right word, and they serve to represent a hesitancy ... to reveal the word which in turn reveals the poet’s mind’ (in Crumbley, 1997, p. 13). The effect of all of this is an openness of meaning which impedes and resists ‘syntactic closure’ (p. 8).

In this generative process, silence and voice coexist. As Denman (1993) notes, ‘Silence provides not only the time and space in which words can be uttered and heard but is for Dickinson a generating source of language ... Silence is not a void but rather a fullness from which the most powerful language emerges’ (p. 39).

Such an organic, emergent language also invokes a self which emerges *through* rather than *in* language. For Crumbley (1997), ‘The speaking subject of Dickinson’s poetry is an emergent self, a self who is a mix of personal and social languages not containable within a unified voice’ (p. 20). This processual emphasis draws attention to ‘the multitudinous potentiality of that self and its innate resistance to reification in social discourse’ (p. 9). The last stanza powerfully evokes this. Certainly, to ‘drop down’, and ‘hit a World, at every plunge’, sounds scary and precarious, but this is a punctuated drop rather than one unrelenting drop: ‘And I

dropped down, and down - '. The sense of a punctuated fall is verbalised through 'every plunge'. This suggests a series of drops, which points to plurality. And for each plunge, the poet 'hits a World'. Again, the capitalisation here suggests the significance of 'World' linked to a plurality of exciting new possibilities in each new World encountered. It also suggests active agency which is in contrast to the objectified terms of the earlier verses, where the poet's Soul is walked on.

The last line is wonderfully paradoxical: a finish which is not a finish after all: 'And Finished knowing— then—'. There is an openness of meaning here concerning the status of knowledge and knowing. Is this the end of knowing? Whatever all this might mean, it becomes undone in the dash where openness and unfinishedness is reaffirmed. This is not an undoing of time and space which conventional interpretations attribute to death or mental breakdown. This is a reaffirmation of an openness which is already present throughout the whole poem, where Dickinson's own writing practices themselves produce an undoing of unified understandings.

*My Transcription Practices*

My analysis of Dickinson helped to clarify for me some of my central understandings around language, time and subjectivity. I decided to adapt Dickinson's punctuation for my own transcription purposes. This was a process of 'Being' an 'Ear' as I listened beyond 'the words' to the music of our voices.

- No Full Stops

Dickinson's poetry affirmed my refusal of full stops in order to mark unfinalisability.

- Capital Letters

In order to convey a stress, I used a capital letter. In practice, this reflected a syllabic listening, so that syllables rather than necessarily words became capitalised (e.g. 'comMunity'). I found myself listening to the music of phrases – any stresses were in the local context of the utterance rather than with reference to some 'absolute' standard.

The ‘implementation’ of this punctuation practice involved firstly abandoning all previous learning about the ‘proper’ use of capital letters. I rendered the whole transcript in small case lettering in order to begin punctuating by ‘listening with an ear’. Rather than transcribing ‘words’, my attention became attuned to how word-sounds became filled with breath in the moment. Words or syllables which had heretofore seemed innocuous in terms of their place in a language hierarchy were now suddenly arresting with new import.

- The Question of ‘i’ and Unique World-Views

In doing this, I was somewhat taken aback by my own resistance to relegating the first person pronoun ‘I’ to the small case letter ‘i’. And yet, this new version made sense in terms of my own ontological commitments. In this new rendering, the ‘I’ of the English language no longer asserted an uncontested authority in a predetermined grammatical hierarchy. Its abstracted, decontextualised presence, standing always presumptively tall and all-seeing in the sentence as the focal site of subjectivity, seemed somehow exposed. Subjectivity was now free to roam and erupt through language, and in the silences between words.

- Gaps between Words

I transcribed silences and pauses between words as blank spaces on the page. Although I left more or less space according to the length of the pause, I did not ‘time’ these in an attempt to reproduce some notion of clock time. The purpose was more to suggest a rhythm of voice and groupings of words, and to evoke the silent spaces in between words.

- Poetic Lines

I listened for the taking of breath as the basis for starting a new poetic line. Sometimes, for a flow of words in one breath, the width of the page did not allow for this. In this case, I simply indented each line after the first and returned to the left margin with a new breath.

Sometimes, it wasn’t always possible to hear a breath. In this case, I made a judgement by speaking the line myself until I came to a point where a new breath was necessary!

- Exclamation Marks

Occasionally, words were spoken with an expression of emotion and for this I used exclamation marks to point to this excess beyond and yet within language.

- Laughter

I noted moments of laughter by writing (*laughs)* or (*laughter)* in brackets and italicised.

- Dashes

I decided to appropriate Dickenson's use of the dash for other vocalisations which, in other transcription paradigms, get called 'disfluencies'. These included such vocalisations as 'em' or moments – usually for less than a second – of stumbling to find words. For me, these highlighted the creativity of language, and language as struggle, process, possibility and openness.

- Quotation Marks

I used double inverted commas where other voices are invoked to highlight the multi-voiced nature of consciousness which is always 'in dialogue' with other voices. For this purpose therefore, unlike their grammatical counterpart, quotation marks in my transcription are not about claims for quoting 'exact words'.

The main categories of this were:

(a) voices announced by 'she said'/'he said'/'they said'

I placed quotation marks around what was said, including for indirect quotes.

(b) when we quote each other or ourselves

(c) hypothetical voices

(d) highlighting ideological voices – e.g. societal voices

(e) where an idea or concept is problematised or engaged with as a concept e.g. 'that kind of "Time"

These are all clearly acts of interpretation, each one of which is open to contestation. The purpose however is to draw attention to the polyphonic and dialogical nature of voice and consciousness.

- Question Marks

I used question marks for statements that take the form of questions, including rhetorical questions; I decided that questions were an important aspect of a dialogical approach to voice

and subjectivity. I am aware of some inconsistencies here, especially with regard to 'd'you know'.

- Overlappings

These are indicated by a \ to mark the point at which each voice overlaps.

- Umm

Initially, I had removed all our 'umm's. But then I thought that these were an important part of the relationality of the interview insofar as they draw attention to a listening presence and to the fact that vocal utterances do not have to be words to be important in an embodied dialogue. I included 'umm' mainly where it was uttered in a 'gap'.

Through engaging with this practice of transcribing, I became present to a sense of spoken language as something of a miracle in its emergence into sound and meaning. Words seemed to dance with new energy before my eyes as subjectivity became fluid and dynamic in and through spoken words.

There is no way of course in which I could achieve a 'perfectly' nuanced transcript in accordance with these practices, but this is not the intention. Nor are there any clear-cut interpretations for any of these practices. The resultant transcript, like all transcripts is an interpretation. Another listener would likely hear much of this differently. However, I recognise that this is a dialogical construction involving a sort of merging of my ear and our recorded voices. Its purpose is to convey a sense of the emergent and embodied nature of self, language and voice, so that our identities are not fixed but are open and on the move:

> and That was the kind of Thing that I—that My Dream was
> that it was Never going to be Dry and Stale that it was going to be Open and Fluid
> ...
> and Some days like Yesterday was a Gorgeous day here
> we had a Crowd of women in it was Lovely the Chat
> was Great the Talk was unReal what people were Talking about
> and— you know Then you say
> i was Sitting Listening to the Women some Women in the Kitchen having converSations and it was Just so Lovely and i thought
>
> "This is what we have to Fight for"

Clare was the first person with whom I shared my new transcription practice:

S	does it Look okay?   are You oKay with that kind of?

C	Oh i'm Fine with it    Yeah i'm AboLutely Fine with it
i mean

I Wouldn't be a Huge big Reader you Know?—
—I    i Really    Don't   Read a Lot
And—   Yeah   i mean—  Probably that's One of the reasons Why it Just looks so Bloody Boring absolutely

S	*(laughs)*

C	oh my God y'Know it's a Uh-a-Uh-a-Uh
it's the    UniFormity of it\ whereas i
S	\Yeah! the UniFormity of it exActly!

C	yeah That's kind of what  like Even that Page
That  looks Interesting to me
whereas
if That was All just ParaGraphed
and Done in    the

S	in preTend Prose

C	yeah

S	it would be   if I  i had had to Put it in
it would be imPosing
a Structure
when Actually All of This is about Challenging
All these kind of Structures

C	yeah yeah

S	like the kind when i say "All of This" i Mean
what you're Speaking about

C	yeah yeah  no i Like it  and i
i mean you're going to   Clearly
for    for the Purposes of   your Work you're going to Do an exPlanatory

S	Oh i'll Have to oh Yes i will oh Yes i Will don't Worry
oh yes i Will
but—

but it's    but it's Readable
i think what it   it kind of Challenges the Reader    as Well to Not just Take all of it forGranted

C	and it Also Challenges    Presence when Reading

S yeah

C I think

S in What Way?

C in—
you'd Have to Concentrate a little bit to to Read That and in Concentrating a
little bit More you're Present In it

Clare highlights here not only a departure from uniformity, but also how in the move to unsettle the taken for granted, the reader is invited into a new kind of presence. These unsettlements and possibilities also inform the next genre I discuss: a letter addressed to each woman.

## The Letters

*Why Letters?*

The rest of my thesis will involve retellings of the stories told to me by Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare in response to the invitation, 'Tell me a story of voice that has some significance to you as a feminist community activist'. But how to avoid a sudden rupture of the I-you relationality of these first tellings into an academic voice where I write *about her?* Is it possible to sustain the relational ethic of the narratable self in a move from the oral/acoustic 'you telling me your story' to a writing which might take the form of 'I retelling your story to you'? Tamboukou (2011) writes that, 'the very order of the epistolary discourse is shaped by the I/you relationship, the addressee who will read and respond to the letter' (p. 635). She highlights how 'the addressee of the epistolary narrative is grounded, embodied and specific'. Following Altman (1982), Tamboukou (2011) calls this the *epistolary pact* which is 'the call for response from a specific reader within the correspondent's world' (p. 635). As Tamboukou notes, the I/you relationship which is central in the epistolary relation is also central to Cavarero's notion of narratability which perceives the self as the effect of the desire to listen to one's story within a reciprocal relation of interdependence. She argues for an understanding of letters 'as textual inscriptions of forces of desire that intervene in the constitution of the social and the subject herself' (p. 627).

In the context of my project, letters are also a deliberate intervention in the constitution of knowledge. If, through the epistolary pact, 'the *who* avoids both the usual language of ethics and politics' (Cavarero, 2000, p. 90), then it also avoids the usual language of academic knowledge documentation and production. In particular, to invoke the epistolary address of I-you in an academic writing context is not neutral, but is also an intervention in the politics of the address. It is to unsettle the customary academic discourse where the 'you' of the interviews is quickly dispelled, turned into the third-person 'she' spoken *about*, and the addressee becomes the generalised 'you' of an academic audience. But when 'you' is Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare respectively, then, to draw on Clare's observation above, the readerly presence of the academic addressee is newly challenged. This unsettling is not about exclusion. On the contrary, other audiences are always already at least potentially present by virtue of the research context. In this sense, other listeners/readers are not separate from but are integral to the reflexivity of the I-you relationship. In this regard, to centre the epistolary relation of I-you opens up the possibility of alternative reading positions which may not be generally available in academic discourses.

The letters for this project are written as retellings of stories of knowledge. For each letter, I have selected quotations from our conversations which relate to knowledge, and woven a narrative around and in response to these. There is a 'critique of knowledge' story-line which for Lady Gaga pertains to academic knowledge, for Alice to medical knowledge about trauma and violence, and for Clare to bureaucratic knowledge. These are not singular stories. I also write histories of these critiques, of relationalities which support resistance, and alternative possibilities and politics created by feminist community education. They are polyphonic political accounts which invoke again and again the significance of listening to women's stories. As each letter 'tends towards distillation and description rather than explanation or analysis' (Speedy, 2005b, p. 63), I work with meanings and images from within the narratives. In accordance with narrative documentation practices (Denborough, 2008; White & Epston, 1990), I write intentionally with attention to agency, relationality and resistance, making connections from within the narrative with political commitments and values. I cannot say then that my own connective narrative is simply descriptive: writing is never neutral. My own cultural and social positionings are inevitably present. Moreover, each letter creates a narrative which is necessarily partial and selective. This too, as Tamboukou notes, is

typical of both life and letter narratives: 'they are full of silences, secrets and gaps; they are stories that respond to the world, rather than represent it' (Tamboukou, 2011).

In writing each letter, I have tried to honour and affirm a unique and intricately wrought body of narrative knowledge rooted in the realities of each embodied, unrepeatable and unsubstitutable life: no-one else in the whole world has these stories to tell, in the same way. The letters have a foundational purpose also in relation to the interview quotations of subsequent chapters also insofar as they establish the discursive register of 'who' in relation to *whom* these extracts have meaning. This is a departure from an approach which relies on reporting quotations disembedded not only from the context of their speaking, but also from their own rich associational web of thought, reasoning, values, commitments and histories i.e. from their epistemic content and contribution. The letters then are not about abstract ideas. Through them, Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare have 'fully weighted semantic position[s]' (Gardiner, 1992) in their ideological struggles, and as embodied thinkers recreating and renewing a feminist critical tradition of knowledge. Side by side, the letters resonate with and amplify each others' struggles, resistance and power.

*A 'Letter?' Really?*

And yet, are these *really* 'letters'? Surely, all of this is to already have strayed somewhat disingenuously from the ordinary actualities of 'a letter'. After all, Tamboukou's analysis addresses the issue of already existing letters as research data. This is the specific context in which letters have been the subject of narrative inquiry in what Stanley (2004) theorizes as 'the epistolarium'. However 'infinitely malleable' letters may then be as 'proto-genres, best understood through the social and literary codes of relationship' (Jolly & Stanley, 2005), is it a genre I can justifiably claim as part of the writing of my research? Perhaps my 'letters,' although assuming epistolary *form*, are mere contrivances already compromised by the context of their writing? Perhaps even, through its (mis)appropriation, they function rather as a kind of betrayal of the epistolary pact?

Certainly, insofar as they are addressed by a particular and embodied me to specific others, my letters have the appearance of 'real-life' letters. Yet, from the outset, as discussed above, they are also letters with their own life which exceeds the address to *you*. The presence of other audiences is already inscribed in their writing. To write these letters as part of my thesis

distinguishes this letter-writing practice from the private practice of personal letters. Is there a kind of pretence then, a fiction, about my address to *you* when accompanied by these side-long glances? Indeed, who *really* are they addressed to? And who *really* is the writer – is the 'I' who writes my 'real self'?

Relatedly, these first letters are written and sent as *draft* letters. There is the expectation that they will be redrafted, rewritten, changed, and changed again. But who writes a letter, uniquely addressed to another, and wonders what changes the recipient of that letter will request be made to the letter? This surely must expose some fundamentally anti-epistolary logic at work if a letter by definition is that which one receives with an implicit sense of 'This is it. The Letter'. Although the meaning of any letter may change through successive readings, surely a letter, to *really* be a letter, must itself be marked by some kind of material durability – a durability destabilised by an idea which appears to unwrite itself: the idea of 'sending a draft letter'?

The epistolary status of my letters then may certainly be contestable. Yet, such contestations as I have outlined derive their legitimacy from a narrow interpretative framework. MacArthur (1990) criticizes the assumption that 'real letters' can be opposed to fictional ones as 'pure, undistorted reflections of life' (cited in Tamboukou, 2011, p. 628). For her, 'both "real" and "fictional" letters are mediated constructions' (in Tamboukou, 2011, p. 628). Leaving aside the question as to whether my own letters are 'real', 'fictional', or 'somewhere in-between', from this perspective my letters have in common with all letters the fact that they are mediated constructions. Relatedly, Tamboukou challenges unproblematic connections between the self and the epistolary text which assume that 'letters open up windows to a better understanding of "the real self"' (p. 626).

Indeed, from the perspective of Tamboukou's (2011) feminist dialogical analytic of the epistolary pact, I argue that my letters, and the specificity of their dialogical contexts, provide one exemplification of, rather than a betrayal of, the epistolary pact. Tamboukou argues that letters require ways of analysis which are oriented to the specificities of their ontological and epistemological nature because 'epistolary narratives have their own take on questions around representation, context, truth, power, desire, identity, subjectivity, memory and ethics' (p. 629). It is in this regard that they actively intervene in the constitution of the subject and the social. My interest is in the corollary of this: in applying and extending this logic by

actively recruiting the ontological and epistemological possibilities of writing letters in a project which seeks to actively intervene in sedimented power/knowledge relations.

For Tamboukou, a mark of the epistolary discourse is its openness. This includes the epistolary novel as well as letters drawn from life. She quotes Altman (1982) theorizing the epistolary novel: 'the chain of actions and consequences is perceived as unending, the circuit of communication is never closed, . . . frames are constantly broken, and even closural gestures have inaugural implications' (in Tamboukou, 2011, p. 631) Stanley's (2004) theorization of real life letters is similarly open and dialogical, so that 'their structure and content changes according to the particular recipient and the passing of time' (in Tamboukou, 2011, p. 627).

From this perspective, rather than undermining epistolary discourse, my 'draft letter' serves instead then to underline these questions of openness, incompleteness and communicative reciprocity. Indeed, in analysing the love letters of Welsh artist Gwen John to the French artist Auguste Rodin, Tamboukou (2011) draws attention to John's tendency to write drafts as illustrative of such openness and irresolution:

> John's letters were therefore always incomplete. She was continuously drafting them and even when they were sent, there were always oscillations, ambiguities and regrets: 'I have just read the letter that I wrote on Thursday morning . . . and after reading it I realized that this letter has not said anything that I have tried to make it say. It says almost nothing' (MR/MGJ/B.J3, undated). The anxiety of never finding 'beautiful and eloquent words' and the frustration of a letter 'that says nothing' leaves John's narratives open and irresolute. (p. 631)

For Tamboukou, this openness is linked to how epistolary narratives are '[w]ritten to the moment ... narrating the present without knowing what the future of this narrated present will be, how it will ultimately become past' (p. 627). Not knowing an ending is the crucial difference between epistolary and other narratives: 'a present that unfolds is narrated differently than a present that has already "chosen its course"' (MacArthur, 1990, in Tamboukou, 2011, p. 627). This difference means that order cannot be imposed on the overall structure of a narrative through the anticipation of closure. Tamboukou links the ontological and epistemological questions at stake in epistolary narratives to a Deleuzian understanding of openness as a force generating meaning. The political import of analysing

letters as narratives points to their contributing to ‘a social analytics of becomings’ (p. 638) which is

> a project that brings together antagonistic power/knowledge relations, uneven economic and gendered structures in a state of flux and forces of desire: this is indeed a milieu for making connections between ‘the libidinal economy and the political economy, desire production and social production’ (Fuglsand and Sørensen, 2006: 1). (Tamboukou, 2011, p. 638)

In this regard, it might appear that my letters are deeply compromised. They are, after all, retellings of stories which have already been told, materialised in the letters as quotations. It might be said the ‘future’ is already ‘known,’ and that each story has already ‘chosen its course’. But to assume such a temporal position would be to lapse into the concerns of classical narratology. It would be to reify the pastness of the past, and to ignore the implications of the epistolary mode as a social analytics of becoming. The analytical shift which Tamboukou argues for is one which is attentive to ‘the process of how stories create meanings as they unfold’ (p. 628). This is the analytics of becoming which I seek to invoke through my letter-writing, as I try to engage with a flux and confluence of multiple temporalities, that explicitly ‘brings together antagonistic power/knowledge relations, uneven economic and gendered structures in a state of flux and forces of desire’ (p. 638).

The letters are crafted around quotations from our interviews. Already transformed from the flux of their vocal origins, these words on the page still remember the ontological force of their own becomings, where my punctuation practise rebukes their absorption into the written word. The act of writing the letter infuses this purposive reengagement with history with its own temporalities. It permits lingering re-enactments of unfolding moments of saying and listening, a new ‘loitering’ with meaning-in-creation, and the intimacy of becomings. In the process, I too become transformed, intensely absorbed in a care and attention to tiny details, sustained by the desire to respond to and open myself anew to this embodied other, and the deep questions about human and social existence she poses. This turning to otherness is what Lather (1996), following Gordon (1995), calls ‘the participant witness’:

> Turning toward otherness, being responsible to it, listening in its shadow, confused by its complexities, ‘the participant witness’ tells and translates (Gordon, 1995, p. 383) so that something might be seen regarding the registers in which we live out the weight of ‘hard-borne history’ (Serres, 1993/1995a, p. 293) in evoking an ethical force that is directed at the heart of the present. (Lather, 1996, p. 539)

All of this is indicative of how '[t]hrough narrative repetition, pleasure and desire are re-enacted and the practice of letter writing becomes an active intervention in the moulding of the self' (Tamboukou, 2011, p. 638).

But if the epistolary pact responds to the desire of the narratable self to have her story told, then it is also a risk-laden telling which is heightened by epistolary temporality. Cavarero writes of the narrative scene, 'each one *for* and *with* another' in a living context that it is about '*here and now*, in flesh and bone, this and not another, the *who* therefore avoids both the usual language of ethics and politics' (Cavarero, 2000, p. 90). But transposed to the order of the epistolary, this 'here and now' time is stretched out, and with it comes an agonising uncertainty around my own subject position as letter-writer. There is the possibility that my letter will make no sense, or little sense, and that she to whom it is addressed will not recognise herself in it, that it does not represent her words and intentions. Such uncertainty already highlights how the actuality of stories told does not secure a stable epistemic ground, and still provokes and troubles questions of representation.

Tamboukou (2011) also draws attention to John's hesitancy about the possibilities and limits of representation, connected in part to writing in French. But she suggests that such 'oscillations, ambiguities, regrets' are part of the epistolary openness, 'a force that keeps the dialogue open, the correspondence going and ultimately generates the narrative itself' (p. 632). She highlights the very specific ways in which letters connect with Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic imagination: 'Even if the love letter might not be read, let alone responded,' she writes, 'it is always already an event of the *dialogic imagination:* it has been written to be sent and to be read' (Tamboukou, 2011 p. 638). In other words, 'the act of reading becomes a pervasive part of the narrative' (Kauffman, 1986, cited in Tamboukou, 2011 p. 638). In particular, Bakhtin reminds us that 'we are never fully ourselves in our utterances. What we make or say is always somewhat alien to us, never wholly ours, as we ourselves are not wholly ours . . . We are outside ourselves and that "outsidedness", "extralocality" creates the tragedy of expression' (Morson, 1983, cited in Tamboukou, 2011, p. 634).

In the event, Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare each respond to my letters with expressions of satisfaction, pleasure and delight. I am relieved. And yet my relief too carries an ambivalence: I wonder if it restores to my own subjectivity a sense of closure and resolution

that I do not fully trust. But these responses do not stay still. As Lady Gaga Alice and Clare read each others' letters, new exposures, new vulnerabilities in relation to and new appreciations of each other come forward. And as we discuss the letters, we each imagine other readers reading the letters, some known and some unknown. This is the dialogical imagination. But conversely, as the 'you's' to whom the letters are addressed, Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare must also surely enter as embodied readers, respondents and, one hopes, as *knowers,* into the dialogical imagination of other readers. In arguing that letters are dialogical, Stanley (2004) argues that they open up 'channels of communication and reciprocity … between the writer of the letter and any reader' (cited in Tamboukou 2011, p. 627). In some ways then, the letter-ness of a letter connects a virtual community of readers who imagine each other into being.

*Troubling Knowledge: A Political Pact*

All of this underlines how, in Tamboukou's (2011) analytic of the epistolary, the dialogical openness upon which the ethical force of the I-you relation depends cannot be enclosed by a focus on inter-subjectivity. In her analysis of this dialogical openness, Tamboukou draws on Kristeva's replacement of intersubjectivity with that of a conceptualisation of *intertextuality*, citing Kristeva's (1985) declaration that 'every text is from the outset under the jurisdiction of other discourses which impose a universe on it' (cited in Tamboukou, 2011, p. 634). Tamboukou notes Kristeva's intellectual debt to Bakhtin's literary theory, so that 'any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another' (Kristeva, 1986, in Tamboukou, p. 635). Kristeva redeploys Bakhtin's notions of *dialogue* and *ambivalence* to conceptualise any poetic text as working through two axes: 'a horizontal axis along which the text belongs to both writing subject and addressee, and a vertical axis along which the text "is oriented towards an anterior or synchronic literary corpus"' (in Tamboukou, 2011, p. 634).

Informed by Kristeva's intertextual analytics, Tamboukou (2011) considers Johns' letters through a double reading, along these two axes of reader-addressee and text-context: 'When the reader of the letter is also the [male] absent beloved, the I/you relationship of the epistolary discourse becomes even more complicated, saturated and driven as it is by forces of desire and in the case of women letter writers, gendered power relations' (p. 635). Rodin is

an embodied addressee, but also occupies a powerful subject position as the figure of 'the Master'. Tamboukou argues that when taken as open narratives and as *epistolary technologies of the self,* John's love letters not only stage struggles between the lover and the beloved, but also open up channels of communication between her and 'the Master' which 'bend forces of the outside and transform her suffering and confusion into a passionate expression of a self in the process of becoming other' (p. 638).

My own letters are quite literally written through interweaving 'a mosaic of quotations'. But the quotations also explicitly reference the exterior texts and discourses of knowledge as explicit objects of critique delineated by Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare – forms of knowledge marked by refusals of dialogue, which silence and refuse to listen to the particularity of unique others. My address then to 'you' is not a mere intersubjective address, but is simultaneously an address to these ideological struggles, in order to self-consciously intervene in the social constitution of knowledge, to 'bend forces of the outside' (Tamboukou, 2011, p. 638) and to effect a shift in antagonistic power/knowledge relations. This is another way in which letter-writing becomes 'an epistolary practice of intervening in the constitution of the social' (p. 638).

Indeed, the very mode of my address – a letter – enacts a response to these critiques by embracing a dialogical mode addressed to a particular you which calls out for an answer. In this sense, my letters offer themselves as self-reflexive tokens of these critiques of power/knowledge relations. Tamboukou (2011) locates the openness of epistolary narratives in the larger political question as to 'why openness is still considered as a problem in narrative theory'. She cites MacArthur (1990) who links 'the fascination with closure' with 'a fear of deviance and a desire of stability' (in Tamboukou, 2011, p. 631). Thus, for MacArthur, classical narrative concerns 'might represent an attempt to preserve the moral and social order, which would be threatened by endlessly erring narratives' (in Tamboukou, 2011 p. 631). In contrast, 'the openness of the epistolary form might indicate an interest in the actual process of creating meaning and a desire to put into question the moral and political status quo' (MacArthur, 1990, in Tamboukou, 2011, p. 632). Indeed, Tamboukou (2011) suggests that John's own incomplete letters indicate a 'desire for making trouble to segmentarities of all kinds and all times' (p. 632).

As will be clear from the letters, these desires 'to put into question the moral and political status quo' and to 'trouble ... segmentarities of all kinds and all times' animate the accounts of Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare. These desires, in turn, are moulded by passionate concerns to sustain dialogical pedagogical spaces of openness for themselves and other women as narratable selves. In this sense then, the epistolary pact of my letters is also at the same time *a political pact* to disrupt power/knowledge relations and disciplinary practices in order to open up the future 'to unforeseen possibilities and forces of life' (Tamboukou, 2011, p. 638).

## Thesis as Novelising Heteroglossia

> Narrative sense in this context emerges as an agglomeration of fragments, stories that are incomplete, irresolute or broken. Yet, when brought together, these fragmented narratives create a milieu of communication where the silenced, the secret and the unsaid release forces that remind us of the limits of human communication, the inability of language and representation to express the world. (Tamboukou, 2011, p. 628)

The letters create a provisional crystallisation of a multiplicity of narrative trajectories. The forces which they release, and the silences which they trace, will range over subsequent chapters. To engage with and amplify the power of these forces raises another level of genre questions applied to the thesis itself.

In my approach to writing my thesis, I have found inspiration in Bakhtin's (1981) theorisation of 'the phenomenon of novelization', with 'its spirit of process and inconclusiveness' and how it 'best of all reflects the tendencies of a new world still in the making' (p. 8). Linked to this is Bakhtin's emphasis on the living language – on concrete utterances spoken by real people in concrete situations. Linked to this in turn is Bakhtin's account of how all language operates in the midst of heteroglossia, and 'the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions' (p. 291). Of particular importance then is how novelisation involves an 'uncrowning, that is, the removal of an object from the distanced plane, the destruction of epic distance, an assault on and destruction of the distanced plane in general' (p. 23).

> What are the salient features of this novelization of other genres suggested by us above? They become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the 'novelistic' layers of literary language, they become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humor, elements of self-parody and finally – this is the most important thing – the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain

> semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present). (pp. 7- 8)

The novelistic epistemology which Bakhtin (1981) describes provides the possibility of confronting hegemonic rationalities through a form of laughter which 'demolishes fear and piety before an object, before a world, making of it an object of familiar contact and thus clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation of it ... Basically this is uncrowning, that is, the removal of an object from the distanced plane, the destruction of epic distance, an assault on and destruction of the distanced plane in general (p. 23). In my own thesis, this is precisely the purpose of refusing 'data' – in order to engage with Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare where they too have 'fully weighted semantic positions'. In this sense, participating as 'three of all the world's passionate women,' they are akin to Dostoevkian heroes in 'their resistance to closure, their refusal to submit to unambiguous and unequivocal expression', so that their 'thoughts and words fail to congeal into a fixed "monologic whole"' (Gardiner, 1992, p. 29).

This also has implications for authorship. Skinner et al. (2001) write, 'The author of a narrative generates novelty by taking a position from which meaning is made – a position that enters a dialogue and takes a particular stance in addressing and answering others and the world' (para. 10). As *thesis* author, I am in dialogue with the polyphonic voices of Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare. I am also in dialogue with their questions and insights which stretch my own thinking, guiding and challenging me as I think and write, living 'a tense life on the borders of someone else's thought, someone else's consciousness' (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 32). Insofar as writing my thesis is a dialogical event of my own ideological becoming, it is one which is not merely concerned to re-present ideas and thoughts, but on how these ideas are embodied through interacting with other consciousnesses. Ultimately, the forces released by Lady Gaga's, Alice's and Clare's voices become reminders of 'the limits of human communication, the inability of language and representation to express the world' (Tamboukou, 2011, p. 628). But with this reminder also comes an affirmative desire for political action rooted in the realities of women's lives which sustains openness, questioning and new beginnings, and which can find its realisation in transformative feminist pedagogical spaces.

My attempt to create a heteroglossic thesis will involve posing the questions, struggles and silences named by Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare in order to interrogate and 'uncrown'

sedimented forms of knowledge which provide the rationalities of closure for neoliberal government at a distance.

Chapter 7

## Dear Lady Gaga, Dear Alice, Dear Clare

Extrapolating on the heteroglossic, this chapter is comprised of three letters written by me: the first to Lady Gaga, the second to Alice, and the third to Clare. Let us now turn to my three letters, beginning with Lady Gaga.

**Dear Lady Gaga,**

I remember my thrill of excitement when, after following your car through working-class streets and past terraced houses, I first walked over the threshold of the women's centre. When I left after listening to your stories, this modest space of two small rooms and a tiny office had become for me a place saturated with a sense of history, of women's stories, and alive with grassroots feminism.

*Dreaming*

It's a space you connect to the realisation of a dream, a dream from a Time when there was 'Space for converSations to Actually Dream of what a women's project could Look like':

LG: you know when We Started when we Came toGether Years ago I was a volunTeer
on the— on the project to Start with So was Alice for Years
And you Know the Time we Had in Those days with the supPort Agency
to Have just Space for converSations
to Actually Dream of what a Women's project could Look like ...
...

S and What was That? and How can You describe Some of those Dreams?

LG Yeah— Some of it Has Come In that In that you know a Space where
where Women Would Recognise that—
This is some Place to Go
...
Just SomeWhere that you Do the Kind of Courses that we Do our
Kind of Flagship Course is 'Women creating Changes together'—
And you Know
there's a Space for Women to be Able to
Just to feel Free to to Talk about
Their Life exPerience and where there'd be Some valiDation
We'd Say "when you're Coming to the Women creating Changes" we Say to
Women "the Only thing you have to Bring is yourSelves
And a Willingness to Share some of your Life exPeriences"
and then We kind of Hang it on a Feminist FrameWork
we proVide a feminist framework that they can Hang their exPeriences On and
See it in aNother Way
but it Is aBout
it's Really aBout their Women's Stories themSelves
and That's what we kind of Wanted we Wanted something that women wouldn't
feel they had to do
a Course and do Homework or do Writing or
y'Know Go outSide their comMunity to Do Something y'Know?

S umm

You story a dream realisation that is so full of movement, and full of voices. This is a place that is no static place. It gets its meaning from being a Place to Go, and this meaning comes from women themselves: 'where Women Would Recognise'. The goings and the recognitions involved in a Place to Go, are embedded in women's own sense of community – that they don't have to 'Go outSide their comMunity.'

The energy of these meanings comes through a networking of multiple voices. At the centre of it all, what it Is aBout, you place 'their Women's Stories themSelves'. You mark this with freedom: 'to be Able to ... Just to feel Free to to Talk about Their Life exPerience'. It's a freedom enabled by invitation and response. You speak of an invitation addressed to women about Coming to the Women creating Changes course. This is a naming and inviting of initiatives - of becoming present, of having a willingness, and of sharing life experiences: 'We'd Say', you say, 'the Only thing you have to Bring is yourSelves And a Willingness to Share some of your Life exPeriences'. The freedom to talk is also enabled by the response which comes after: Some valiDation.

But your invitation for stories, and your responses to stories, are also shaped by political commitments stirred by the meaning and purpose of stories. You thread together women's stories – what 'it Is about', women's perspectives – 'that women wouldn't feel', women's action – 'to Do Something', and the dream history of 'we': 'what we kind of Wanted we Wanted'. And in this fusion, you displace central ideas and assumptions of formal education: notions of a 'Course', of 'Homework', and of 'Writing'. Not to mention the expectation to 'Go outSide their comMunity'. So when you say, 'the Kind of Courses that we Do', you invoke a 'Kind' which unsettles the notion of 'Courses' itself, and charges it with political tension.

But then too, in the space of the response to women's stories, the space of valiDation, the meaning of women's life experiences does not stay still. This is a space to 'See it in aNother Way', facilitated by a feminist framework 'that they can Hang their exPeriences On'.

*What's the Point in Telling Me?*

Yet, this realisation of a dream, the 'Women Creating Changes Together,' was no simple unfolding of a dream. I'm curious about how the Women's Project began realising the dream - 'was This one of the First Courses that ye Started?'. And out of this, you tell me more of the history of Women Creating Changes Together:

LG it Came out of when I did a course in Women's studies in [university]

S uhum

LG And We used to be Talking an Awful Lot about—
you Know— Different Women— Multiple opPressions that Women exPerience
So Not just being opPressed by being a Woman but being
y'know having the Others
and Yet you'd look around the Group and it was all White
it was all middle Class there was No Travellers on the Group
... so you Might have had people who were
who Might have been educationally disadVantaged In the sense
that they Didn't get to College the First time Round
or Something like That because we were all Middle-aged Women
But— Not fiNancially Really y'Know—
and I felt Very unComfortable Sitting disCussing Other women's Lives

and i Spoke to the course Tutor about it
and Said or the course diRector
and i Said to Her "Look"
y'Know— that "i'm Working in the comMunity and i'm working with Women
These iDeas are FascinAting that we're Learning out Here
but What's the Point in telling Me about
Somebody who's exPeriencing you know Awful Poverty Or the Things that
Happen because of Class or all the Rest when
it's That's not really Me d'you Know but there's there's Loads of women Who
would Love this"
So Anyway She Said that she would Work with us and supPort us to do
Something and so I went out and i had a Meeting With her aRound it
and then Alice came on Board as the faCiliTator
so we Kind of Picked out several Areas like
Women in History Women's Body Image eduCation—
Different areas now i can Check them out with you
and then Alice put the Meat on the Bones of Those And deVeloped them
into Different y'Know— sort of Classes we'll say

Well y'know, whenever I think about the stories you and Alice have told me connected to this course, I always think too how amazing it is that something so powerful and multi-storied can have its seeds in this feeling of uncomfortableness. Not just the feeling of course. The feeling, yes. That turns into a story told. That receives a response of validation and commitment. And that then becomes a whole matrix of feminist collaboration and solidarity through these tensions of different educational contexts.

But yet, there is of course nothing simple about this feeling of uncomfortableness. And if it's a 'seed', then it's also a seed germinated through already present meanings and commitments. The uncomfortable feeling comes from discussing Other women: 'I felt Very unComfortable Sitting disCussing Other women's Lives.' It's produced by a contradiction between the what of the discussion, and the who of the speakers. The Talk is about women's multiple oppressions. But who do you hear speaking? You say how 'you'd look around the group', and you'd observe and hear that the speakers are White and Middle-class. You note the absences of those whose lives are being discussed: 'There were no Travellers'. You highlight the significance of financial disadvantage.

You then tell a story of voicing your uncomfortableness to the course director. You announce your uncomfortableness as connected to who you are, and to who you are not. You say, 'i'm Working in the community and i'm Working with Women', connecting who you are with

women in the community. You hold to this connection in your 'Not really Me': you're not 'Somebody who's exPeriencing you know Awful Poverty Or the Things that Happen because of Class or all the Rest.' You bring this back to the discussion context, and inject feminist speaking situations with questions of political purpose: 'What's the Point in telling Me?'

But the strength of your connection with community women is in hearing them as potential listeners to these 'FascinAting' ideas: 'there's Loads of women Who would Love this'. And with this, Loads of women move from being the objects of white, middle-class, settled women's discussions of multiple oppressions, and become real, concrete particular women Who would Love this, with their own thoughts, ideas, and intellectual passion.

When you invoke the course director's response here, it is a voice of action and solidarity 'She Said that she would Work with us and supPort us to do Something and so I went out and i had a Meeting With her aRound it'. The strength of this commitment is further heightened when you bring her voice into your story again. In your revoicing, you accentuate a sense of immediacy, absolute agreement, and a 'Love to get ... these iDeas Out'.

LG ... and she picked Up on it Straight aWay and i said Okay

S How do you mean in what way how did she?

LG Oh in that AbsoLutely Really Really aGreed that
y'Know

S yeah

LG she would Love to get it these iDeas Out

Out of this dialogue, this interweaving of feminist commitments, along with Alice who came along as facilitator and 'put the Meat on the Bones', you describe a shared sense of purpose which has supported women's academic accomplishments:

> —Now they're Very LikeMinded the Women's dePartment Very likeMinded
> so y'know we've we Know that—
> They Used it They Funded it and Then Anybody who Did that Course
> as Long as They had y'Know Reasonable Literacy Levels
> was Able to AutoMatically go On to the Women's Studies cerTificate Course and

you can See them There
with their Hats and Gowns

S *(looking at photograph on the wall)* oh Yeah!

LG —and Then Some of them went on to the diPloma and Some of them
went On and Did deGrees

You tell a story of change which effectively expands on the name of the course, 'Women Creating Changes Together':

LG and— the Women when they Start they deCide what they Want Which ones
that Are of most Interest to them we do sexuAlity Different ones
they Pick out and they say "okay
for This course we've Six Weeks We'll do those Six"
Now they'd Love to do them All we Never have enough Money for it to
do y'know Keep it Going
And Then they would Do them
And it is They'll Talk about Their exPeriences and then
and Then there's an Input Say it's eduCation
and So Women have those Moments you know those Wow moments when they'd
say "God i always Thought i was Thick"
And Then they'd say "God the eduCation system Really didn't Cater to me at All"
you know Those kind of moments they have a Lot of Those—

S ummm

LG – And the Other thing is that we Always Wanted it Very Grounded in the reAlity
of their Lives so Not only the Fact that
it was Just Their exPeriences was All that was Used as
you Know that you'd Feed In Their exPeriences and Use That to Draw out
the the Theory
but Also That
They would Know exActly what's aVailable for Women so we Also used to
Say "is there Any organiSations? is there Anything you'd Need?"
so they'd Ask maybe the rape Crisis centre to come in or the Women's Refuge
That comes up aGain and aGain as a Problem for us

The presence of 'the Women when they Start' is already of course a response to the invitation to "Bring ... yourSelves And a Willingness to Share some of your Life exPeriences". They start with the making of choices – choices to be sure necessitated by the limits of funding and the limits of choice – but choices connected to their Interests.

You describe 'Wow moments.' Moments of transformation. You make present a woman's voice – a voice which radically shifts the power relationship between 'me' and 'the educational system'. It is a voice which opens up and contests the terms of history, of education, of knowledge and of self. There's the long history of a Thought, which in its voicing is already questioned: '"God i always Thought i was Thick". And in the moment of Wow, histories are transformed, power is exposed, so that the Thought of being 'Thick' becomes deprived of its power: 'God the eduCation system Really didn't Cater to me at All". Here are Their exPeriences Drawing out the Theory, so that Theory is Grounded in the reAlity of women's Lives.

But this grounding in living realities also carries the question, 'is there Any organiSations ... you'd Need?'. And from your answering examples, - the Rape Crisis Centre, the women's refuge, you highlight the aGain and aGain of the issue of violence against women.

When speaking later about a particular women's group, you return to the issue again:

LG it Is it's it's Such a Huge Problem! i Don't think i Think people say Flippantly
"One in Five"
they Don't Actually Know what they they Don't Know! like it's Just
Huge! it's a Huge
problem
it is eNormous it's Everywhere it's Everywhere

And and—it is and reGardless of That— Even though it's Everywhere and

People can Still be Very aLone because They
they Don't See their— Maybe it's just you Don't see your Life exPerience in
the kind of Sterile Language we Use aRound
domestic aBuse or domestic Violence Even That you know they Don't See
—getting a Slap across the Head or
a Kick y'Know and and i Know that people enCourage
they'd Say y'Know "Say it for What it Is and Do That"
but it's it doesn't Happen it's Just Too Harsh and and People Shy aWay from it
and So
it Closes People In to their Own experiences "and say domestic aBuse" "abuse" is a
Very SteRile Thing to Talk about
which "is That what He does to Me or what He Says to Me?" that's it's
Course they think it's something Different cos it Is something Different it's Their's!
y'Know?

You describe too a new space of the political, of feminism, opened up by the telling of stories:

LG so Feminism<br>
Things Once y'Know<br>
we beCame Once<br>
Private Issues started being Brought into the Public doMain That was the Key<br>
Once Stuff that was going On and they Started to<br>
Feel Safe eNough to Talk about it<br>
And Then Hear from Other Women<br>
and Then<br>
the disCussion that'd Follow<br>
it Stopped being just<br>
Something that Happened to You<br>
In a Vacuum

S ummm

LG it Started to have a Whole New Meaning

You create a dynamic narrative of feminism out of Startings which circle around Stuff that Happens. The first and all-arching Start you describe is 'Once Private Issues started being Brought into the Public doMain'. This for you is the Key. The Public doMain here is the space of women telling each other their stories. It depends on the second Start which you describe: 'to Feel Safe eNough to Talk about it'. Out of this emerges hearing other women, and then a collectivised discussion. The other side of these Startings is the Stop they effect: 'it Stopped being just Something that Happened to You In a Vacuum'. Your narrative concludes with a third new Starting –'a Whole New Meaning'.

This is all such a powerful, transformative interweaving of multiple voices and histories: from the Dreams of the women who created the women's project, to those of the director and others in the Women's Studies Department, of you and Alice joining with the voices of the women who Bring themSelves to the collective space of story-telling, who in turn join with other 'You's', and who together create Whole New Meanings.

*Boundaries of Uncomfortableness*

I was very taken though with the strength of your connection with the women you work with, as registered in your feeling of uncomfortableness. I wondered if there was more to be said about the feeling. So you might remember that as part of our second conversation, I expressed my desire to hear more:

S —and i i'd Like to hear More about
Being you know Like—
—like Sitting in a Sitting in the Room
and you know Just you're Being un Being unComfortable
and being aWare of being uncomfortable

LG uhum

S and How that Was for You

LG uhum

S —does That make Sense?

LG Yeah it Does Yeah

Now your response to this question becomes complex and analytical. It unravels a whole host of tensions and struggles about academia, women's stories, and the politics of knowledge production – tensions of course I'm well mired in myself, doing as I am my PhD on the voices and knowledge of feminist community activists - well, you!

What strikes me though about your analysis is how you build it around movements between different locations and contexts, and how the boundaries of these contexts are charged for you with political and social significance.

*Canteen and Classroom*

—i supPose at the Start i i Mightn't have been you know we were Just
you know you were Learning stuff and you were Learning stuff aBout—
People— Well it was All Women so you were Learning about Women who
experienced Different opPressions so we were Looking at Black women we were Looking at
—Maybe women from the Traveller comMunity who were Different—

Different Groups of Women
and i reMember i Think Really what Started the Real thing for Me was
you know we'd Go to the Break we'd Have these disCussions in Class
And Everybody would be Talking about
—you Know like
in a parTicular Way about the Studies and— Taking that aPart
and Then you'd go to the Break ...

Here is your first boundary-crossing: between the classroom and the canteen. This is when/where 'the Real thing' started, in a move from 'Talking ... in a parTicular Way' of taking studies apart, into hearing different kinds of Talk. You describe conversations in the canteen, 'Ten Steps from the Classroom'. A woman speaks about her son and his migrant girlfriend, speaking in a way which was 'like it was Okay for him to Practice on this girl but this girl was Never going to be a Wife'. You tell of how you were troubled: your Horrified response, and your associated thoughts internally addressed to the speaking woman:

LG and i was Quite Horrified at the way
she was Speaking

S yeah

LG you know and thought "My God we're like Ten Steps from the Classroom you're
going to go Back In and Talk in a comPletely different Way because
This opPression is Not your Life
it's Not your" so we can Never have an Honest disCussion we can Only have this
disCussion about
that we All try to get Good Marks and pass an eXam but it's actually not Really
what we Do it's not Really our Life

You recall another woman joining the conversation, talking about her cleaner, speaking in terms of how she 'alLowed her Off to do a Night class." Again you describe your answering thoughts:

and it was Just the Whole
Not exAmining it was like So Patronising you know and—
"it's a Charity and i'm" and Telling it as a Big Story that you know
and i just thought "Oh god it's just So Separate! this is Not our Lives! we're just
Doing this to get a qualification or whatever the Thing"
and i "and Yet we can come Out here but it's Actually Real People's Lives!
and We're just Playing at

This being imPortant and it's only imPortant in front of the course director so we all look Good but
Actually it's Not what"

In these narrative accounts, to your own question, 'What's the Point in Telling Me?', you present one answer: the point is good marks, passing an exam, get a qualification.

But through your critical listening, you draw out the effects of an emphasis on academic progress. The effect of this is a Playing of importance, a performance 'Out here' which is Not our Lives. And yet, this is a Playing which is based on Actually Real People's Lives. You question whether discussion linked to academic progress, when Life is 'So Separate', and when 'This opPression is Not your Life' can ever lead to an Honest disCussion in 'Learning about Women who experienced Different opPressions'.

Your sense of the unReal pervades Theory itself, and the Making of Fancy Theories:

LG there was aNother disCussion around porNography aNother day
and it was That—
y'Know that disCussion that people get inVolved in about "All these Call girls who actually Love what they Do and
make Huge Money out of it" y'Know?
and i Just felt
it was So unReal
because you know it it was like a Little theoRetical Point "are people Still opPressed when they don't Know they're opPressed?" you know That thing people get inVolved in
and Yet
I was Working One of the Women that i was working with at the Time
was Actually had y'know she Goes on the Game every Now and Then
When she gets Skint she's i don't know How many Kids she has

S yeah

LG and like She was on the Game and i Thought
"god We're just Having this preTend disCussion about aWareness That's Actually Her
and She's On the Street and She is comPletely Skint and she Has to Do That
and— When do we Start unPicking All of this Making these
Fancy Theories that Actually y'know it's it's Totally imMoral! to be
you you know so that you can kind of Distance yourself 'and it's Fine People are
all making Choices' y'know?

your Choice is between a Rock and a hard Place

So—
a Lot of That i used to I got Quite upSet about All this Stuff that was going
On like That and i'd Say
There was some Lovely people on that Course now Don't get me Wrong! [...?]
were Grand there was a Couple of them
it Just made me feel Very unComfortable

Here, you speak of theoretical involvements. There are discussions people 'get inVolved' in, such as that of 'All these Call girls who Love what they Do'. There is here too your own involvement: your getting 'Quite upSet' and 'Very unComfortable' about what you experience as a 'preTend discussion about aWareness'.

You centre these involvements around 'a Little theoRetical Point' which is: "are people Still opPressed when they don't Know they're opPressed?" So now, your earlier account of the discomfort of 'Sitting disCussing Other women's Lives', becomes one of discussing Other women's knowledge and awareness of their own oppression.

In the midst of these rarefied discussions, your thoughts are involved with a different person in a different place, far removed from classroom and canteen. You think of One of the Women you were working with: 'That's Actually Her and She's On the Street'. You situate Her in the social context of her life: Kids at home. comPletely Skint. Goes on the Game every Now and Then. she Has to Do That.

In thinking about Her, and the conditions of Her life, you call for an unPicking of the Making of Fancy Theories. You imbue this call with a passionate ethical declaration: 'it's Totally imMoral!'

The question of involvements becomes an ethical one of how 'you can kind of Distance yourself'. As you speak, you turn this distancing into the uninvolved and accepting Distance of 'it's Fine People are all making Choices'. You then take the notion of Choice, and radically relocate it from this generality of People to the particularity of You in a social context: 'your Choice is between a Rock and a hard Place'.

So basically then, you're deconstructing and theorising the practice of theory-making. But in terms of questions of knowledge and awareness then, all this newly resonates with your

question, 'What's the Point in telling Me?' In questioning the question, 'are people Still opPressed when they don't Know they're opPressed?', you also open up alternative questions about knowers and knowledge. These are questions which look to Loads of women who live 'between a Rock and a hard Place' as knowers Who would Love these ideas.

*Between Community and College*

S so when so when You were in that Space — you know and you were you were
Thinking of One particular Woman that that You were— that You were
Working with and were you Thinking of you know Other women that you were working with as Well at different Times? or

LG Oh! All the women
i was just thinking then
yeah i was thinking about All of the Women

S so They were Kind of very Present for you in that Space

LG oh I was actually Doing That and going back to Work
you know like I did say i would go to College in the Day and come back or else go in Early
if i didn't have Lectures and you know i was In and Out at Work
so it was Very Real

...

i don't know it was Just

and and Maybe that's It you know you Talk about the "Six Million Jews Dying"
and we All know anne Frank Maybe
and That's what i would Say you know I I—
Couldn't talk about "Prostitutes" but I had
Three Prostitutes in my Head I couldn't Talk about "Women's exPerience" because
i Had them in my Head and i was going to be Meeting them

Here you open up a new set of boundaries: those between college and your work. But these are porous, as you move In and Out between them. In this process, abstract categories of 'Prostitutes' or of 'Women's exPerience' don't offer you a speaking position - 'I Couldn't talk about 'Prostitutes'... I couldn't Talk about 'Women's exPerience' –You compare this with the difference between 'Six Million Jews Dying' and the story of Anne Frank.

You're thinking of All of the Women you're working with. In moving across these boundaries of college and work, they're in your Head as Real women you'll be meeting and engaging with.

With all these questions, and in the light of the course director's supportive response, I was wondering if you had been concerned that she might hear your concerns as a criticism of the course. You distinguish between the course and academia - the course was Interesting – and you broaden your focus to acaDemia:

S and when You apProached the course director like did You have an expecTation that she would reSpond in a positive Way? or did You
you know were you conCerned she might hear it as a Criticism of the Course? or

LG Oh No i didn't because i Wasn't criticising the Course the Course was Interesting
I suppose i Might have been having a Little Sideswipe at acaDemia

S right

LG you Know because like we See that So Much Working in comMunities like you have
Every now and Then like it's the Travellers and they're Researched to Death and
you know People don't even— come Back and feed Back and the Same with
Violence against Women y'Know there's Certain things that are Very
Hot Topics and they're reSearched to Death
And—
you Know
...
but you'd Almost Think that they'd Love Bigger Stories so that they can get aNother Bloody deGree out of it or Something you Know?
but Maybe that was just Me being Maybe that's just Me being Cynical
i Just don't Like the disreSpect as Well
it's like you know they Hop in and
and Even when I was there That was the Other thing i suppose that People
you know Some of the People who Saw me and that
and Realised what i Did
Thought
"Oh my God" you know
you know "Oh we'll get a Great source of Women
from There and you know
Maybe emPloyment or conNections or This and That" you Know!

i Just didn't Get that the People were Really Interested

...
and Also because you know when People were Doing stuff parTicularly about—
Women from the New comMunities
it was Like y'know Hopping In to Make a conNection and Get a qualifiCation
but they'd Never be in your House or you'd Never invite them to Dinner or you'd Never
y'Know and i Just Felt i couldn't Use people to that exTent

And now, from this Sideswipe position, you further expand on the boundaries between academia and the community, looking at the movement from academia into the community. From your perspective - we See that So Much Working in comMunities' - this movement takes the form of the act of Hopping In.

Hopping In is about research on people in communities. 'Hot Topics' here are Travellers and Violence Against Women.
Hopping In is being Researched to Death.
Hopping In is about not feeding back results.
Hopping In is when you are seen as a Great source of Women.
Hopping In is when Women from the New comMunities are researched on to get a degree, but are Never invited to Dinner.
Hopping In is about using people and is disrespectful.

Hopping In seems to have its own logic of looking for Bigger Stories. (But that might just be you being Cynical.)

The importance of the 'Women Creating Changes Together' course lies in women being able to have a relationship with their own stories through a new kind of connection between academia and women in the community:

S and How imPortant Then
you know in Terms of
you know so would You see then that Kind of
the creating Changes together Course was in Some way breaking Down that DisconNect
between you know acaDemia if you Like and
you know like Women in the comMunity?

LG Yeah
it was
it was Some Way for Us to Start

—First of all making the Link beTween acaDemia and These Women
but Some way for These
Some way for Those Women to Bring Their Stories and for Their Stories
to be Something about Them getting On
so you could Come into this Course and we used to Write out and we'd Say
"you Don't need to bring Anything Only yourSelf
and a Willingness to Share your Stories"
so inStead of Me coming in and Your Story is going to help Me get On and
you know it— Not just in acaDemia but you know in Work and i could Tick a
Box so "Oh you're
aBused? grand i can Tick that i've aNother aBused Woman in mine and the More
opPressed they Are the Better because we're supposed to be working with the Most
Marginalised so your Story can Never be Bad eNough it's Only aNother" y'Know
d'you Know?

S yeah

Making the links between academia and These women shifts the terms of engagement with women's stories, so that now Their own stories are about 'Them getting On'. But you also draw parallels between the academic appropriation of women's stories, and community development work funding practices. The demands of community development funding mirror academia's penchant for Bigger Stories: 'we're supposed to be working with the Most Marginalised so your Story can Never be Bad eNough'. You take on a voice which is called out by the reporting requirements: '"Oh you're aBused? grand i can Tick that i've aNother aBused Woman in mine'. Each woman's story then becomes reduced to a tick in a box: 'it's Only aNother', to support the successful funding of community development work, and of workers in getting On: 'Your Story is going to help Me get On ... i've aNother ... in mine'.

Yet, still this question of 'What's the Point?' carries its tense reverberations into the Women Creating Changes Together course:

S and would You say that That—the Women the— the Creating Changes Together course
in Some Way Captures your Sense of the Dream of what Could be Possible
in terms of the Kind of Spaces
that
that— it would be Great to have leGitimised more Widely?

LG yeah

Yeah
i mean

We have to Set it Up and Run it as a "Course"

S yeah

LG That shouldn't be a "course"

That should be Actually what's happening All the Time in a Women's Centre
that that Space is There for Women to Share their exPeriences
And to Learn from each Other

– We can Fit it In under a Goal in eduCation
And Give it leGitimacy
We get it eValuated by [university] When it's Finished you know They look at the Content and All That
...
But
That's how I have to Sell that to the dePartment
is that they it's "eduCation" and they "proGressed" and they did This and they did That
... which is All a very Positive exPerience

S ummm

LG For women

but That should be Just! Fine to Do without Having to justiFy it as "proGression"
or "Education" or anything
That Should be What we're Doing All the Time
is Making Spaces for Women
because

like Women have So many Stories that they tell Nobody because they Tell you
they've Nothing to Tell!

You open up two alternative stories of the 'Women Creating Changes Together' course. One is the story of a 'course', of 'progression' and 'education'. You draw attention to the funding relationship of power with the state which establishes the language, the categories, and the terms of legitimacy: 'We have to Set it Up and Run it as a "Course" ... That's how I have to Sell that to the dePartment'.

But as a story you have to 'Sell' and 'Justify', you hold these terms at a distance through your own language of critique and contestation.

Your critique and resistance is enabled by your holding to a counter-discourse, and this is the place from which you speak. Here is the Dream Story. It is the story of what should be, a story of All the Time in a Women's Centre, of Making Spaces where women share their stories and learn from each other, the Time and Space of Wow moments. You insist on its importance in itself: 'That should be Just!    Fine to Do without Having to justiFy it as "proGression" or "Education" or anything'.

Your commitment to a women's centre of Making Spaces All the Time is sustained by and responds to your knowledge of voice and silence. You powerfully affirm that 'Women have So many Stories', to counter the space of silence, of Nobody told because Nothing to Tell.

Through all these refusals, contestations and affirmations, flows the remembering of your Dream:

> and That was the kind of Thing that I—that My Dream was
> that    it was Never going to be Dry and Stale   that it was going to be Open and Fluid
> that Lots of  you know   we Didn't have to s- Start out and say "we're going to Work on eduCation and emPloyment" that We were just going to be Open and we were Just going to —you Know
> we    were going to Go where the work Took us and we were going to be Guided
> by what   Women   were Coming in and Telling us

*Feminist Herstories*

With all these boundary contestations, when I say, 'i would Love to Hear    about your reLationship with Feminism   and Feminism in your Life', your response is perhaps not surprising.

> i suppose   from When i was Quite   Young i suppose M and I would have always
> —Challenged Boundaries   the Two of us

Through your relationship with your best friend, M, you link feminism with a love of 'exPloring iDeas':

So— i Absolutely Love Talking To her and exPloring iDeas and
She got into y'Know Reading about Feminism

Two central and interconnected ideas which you speak about as a focus of your critique are inequality and essentialism. You get 'Really inCensed' about inequality:

LG it's Always Struck me because i Grew Up
in a Working class Area of Dublin
i Grew Up with Very little Money
and it was Never a Problem because I Only knew Loads of other people who didn't have much money
y'know?

S yeah

LG the Only Time when i've been Really inCensed is
is around Justice issues when i see ineQuality
and i Didn't see it as a Child growing Up i saw Loads of us
i Never i Didn't even reaLise we were Any way Poor

Inequality is for you, the issue. You link feminism with a questioning based on the Evidence of your Own two Eyes of essentialist 'iDeas that we were Sold around Women':

LG But I always believed that ineQuality
Even before i'd have Ever called it "Feminism" or anything
Just Thought you know "well" kind of "Why Would you?" sort of thing you know
—i was i was i suppose beLieved the Evidence of my Own two Eyes that
not All women were Nurturing and Kind and so Destined to Be
"maTernal" and You know "Out of the Workforce" and the Kind of iDeas
that we were Sold around Women
i mean like the Evidence it was Obvious that That was a Lie Anyway

for a Start!

S *(laughing)*

LG *(laughing)* Even just the Fact that i Went to School with Nuns who
Beat the Shite out of me was eNough to Tell me "well No Hang on Here"!
I just used to know Loads of you know inTelligent Women
and Women who Didn't want to get Married and have Kids say y'Know?

You challenge essentialism, and how it's used against us:

LG i Think beCause i reSist esSentialism so Much aRound you know the CharacterIstics
and When
y'know— How it can be Used aGainst us So Much that you know "Well
of course it's Natural that the the Women are the Nurturers and the Carers
and so why Would they
get Equal Pay isn't it Better to have them at Home?" and All the Rest

So when I inquire about any feminist Figures who Might have inspired you, you talk about the writer Isobel Allende - Just because of what we've been Doing and the Story - you connect her with your resistance to essentialism:

LG i Love the the way she Writes i Love the Way
She— Cherishes WomanHood
...
i Think beCause i reSist esSentialism so Much aRound you know
...
Whereas when— you know it's the Honouring of Women the Honouring of All Those
Not Claiming them exClusively
As
Our characterIstics of Course they're not if you Walked into my House
my husband is There
Who is Nurturing and Kind
Way more than Me!—
...
you know— so it Drives me Mad that kind of esSentialism esPecially
when it's Used as a way of Limiting
so i Love when somebody finds a Way of Drawing out those Characters characterIstics
in a— in the Way that Anything is aVailable d'you Know what i'm Trying
to Say? so that it's Not
—"Oh ye're good at This"— and these Wonderful Characters who are So
Powerful! she Writes about
the Women
...
and Writes about Really Powerful Strong Women who have All this Magic and all
the rest
in a Way that
—is the Very Opposite of what
you know what is Kind of
y'know the esSentialism Really

Essentialism Drives you Mad. Your appreciation of Allende is in part because she has Found a Way of opposing essentialism, which is also one of Honouring and Cherishing Women and

Womanhood. As opposed to the way essentialism imposes limits, making exclusive claims about both women and men, you express an appreciation of how Allende Draws out Characters, so that 'Anything is aVailable'. Her characters are 'Really Powerful Strong Women who have All this Magic'.

You tell me about your own first 'official' involvement with feminism, which started off with an announcement from the pulpit at Mass:

LG it was Really Funny because i Moved to kilDare on a Saturday and i Didn't know
Anybody and [my husband] didn't know Anyone Either
And i Went to Mass at the Time i used to Go to Mass
and i Went down to Mass on the Saturday
and they anNounced off the Pulpit that there was a Group going to Try and
Organise community eduCation classes

S ummm

LG And they were Meeting for the first Time On the Monday i think it was
and i said "Grand i'll Go along to That"
And i Went aLong and brought [my son] who was only Very small at the Time
And
and Straightaway was Shocked to reaLise
"oh Gosh" y'know "they've Not come aLong with other Kids" and then
sort of— they were Having the Meeting and Talking about what would they Do? and
I put up my Hand and said "ye Have to have a Creche y'know we Need to Organise a
Creche" and Somebody said "do you Want to join the comMittee?" and I said "yeah"
and That was It! and That's i made All like Instantly a whole Gang of Friends
From That and we'd y'know and then we Got that First "Women
creating Changes toGether"

This is a great story. There's you going along to the meeting with your little boy, your shock at no other children, and then out of the act of putting up your hand to address the need for a creche, there's you on the committee. Or, what seems to be more the point of your story, there's you with 'Instantly a whole Gang of Friends'. And here you open up too an older history of 'Women Creating Changes Together, remembering that time when the Gang of Friends made the first one happen.

But I'm curious about the initial decision of "Grand i'll Go along to That", and out of this you name your values around some of the central ideas of community education:

S	and what Brought you to that Meeting   in the First instance?

LG	i supPose a Number of Things just New to the Town   stuff like That i was New to the Town
i didn't know   Anybody
I was— A was going to be going to Work on Monday I was at Home with you know Still working at Home with the   with the Kids
—So   i supPose i wouldn't have gone to Any meeting now i'd have Gone to That
i Loved the iDea of "comMunity eduCation"
i'd Done—   and i'd   i'd been Living in Dublin before i came Down and i had Done— my Counselling diPloma
As part of a comMunity eduCation College you Know?
so i Loved it   and i Loved the iDea that
you could— you know you didn't have to Go Out Somewhere y'know that you could that we were Going to Have this— Room   and that We'd make it
so All that was   Really atTracted me—
and Then it was   it was All Women on the committee which Always atTracted me as Well
—i Like working with Women i Like Listening to Women and Talking to them—
i Went aLong
and it was fanTastic it Worked out So Well

And here you talk about the iDea of 'comMunity eduCation', what it means to you, and what you Love about it. At the centre of your story is an image of 'this— Room   and that We'd make it'. Your 'We' of the making of this Room is created through your connection with women: 'i Like working with Women i Like Listening to Women and Talking to them'. This Room is where you don't have to Go Out Somewhere. Here too are echoes of your Women's Project Dream: 'a Space where   where Women Would Recognise  that— This is some Place to Go'.

You then tell a story about joining a women's group linked in with the Christian Feminist Movement, although this becomes a story of Christianity going 'out the Door':

LG	and if They Did stuff
now i Think the "Christian" went out the Door fairly Quickly because it beCame quite Obvious that
First of All there was— Lots of people who Weren't christians y'know as Things Changed in Ireland and that
But we'd   we'd Go to   we Might go aWay for a Weekend there's a Place called Chrysallis in Waterford i Don't know if you ever Heard \of it they Do stuff
S	\No i didn't yeah

LG	or and— we'd Meet and we Kept Diaries and we used to   Read a bit to each Other

and we Might just disCuss i Don't know What we did
i Know we celebrated Pagan festivals which Really makes me Wonder about the
"Christian Feminism" bit! That was probably gone out the Door by That

S (*laughs*)

LG so i Know one time we were All we Used to Celebrate Lúnasa and all this
i reMember One time that we'd [my daughter] was Tiny and we'd her Dressed in her Holy
comMunion dress and we All got up at Four o'clock in the Morning
and we Lit a Fire out the Back! and you'd to Jump over the Fire was the ferTility
rite and then we Did the
"Welcome to the Sun" when the Sun Rose
and then we Just had a Big Loads of Food!

S (*laughs*)
...
LG but—
i Just i Just always Liked i Like Fun
i'm a Very Serious Person but i Like to have Fun
...
like i Do have Fun about Serious Things

You mention here two 'Goings out the Door' of the 'Christian' bit of the Christian Feminist Movement. These speak to some important values in your life and in your practice of feminism. You speak of the first Going out the Door as an act of inclusion, a response to the presence of more people in Ireland who weren't Christian, as Things Changed in Ireland. You link the second Going out the Door to the celebration of pagan festivals such as Lúnasa, and you draw out a graphic description of this – Jumping over the Fire, Welcome to the Sun, and Big Loads of Food! - which highlights the importance for you of Fun. Fun and Seriousness are for you not in opposition. You are a Very Serious Person who likes to have Fun, including Fun about Serious Things (yes 'Lady Gaga').

*Reclaiming Feminism for GrassRoots Women*

One thing you are Very Serious about is the ReClaiming of Feminism for GrassRoots Women. 'it Has to Happen,' you say:

LG it deVeloped over Time but i Love to see it Now in the Women's Groups that we
Visit y'know?
And— So many More people are are Comfortable to Say that they're
"feminist" and that they're

you know and ReaLise
but it Has to Happen and you see aGain that Happened through Building the
reLationships it Happened through the Ordinary Stories of People's Lives
it didn't happen in Any acaDemic Way
because—

and i know [*whispers*:] you're quite academic [*ordinaryvoice*:] but
it's quite AlieNating for an Awful lot of People
—you know a Lot of what goes On not Least the fact that we've
objJections around what's being reSearched and
...
but the cl- Claiming it y'know i supPose That's It isn't it? just ReClaiming it
for GrassRoots Women

S Yeah
it is yeah

LG you can be a Feminist
you don't Ever have to have Heard of "First Wave"

S No

LG or "Second wave feminism" \you Don't need to Know Any of that
S \No yeah

LG but you Know the reAlity of your Own Life

S that's Right

LG and Actually when you Share it and we Link it
we're Talking about the Same Things we're Talking about the Same Principles
so Then it becomes Real and People it's Not that you have to Struggle with them
if They don't Want it that's It

You speak about the emergence of a feminist consciousness, and becoming comfortable with the name 'feminist,' among women's groups that you work with and visit. In this context, the 'ReClaiming of feminism for GrassRoots Women' is linked for you with resisting and challenging the academicisation of feminism. This is connected with questions of the 'who' 'what', and 'how' of feminist knowing and knowledge. You contest the notion of a fixed body of knowledge which defines who can be a feminist, such as knowledge of 'First Wave' and 'Second Wave' feminism. You describe as 'AlieNating' the effect of academic knowledge for many women. In storying the history of an emerging feminist consciousness among women's groups, you emphasise that 'it didn't happen in Any acaDemic Way'. You

open up rather a counter-history: it 'Happened through Building the reLationships it Happened through the Ordinary Stories of People's Lives'. The central knowledge in this process is that 'you Know the reAlity of your Own Life'.

You tell a wonderful story of this process in action:

LG and Then
now there's Still women in Lots of the Women's groups aRound who Won't call themselves "Feminists"
but there's Other women Who— one of our Colleagues was saying one of the Women had Been Here with Us
And she Went into the Women's Group There a couple of Weeks ago and she Walked in and she says
"i'm a Feminist!
i Never knew it! Now
All of You lot are Feminists Too and i'm going to exPlain to you How"
...
she said "she Came in and Burst in and said 'i'm a Feminist we're All Feminists i have to exPlain it to you'!"

S (*laughing)*

LG and Started People Started to iDentify it With it
as a more Positive Thing because it was exPlaining the reAlity
of Your Own Life in a a Story you'd Shared with People
and Now you had This to Hang On
and it Started to make a Meaning and a New Sense so
y'Know
Once it started to make a bit of Sense to people

There is energy and excitement in this story: the thrill of feminist discovery. The realisation of 'feminism' as a new engagement with personal history – 'i'm a Feminist! i Never knew it!' - is a narrative so familiar to many of us. The follow-up of 'All of You lot are Feminists Too' is a statement deeply embedded in a shared relational history with 'All of You lot' - connections with known and particular others. It's upon these connections that this pedagogical role of 'and i'm going to exPlain to you How" depends.

You describe too how your own experience of making connections with women in Tanzania effected a change in how you thought about development education through having 'Taken the Time' to Hear it from the women:

And  And— And
and it's Funny   it Links in Also      with the Whole—    exChange trip to TanzaNia
in the Difference between Going        Sitting in somebody else's Space      Having
converSations
Building up a reLationship          How Real     That Makes
Any kind of
deVelopment education work After That you     you Think completely Differently
because you've
you've Taken the Time        you've Heard it
and you Haven't Heard it from Reading out of the— the irish Aid or the Trócaire
Booklet about the "Problems in Africa" you've Heard from the Women
who are Telling you things
Very Differently      and then All of a Sudden you reaLise
All      d'you Know how much we have in Common sure i mean That was the Big
thing for us All was
you know but    Yet if you were to read the irish aid Booklet you'd be thinking of
"Women     maTernal morTality and
Going for Water and—"
and They're all Problems

S        umm

LG      but the Women       what They were talking about was Stuff about—
"doMestic aBuse"         they were Talking about— You know "community
eduCation and getting Back Into it and Building Up and empowering Women and women"
you know it was a Totally different converSation

When we chat about this again, as I wonder about the difference afterwards, you link it to a new understanding of solidarity:

S        ...
and Then you were Talking about How when you came Back

"the Difference     it Made" to your "Practice\       of deVelopment eduCation"
LG        \uhum        uhum

S        and     Could you talk a Little bit about How      How     How was That?
"it made everything so Real afterwards" you Said

LG      uhum
uhum

i Think—   and i Think i Said this to you beFore
is that i reMember when i came Back     and      People Said to Me
"Oh do you find it Hard to do this Work? Now that you're Back having Seen
the Challenges over There?"

S yeah

LG And and it was Quite the Opposite for Me
because what i i Didn't See
y'know What i Saw Was
IneQuality
That's That was what Jumped out at Me and That is what We're you know
We're Working on—from You know an eQuality aGenda Here
...
and— and That's what it strikes me with
and Then this Whole— kind of how you can Build soliDarity where you
Don't have to Share the exAct same exPerience with People
because the Warmth and the Interest in us Building that mNá Sasa as a Movement
and the
and Building those coNections and Trying to Work toGether
when it was exTremely Obvious our exPeriences were comPletely Different y'Know?

S yeah yeah

LG i Kind of Didn't Really Get soliDarity beFore that

S ummm

LG i Didn't Get
that it could Really Work

S yeah

LG you know i Thought
you could— AdvoCate on beHalf of Women in TanzaNia
and y'Know AdvoCate with Irish Aid in terms of their
AlloCation and their Overseas Aid and all That
but i Didn't Really get
the— the the Actual InterTwining of our exPeriences the Actual Way that
it it Wasn't about
y'Know it was Just
We have Bits to Do
and They have Bits to Do
and we Do those Bits toGether and we Guide each Other and supPort each Other
and That was Really
what SoliDarity was aBout

S yeah

that's Very interes- so when You talk about the "Actual InterTwining
of our exPeriences"

LG yeah

S can you Talk like
So\
LG \Like the Way You Wrote
mNá Sasa
Even That is the Kind of—y'know a Sentence about Irish culture a Sentence
about tanzaNia and All
that it's just So Linked and So interTwined and beCause there's this Thing in the World
Gender ineQuality
that it can have All sorts of Tangled convoLuted efFects
and it's the Same Thing and it—
Plays out in One way for Us Here and it Plays Out
in a Different Way

S yeah

LG For But it is the Same Thing and it was Kind of
Getting Back to the
Bringing us Closer to That to saying
"This is what we're
On about This is what we Need to Work on"

When you talk about a Feminist Human Rights training course developed by the National Collective of Women's Networks with Banúlacht, you highlight the political and strategic significance for grassroots women of claiming feminism. This for you is about the strength, power and solidarity of being part of a movement.

LG You saw the piece that mySelf

S Yeah

LG and Clare and Alice deVeloped and
and like y'know the the Number of People we Got reQuests from
...
S so Tell me about that Piece—
... How it Came to Be that ye Did that
Drama

LG Yeah well we Did we Did a Training with— the National ColLective

S yeah

LG and the Training Was deVeloped and deLivered

By
well it was deVeloped
in conJunction with the Training group of which i was Part
But
Really Led and deLivered By
banÚlacht

S right

LG with the National colLective and it was Really Good

S ummm

LG and
we were Looking it was Looking at GrassRoots Women

S ummm

LG And—
And human Rights Issues and that
And
a Big Part of the Course beCame around Feminism and i Think it was Probably the most Striking Part of it for an Awful lot of the People who were There it's the Thing that they reMembered afterwards that— All going away saying "oh my God I am a Feminist you know we've Got to
We have Got to Get our organiSations to Use
This Word We are part of a Movement
If we Don't iDentify it"
Even the Whole—
Thinking around "iDentifying it"—
you know that you it's Not so Easy to Pick us Off Basically y'Know?

S yeah

LG and People ReaLising that it was Far more than Just
a Battle aRound the Myths but that it was a Huge poLitical Statement
and that by Making it we were Helping
In soliDarity to we were Making ourselves Stronger Basically That's what they started to Realise
and Which is the exPerience that I had had in tanzaNia
because by Then i was y'know i was feeling yeah
Okay sometimes it's Still Difficult in a Funding appliCation how you Word things

S ummm

LG —and i Think When when they came from tanzaNia they gave us a great
Freedom around that and they were saying y'know we were Talking

and we did we quite a bit around strategic alLiances

S ummm

LG y'Know And you can Choose and
y' know we Don't let these Rules Totally Bind us
we Use our Loaves and straTegic and we get what's you Know?

With love, in friendship and solidarity,

Siobhán

**Dear Alice,**

Now this is a very long letter. But still no way near as long as the huge missive we discussed that afternoon when we met in your home, where you fed me vegetarian lasagne, and then we talked for ... hours!

As I write this letter to you now, retelling just some of the story you have told me, I hope I can do some justice to these questions of voice and trauma which I know you have thought about and analysed deeply for many many years. As I listened to your opening statement unfold for me, already layered and complex, I remember my deep deep concentration as I tried to take it all in:

S ...
So So — so you were Saying the other day that they're—y'know you were
Talking about—
y' know that you were very "Passionate"
about the issue of Voice or Moments when "women Don't have a voice"

A uhum uhum

S in Terms of parTicularly around "mental Health"
and the Kinds of—
i suppose Labels that can be\Put on women and their exp—and the Heavy
medicaliSation that goes On around that
A \Ummm uhum

S and you were— Yeah—

A yeah i Think
i suppose my my Interest is Not necessarily in in the issue of mental Health
and Voice and women not having a voice around mental Health

S Okay

A my Issue i suppose is around
women Not having Voice
that Then turns Into "mental health"

S Okay

A or is Labelled as "mental health"

S Okay

A When in actual fact it's
it's Trauma or History or
y'know Past experiences in general

S Okay

A it's y'know— human Rights aBuse
Or— y'know from a
from a System level and Also at a Family level d'you know

S ummm

A reLationships that Kind of thing

S oKay
yeah

A y'Know that that Women Don't
UnderStand their voice they Don't know how to exPress it
It's silenced they Don't feel that they Have one

and so that that Trauma and Pain goes Somewhere and it goes withIn
and so it attacks Them as a Person and then They
—Either come into contact with mental health services Or Other
Services or Other situations in Life that
y'know are not
Positive ...
—

withOut kind of Recognising or Even if they Do recognise that Part of it is to Do with that Lack of voice

S ummm

A and that What they're Carrying—

S oKay

A and Often kind of you know
As a as a Trainer or as a Worker
being Clearly able to See that Disconnect d'you know being able to See that
You know—
that—

Often women will Tell a                    a horRific story
and Then say "Ah but sure that was Years ago"

S    yeah

A    or    you know they'll    y'know Minimise it in Some way Shape or Form
and there's a Disconnect between
What's happening in their Life

Now—

and the Subsequent relationships Maybe that they've Had

This is a statement I have returned to again and again, this core statement of your Issue of women's 'lack of voice', and the terms of your challenge to notions of 'mental health'. As I offer a retelling of our brief phone conversation to 'start the ball rolling' - my hearing of your passion, concern with voice and labels of mental health - your response opens up a more nuanced and new layer of critique. You carefully distinguish between 'women not having a voice around mental Health' and 'women Not having Voice/ that Then turns Into 'mental health'. You distance yourself from the very idea of 'mental health' itself by calling it a 'label'. You call attention to alternative understandings which include ideas of 'Trauma', 'History', 'Past experiences in general'. You describe 'a System level' and a 'Family level': 'human Rights aBuse', and 'reLationships'. These are for you the locus of 'women Not having Voice'. But you connect these two sets of understandings through the idea of a Turning: 'women Not having Voice' is turned into a label of mental health. In this notion of 'turnings', there is a clear sense of voice and silence as an active process. This for you constitutes 'trauma and pain'. It doesn't stay still. It 'goes Somewhere'. For you, this 'Somewhere' is 'withIn'. This 'going within' is a form of 'attacking' them 'as a Person'.

You go on to describe forms of contact with the social world which follow from this. In women's 'coming into contact' with mental health services or other situations in life, you discern 'that Lack of voice/and What they're Carrying'.

You tell a brief story of hearing a story often told. But the point of your telling is not the story itself, but the response of a woman afterwards to her own story – how a woman hears her own story. You quote, 'Ah but sure that was Years ago'. This response for you is one of the

‘shapes or forms’ in which a woman might ‘minimise’ her own story. In your hearing of women’s responses to their own stories, you discern tendencies to ‘minimise’ or ‘disconnect’.

This is really complex, opening up depths and depths of silencing. You suggest that the notion of ‘mental health’ becomes another layer of silencing, which silences and conceals deeper processes of silencing.

In all of this there is also you, as a worker or trainer and your ‘ability to see that disconnect’. Your story of the shapes and forms of minimisation is also a story of how you hear a story. You do not simply say, ‘Often women will tell a story’. You say, ‘Often women will Tell a
a horRific story’, so that the hearing holds your emotional and ethical response. Your sense of a ‘disconnect’ takes the form of a disconnect between the present and the past. You hear how the story told in the present, horrific in the present, is placed in the past: ‘Ah but sure that was Years ago’. The ‘disconnect’ for you is one ‘between/What’s happening in their Life/Now/and the Subsequent relationships Maybe that they’ve Had’.

This is incredibly dynamic. It is full of movements, turnings, transformations, coming into contact with services and situations in life, the past in the present. As I said, in listening I’m trying to take it all in – the awful effects which attack women’s personhood.

At the centre of all this movement is the phrase ‘lack of voice’. But this does not seem to refer to a simple lack, or a nothingness: you link it to a sense of ‘What they’re Carrying’.

Here, in the phrase ‘their voice’, there is a sense of voice as somehow linked to a reality which is already present for women. But what is not present is ‘understanding of voice’, ‘expression of voice’, and ‘knowledge of how to express voice’. This is because ‘it’s silenced’. And so there is no ‘feeling of having a voice’.

Even this ‘lack of voice’ is not a total one: your sense is that women are ‘carrying’ something. And although you see women’s voices as ‘silenced’, when you say, ‘that Women Don’t/UnderStand their voice they Don’t know how to exPress it/It’s silenced they Don’t feel that they Have one’, there is here a sense of the possibility of understandings of ‘voice’ and of knowledge of how to give it expression.

As against labels of 'mental health', you posit alternative understandings including trauma, history and human rights abuse. You yourself clearly carry knowledge and skills which enable you to listen, to resist, to hear and to speak beyond the labels of the 'given' world.

I offer you a retelling of what I have heard. I am particularly intrigued about your account of 'a lack of voice' and the sense of 'carrying':

S oKay Right so there's an so there's
it Sounds like there's an Awful lot There that You have Learned\ from from
A \Umm

S Working with women\ in the sense in the sense of Having
A \Umm

S y'Know a Sense of you were talking First of all about "women Not having a voice
that then Turns Into\ 'Mental Health' issues"
A \Umm umm

S so there's a Kind of a Sense of
of Something that a Journey that They Go through

A uhum

S that Something

A uhum

S beComes something Else

A uhum

S and then there's a Sense of all these Systems\ aRound that\ that—
A \um \uhum

S and so
So that there's—
some— women are "Carrying a Lack of Voice"

A Yeah

S is what that's a Really Interesting iDea that sense of
"Carrying
a Lack"

A uhum

S so it's Present but it's Lacking

A uhum uhum yeah
because it's— beCause there's no Way for it to come Out
women Often asSume it's Not important
or it's Not There or there's Nothing that they can do about it
it Is what it Is and
and you know the Women that we work with
there's a Huge amount of kind of self Blame and
y' know—
a Very Fatalistic apProach d'you know?

Your response to my question of the coexistence of presence and absence opens up some devastating effects of the lack of voice and the burden that women are carrying. You begin with 'because there's no way for it to come out', and move to the phrase 'it Is what it Is'. There's a sense here of a reality of 'it Is' for women which is fixed and given, frozen into a sort of permanent present, without a pathway for voice to come out. In this phrase, there is a sense of reality as fixed, where the idea of a different reality is simply not available. The sense of 'it Is what it Is' is founded on a series of assumptions about voice which you discern that women are carrying, all marked by the negative: 'it's Not important', 'it's Not There' and 'there's Nothing they can do about it'. In the time and space of 'it Is what it Is', agency is not an option. The future is closed off: you describe 'a Very Fatalistic approach' among women you work with. Your analysis here links with your earlier statement about Trauma and Pain going Somewhere and attacking the Person, so that the effect of this is a 'Huge amount of kind of self Blame'.

*Things That Would Make You Question*

Later, I inquire about the foundations of your knowledge, and these conclusions you've arrived at about women's lack of voice:

S and you've kind you Seem to have Come to
—
One y'know a Set of underStandings\ around that yourSelf
A \uhum uhum

S One of Which is that
"there's a Lack of Voice that women are Carrying"

A yeah

S —can you say More about How you Came To
That underStanding if that's okay?

A i Think it's just i suppose beCause we're Hearing—
beCause i've Heard So many Stories

S yeah

A and then on the Same time from the Same Women
Who will talk about
Their "issues around mental Health"
or their y'know speCifically around
—
not "Low-level mental health Issues" but—y'know Things that would make you
Question "Are they mental health Issues?" d'you know the Fact that they're on Tablets
— Anti-depressant Tablets for Years and years and years without Any kind of
reView

S okay

A —
And the fact that y'Know Is it coincidence that
y'know these Same women who are on anti-depressants are Also women who
have exPerienced Trauma?

S oKay

A and it's like Is there a conNection? you know beTween the Two?

S Umm Umm

The genesis of your knowledge is in your having 'Heard So many Stories'. But in hearing this multiplicity of stories, what you hear are, 'Things that would make you Question'.

You describe two separated strands of stories which women tell: mental health stories and trauma stories. Your question is: 'Is there a conNection ... beTween the Two?'

You evoke a sense of hearing the powerful hold of 'mental health' ideas on women's lives. Women draw on the language of mental health in telling you their stories: they talk about 'their issues around mental Health'. You link issues around mental health to Tablets: 'Anti-depressant Tablets for Years and years and years without Any kind of reView'. This then is a new illumination of 'it Is what it Is': the unquestioned, uninterrupted, year after year living of life with anti-depressants, and with a label of 'mental health issue'.

Unquestioned, that is, except by you!

The key to your questioning is hearing other – dissociated? - stories told 'on the Same time from the Same Women'. The Same Women who are on anti-depressants are also women who have experienced trauma. You question that this is 'coincidence'. You wonder, 'Is there a conNection?' You subject 'mental health issues' to contestation: Are they mental health Issues?

Out of these questions emerges another strong and powerful question, which holds a sense of deep historical roots: there has 'Always been a Question in my Mind':

A and i suppose
i it Just has Always been a Question in my Mind in Terms of like when you
you know when you Talk about kind of—

the aMount of Women who have Died as a result of domestic Violence for
example
or Family Violence
And

i suppose there's Always been a Question in my Mind about you know
What about the Women

Who are Dead

as— as an Indirect result of of domestic Violence or Trauma?
y' know so
Women Who
—committed Suicide
—beCame adDicted to Drugs and Alcohol

d'you know there's like there's there's Just a Sense of Un
an Un UnHeard

Group    of Women
whose Stories are Never going to be Heard

and they're Never going to be Counted in
In the    the Toll of
when Looking at staTistics For
the likes of domestic Violence and Trauma

You speak then of one terrible consequence of violence against women: women who are dead. But you expand the terms of talk about the amount of women who have died from domestic and family violence to include

the Women

Who are Dead

as— as an Indirect result of    of domestic Violence or Trauma?

You speak here of women who committed suicide or became addicted to drugs and alcohol as a result of their experiences of violence and trauma. You challenge the limits of official statistical knowledge of domestic violence, because these women are Never going to be Counted in the Toll.

Your refusal of the legitimacy of official knowledge holds your steadfast connection to a sense of the women who are UnHeard, and 'whose Stories are Never going to be Heard'. In your attunement to the UnHeard, you unsettle the naming of issues and the labels they depend upon - your questions proliferate as you reflect on young people becoming addicted to drugs or alcohol, and you open up the possibility of 'More to it':

it's Just—    to think there's More Questions to be Asked
in terms of you know
Was their issue really "Drug adDiction" or?
Was there More—Is there More to it?

*The Box*

With all these questions, and all your taking issues apart and opening up new possible connections, I wonder about the possibility of naming your critique:

S —
and for You in in Hearing these stories and This Question! that you
This Question that you're Holding

—so for so many women Who Have exPerienced some kind of Trauma\
say
A \uhum

S and— and So who have Told you their Stories
but You have Noticed that a Lot of these women Are
y' know Come under this Category y'know are
are "Talking about their experience\ in terms of 'Mental Health'"
A \uhum uhum uhum

S and are Heavily med- y'know on Anti-dePressants
A Ummm umm

S ...
and so they're Living with
the exPerience of aBuse and they're Also Living
With
y'know These iDeas of— that They're
...
... — what you would call a "NormaliSation"\ of
A \uhum uhum

S y'know "you're dePressed" y'know "they're Mental Health Issues"

A uhum uhum

S —How would you what is there something what would
what would you call that?
is there a Name?

You respond to my grappling for words by picking up again your own word which I have reintroduced here – normalisation. And you expand wonderfully on the notion of 'a norm' by turning it into the image of a Box:

A	i Think it's about—

just—

i Think it's about kind of Fitting In to a Norm

S	Umm

A	y'know soCiety Has to Put it in a Box

S	ummm

A	so it's like Oh well—you know "dePression" is Easier than
Lifting the Lid on

S	umm

A	the efFects of the Trauma

S	yeah

A	y'know Which as a society we Don't want to see
y'know so it's Often
Even y'know Even though women may have Told their stories

S	yeah

A	the resPonse Often is Still to put them to Give them mediCation

You create an image of dePression as a box with a closed lid which holds and conceals the effects of the trauma. You infuse your image with the activity of social control, concealment and containment: society 'Put[s] it in', and doesn't want to see the effects, because the box is easier than lifting the lid. You then bring these ideas back to sustain your protest against medical responses to women's stories. Responding to women's stories with medication is a refusal to see the effects of trauma, and is putting them into a closed box.

As I listen to you speak, I am drawn to your image of 'Lifting the Lid' as an image of resistance. I wonder how you imagine this:

S	oKay

So

so there's a Kind of
so so
for You there's a Sense Of
there Seems to be a Sense of
that there's there's "a Lid"

A yeah

S on Stuff

A yeah

S And that
so if—so
if this "Lid" was "Lifted"

A uhum

S What do you iMagine
what would that— what would it Look like the "Lifting of the Lid"?
...

A i Don't Know i mean i think We have exAmples of it in terms of like if we Look at Similar
—examples of Church
—the Church aBuse Scandals over the last you know

S Umm

A Decade

S yeah

A you know

—i supPose it's Similar to That in terms of
y'know People Lifting the Lid to try and get some Sort of
of—

Not recogNition but—

Some sort of— aw the Word is Gone

—

VerifiCation

S Ummm

A you know and i Think that's what's Missing for a Lot of the women that we would
Deal with
is that you know Their Lives are not Verified in Any way
their exPeriences are not
there's No VerifiCation that they Happened or that they Mattered

S Ummm

I don't know if I have ever been held in such enthrallment for the sounding of a Word. When you break the first silence by saying, 'Not recognition', I sense the care and deliberation in your choice of words. I stay as quiet as a mouse, poised on the edge of possibility. When you break the second silence with 'the Word is Gone', I know there exists a specific word for you. I sense its importance. I don't want it to be Gone! On this precarious edge, the silence

becomes charged with heightened hope and anticipation. And when you break the third silence with the Word, 'VerifiCation', your voice flows into a fluent rhythm which connects you with the women you work with, and bears a profound testimony to the importance of their Lives as an event of existence. You name what's Missing in many of Their Lives: the verification that their Lives and their exPeriences Happened and that they Mattered.

With Verification, you open up a counter-narrative to that of putting women's stories in a Box of dePression. You assert Verifying responses from another person to women's stories of trauma which counter medicating responses. You also then expose giving tablets as utterly diminishing the Happening and the Mattering of women's Lives and exPeriences.

*Coping*

S    and so for You

there's    there's    there's the Questioning

A    umm

S    there are These Questions
that are    or that seem to be very Present and aLive for You

A    ummm

S    and— have you—
have you Always Had that kind of Questioning    There in reGard to these Issues or?

how did it?

A    No i Think it's    well    i supPose it Would Certainly have been Part of

—y'know in Terms of Looking at

—in looking at my own exPeriences— of Growing Up and    of  of Violence and Trauma
and    i suppose
Looking    Listening to other people's Stories and
maybe reFlecting on

"what's Different?"

or What has been     what
i suppose     in Terms of
exPeriencing something that—
you have an Option in terms of how you Deal with it or
Do you even have an option? That's a question do you know what i mean in terms of what
people are Made     with Coping Skills or
a Lack of coping skills and it's     like
i suppose iNitially the question would be like     you know
"how can Some people deal with Some stuff or Why do people deal—Some people deal with stuff in One way and then Other people will choose a Different way"

S     Umm

A     d'you know?
—and over the Years i've kind of     i've Come to the realiSation maybe that
you know— when     People are Dealing with
Hurtful and Harmful Issues
there are some very—     Public     or
Present ways of—     y'know that are very Obvious to people
Who Know a Story they can See kind of     you know
Where damage is Done to somebody or where     y'know the efFects of trauma
And yet     for Other people
the effects might be still There     they've just     Managed it in a Different Way

S     okay

A     d' you know     and i suppose That would have been the iNitial—
kind of Questioning or—
Reasoning and Then
you know from Hearing     these Stories—     from Women     being Part of
of—
the enVironment of Working with women and Working with women     you know
who've experienced domestic Violence and Trauma
but who Also experience mental Health issues     Alcoholism  Drug addiction
d'you know

S     Ummm

A     and just i suppose Making the Links
do you know—

The foundation of your initial Questioning and Reasoning has its roots in your own childhood experiences of Violence and Trauma, and in your connecting with other People who are Dealing with Hurtful and Harmful Issues. From your own experiences and listening to other people's stories, the question for you was 'what's Different?' Around your central

recognition of people as active and agentic in coping with trauma, you open up a traumatised world of people with diverse and ongoing coping strategies. Some of these are Public and Obvious, and some are not. Your questions open up a sense of mystery about 'Why ... Some people deal with stuff in One way and then Other people will choose a Different way'.

You talk then of Making the Links. The questions you raise from Hearing women's Stories are enabled by your Making the Links with your initial Reasoning. It is therefore from a position of connection and solidarity rooted in the knowledge and analysis of your own experiences that you contest the labelling of people through their coping strategies.

*Waters*

I wonder then about the importance of feminism for you in supporting these recognitions:

S in Terms of being Able to Have the kinds of recog- recogNitions around all of
This
that you Have
How important would you Say
—like being a Feminist or your
y' know your enGagement with Feminism has has Been?

In your response, you speak of the importance of 'conNecting them to as Human Rights issues'. But you also describe the central importance of a knowledge of wrongness:

A and Seeing
y'Know what—This is Wrong
—kind of from a from a Sense of it being wrong
i supPose it's Moved to an underStanding and a Knowledge that it's wrong

I ask you then 'can You fill me In a bit on that Difference between "a Sense of it being Wrong" and then "a Knowledge and an underStanding of it being wrong"?' Again, you reiterate the importance of human rights, and speak of becoming 'aWare of things like the Beijing Platform'. But you then locate your knowledge and understanding about violence and abuse in the historical and cultural context of your growing up: of abuse not being spoken about, and not being Seen as an Issue:

A But

i'm i'm Also aware that I grew Up in a generation where
y' know doMestic Violence Wasn't against the Law kind of or it Certainly didn't Seem to be or
...
—"aBuse" Certainly wasn't even Spoken about it was y'know Prior to the to the Church Issue

S yeah

A —
d' you know So
so there was a Kind of a

a Need to kind of Clear the Waters d'you know to kind of to Get to that sense

S Ummm

A because Lots of Other people that i Knew or would Know Wouldn't see it as an issue

'a Need to kind of Clear the Waters' – what a beautiful evocative phrase! It immediately draws me in ...

S sorry when You say "Clear the Waters"
how how what do you mean?

A in Terms of Seeing it as a as a disTinct Issue
For women

S okay right

A inStead of like
"This is just the way Life should Be"

S okay

A —And i think growing Up
Certainly Growing Up in a Working class Background
—y'know—

I suppose
Growing up in a Working class Background Where
Women kind of Had this attitude of themSelves and of other People that

"you Made your Bed so you Lie in it"
S yeah

A d'you know?—

and Moving On from That
and Seeing    and Being able to Question    and See issues for what they Are and
and aBuse for what it Is and that
and underStanding that it's Wrong

You use the metaphor of Waters to describe this immersion in cultural meanings, locating yourself in your own working-class background. Your image evokes for me a difference between a reality which is in some way muddy or cloudy, and clear waters in which an issue can be distinctly perceived. To 'Clear the Waters' is an active image of Seeing, of Being able to Question, and of Moving. It is about Moving On from a static and stagnant 'This is just the way Life should Be', carried for women in phrases such as, 'you Made your Bed so you Lie in it'. Seeing an alternative reality of 'issues for what they Are and aBuse for what it Is' involves a questioning and understanding which moves to an ethical position of 'it's Wrong'.

'and can You Tell me a little bit about that Journey of "Moving On from That"?', I ask you then.

*There Are Other Worlds*

In the story which you tell me, lie the depths of your question, 'Why do people deal—Some people deal with stuff in One way and then Other people will choose a Different way?"

—it's  it's    it's kind of a Fluke    in a Way in that
y' know—
I
the biggest Influence on my— for    the Whole of my life has been
—a deSire to Read

Your relationship with reading and books is through one of desire, and the significance of reading in your life. There are no limits in your relationship with reading books, apart from what is available to 'Pick Up':

i i reMember like Reading kind of Books
going beYond my own Age y'Know—

And so i would Just read Anything at All that i could kind of Pick Up

But what you could Pick Up was culturally exclusive:

and at that Time in Ireland— parTicularly in terms of
Children's Literature
Wasn't quite adVanced in terms of there Wasn't any
—kind of roddy Doyles or whatever there was No
there was No— Sense of working class literature aVailable for children
so
you know you were
What i was Reading
was Very Much
i suppose a Middle Class Representation

By the same token, there were no cultural expectations or immediate supports for your deSire to Read:

and Being quite Isolated in that Nobody i Knew liked to read
Nobody it certainly Wasn't people in my Family couldn't underStand it and
That kind of thing
and y'know and Certainly i Didn't kind of y'know

for Lots of different reasons i Didn't kind of go on in college there was No
expecTation that we would go to college Any of us or—
and i Grew i Lived i spent Most of my life
Not living with my biological Parents kind of Moving aRound to different
Houses and Stuff like that

But your deSire to Read was so powerful, and so all-absorbing, that it went against all these cultural odds:

S How did you Come to start Reading?
How were the Books made aVailable for you? or

A i Actually don-
i Went into School the First my First experience of School was
i Went in
i Sat down at a Desk
and a LadyBird book was put in Front of me
and i Literally didn't take my head Out of a book

for the next Ten or Fifteen years

And yet, it was precisely this failure of representation, this radical encounter with difference, that for you was the springwell of your imagination of 'this other World':

> d'you know so when you're Growing Up
> with books like Enid Blyton and That kind of Thing
> y'know you    you iMagine this other World
> that Doesn't represent your Own

As you continue to tell your story about the importance of reading in your life, you create a powerful sense of contrast between the world which you experience around you, and the world which you encounter in books. One difference emerges centres on children being seen and heard.

A    the Person at the Centre of the Story was a Child  d'you know So
     and    and they Had an imPortance   and i think Growing Up
     withIn the   kind of the Structure   Both from a Cultural point of view i think
     y'know

S    ummm

A    —And speCific to my Own situAtion

S    ummm

A    Children were Definitely Seen and not Heard   kind of   d'you know?

S    ummm

     and So the
     but in the enid Blyton books
     you got a Sense   of Other possiBilities

A    Yeah
     And i think of Happiness

There is an association with a child 'being heard' and a child being 'the person at the centre of the story' so that your reading made available for you a sense of Happiness. But you clarify that the significance of your Reading went beyond particular books, and was because of a sense that 'there are Other Worlds outSide the One that I Live in':

A ... it was the Reading that
Not Even like Even beYond kind of enid blyton or whatever
that It was about
"there are Other Worlds outSide the One that I Live in"

S yeah

A And and there was Something that kind of
Very unconsciously but from a Very young Age
I Recognised that "This is Not the way I live"

S in the Books

A yeah

S yeah

A and That i Think brought Hope
that i didn't Have to
Follow
What i Saw

In this recognition of Other Worlds, the sense of 'This is not the way I live', you identify the bringing of Hope. You link Hope with the idea that 'i didn't Have to Follow What i Saw'. In this sense of Hope, you evoke an alternative path, an alternative future, and a sense of agency and choice in relation to the future.

You talk then about an interest in aNalysis and reFlection, and Moving In to a new genre of books:

A and Then kind of from a very young Age was Interested in
y' Know—

sort of—

aNalysis and reFlection so
Moving In to kind of—
Popular psyChology books and self Help books and that kind of thing
...
i supPose given the Fact that i Would have felt kind of from Early Teens that i
d'you Know through Different experiences

S ummm

A as Part of what i've Already desCribed
that there was a Lot that i needed to Fix about myself
y'know
...

that i Didn't have a support system in terms of—
within a Family
And So it was kind of aGain
i Recognised that i could get inforMation and i could Get kind of i could
—Analyse or Find Answers within Books

S Ummm

A my First kind of Point of Call

A new sense of the importance of reading and of books as part of your life and your world emerges. You turned to books as your First Point of Call with the questions arising from your 'need to fix'. The recognition of this need, taking steps towards this through 'aNalysis, 'reFlection' 'getting information' and 'finding answers' itself suggests a refusal to accept that 'it Is what it Is'

In your saying, 'i Didn't have a support system in terms of/within a Family', you suggest that books were a support system, a substitute for family support. They were for you 'my First kind of Point of Call'. There is a sense here of books as your family and your friends: another world which is now also a central part of your world.

When I shared these reflections with you during our second conversation, this sparked a dialogue about books, the connections between 'real worlds' and 'other worlds', about story and otherness, about agency and connection. This is a long quote now coming up but it's all important! It starts with me reading what I've just written ...

S "aNother World which is Now"
so like Even though you were talking about "there is another World"
but it's like they're Actually "now a Central part\ of your world"
A \Yeah Yeah

Yeah

yeah

S ...
like they’re not People obviously but Still
it’s kind of your
They’re like your Family Substitute

A Yeah Yeah

well i supPose y’know it it it’s Obviously not the Same as exPeriencing something With withIn a family or withIn a relationship or withIn a Friendship

S Yeah

A but y’know when you when you View
and exPerience and the different Interconnected relationships and whatever
Through a book

S Yeah

A you Still take On that as Learning

S of Course yeah

A do you know?

S that’s Right yeah

A you Can’t
it Lacks yourSelf as as Agency in it do you know what i mean? you can’t see how You would be

S yeah but you can iMagine

A but “you Can imagine” Yeah

Yeah

S like Even the very fact of seeing “the Child at the centre of the Story”

A uhum

S it Almost suggests that well as far as You were concerned You were right There at the Centre of the Story!

A (*laughs*)
Yeah

and No actually i    i Think i Wasn't and i think That's imPortant because

S Okay

A —to    to the Work that i do Now it's Always about  it's Always about
an Intrigue
around the Other Person

S ummmm

A aRound this Character

S Right okay Yeah

A Whether it's    y'know Somebody i'm listening to in a Group or somebody

S Yeah

A y'Know it's    it's about
it's Always about Them

S yeah

A do you Know?

S yeah

A —Yeah i Think

d'you know and That    That would have
developed an interest in    in People
outSide of  y'Know what i Mean?—    outSide of Family and
and Friends and whatever Is that Seeing the
the reLationships and interconNectedness and    and i suppose
Taking that Questioning around it    out Into the real world
Almost
do you know?

S yeah
yeah

A Maybe

S yeah

As you engage with the issue of the differences, boundaries and mergings between the other-worldness of books and the real world, you express this firstly in terms of a 'View and exPerience ... Through a book' which is linked to Interconnected relationships. It is a View which can be taken on as Learning for the real world. The key difference you discern between the Book World and the Real World is that the book 'Lacks yourSelf as Agency in it'.

Now, here is where I come in with my not very narrative-practice intervention of suggesting that you iMagine agency, and that 'the Child at the centre of the Story' Almost suggests that You were right There at the Centre of the Story!' Now, this intervention no doubt reflects my own reading of Enid Blyton as a child, because I definitely imagined myself plonk smack in the thick of the action. I wrote stories in Blyton-esque language where I solved the mysteries. I was at the Centre of the Story.

But in the more delicate and nuanced connections you make between the living of life and your reading, the question of 'Who is at the Centre of the Story?' takes on a whole new meaning. My centring of self as Central Agent emphatically does not hold. For you, this is important for the work that you do. The key connection Always, for you, is one of an 'Intrigue around the Other'. In books, the Other is the character. In real life, the Other Person.

This is such a beautiful knowledge. Your sense of Intrigue suggests that your engagement with Other Worlds was not one of being absorbed, but of holding difference. Here, you make connections between your own listening to women's stories, and its narrative foundations in your reading through your sense of an intrigue around Other Worlds. There is a sense in which this links with the idea of Verification, an Intrigue about the Woman at the Centre of the Story which holds her difference and her other-worldness.

It also suggests an alternative relational agency based on this Intrigue. Your final words here add the agency of Questioning to Seeing reLationships and interconNectedness:

> Is that Seeing the
> the reLationships and interconNectedness and and i suppose
> Taking that Questioning around it out Into the real world

*There's Something about When You Name Something as a Human Rights Issue*

Towards the end of our first conversation, you introduce with laughter a statement you say would horrify Lady Gaga:

A Y'know And— i mean i've been Part of the women's project for ten Years now
but As i said it's Probably only in the last Three Years that it's Really kind of made Sense to me!

and Lady Gaga would would be Horrified to Hear that! (*laughs*)

S (*laughs)*
well How do you mean? What has "made Sense" to you?

There follows what to me is a feminist analysis of women's human rights of extraordinary power and incisiveness. Your focus is the power of Naming something a human rights issue, and you set your learning in the context of Banúlacht feminist education:

but it was kind of in Terms of in the banÚlacht Training
there's Something about
when you Name something as a Human Rights Issue

(*with a knock on the table accompanying each of the words 'Name' 'Human' and 'Rights'*)

...
but there was Just Something about that
kind of Naming it as "a human rights Issue"
and Seeing it from a Feminist

S ummm

A persPective that—
was Different to the AcaDemic
Women's studies—

You mobilise an understanding of women's rights which gathers your story with the stories of other women:

A yeah when i could see when i when i Had an understanding of What
human rights Are

and What people Have a Right to

S Ummm

A i Recognised kind of the Women that i've Worked with
i recognised i seen mySelf
i seen Other Women that i Know

S yeah

A and All of a sudden i Seen us All As being Violated
of our human Rights
Which

which Lent or Gave a
a Sense of
CrediBility to our Stories

'Human rights' for you is no abstract body of knowledge. The human beings it confers rights on are no vague abstractions. Your claiming of human rights is centred on a moment of how you newly recognised yourself, women you work with, and other women you know, and what you suddenly newly Seen. Through this Seen, you connect all of you as being Violated of our human Rights. But the positive power of this critical Seeing of Violation, was 'to Give a Sense of CrediBility to our Stories'.

*Not Chasing Windmills*

While your 'Questions would have been There from Long beFore that,' Credibility to our Stories becomes aligned with an acKnowledgement that your questions Matter:

S ...
and perHaps these
Questions There for you as Well in terms of these "DisconNects"?

A that yeah that Certainly those Questions would have been There
from Long beFore that

S yeah

A but i Didn't have a sense of where
y'know

that they Mattered    in a way or that
i Knew that they Mattered    but—

it's Sometimes it's Hard to kind of Have the Courage of your conVictions and i think
Having an underStanding that the
you know
that These were "human rights Issues"
and that y'know And that there was
that there was these kind of
these Processes in Place to Try and
make Sure that they didn't Happen or whatever

S    Ummm

A    Gives you a sense of Courage i suppose or a Sense of
you know "i'm Not
chasing    Windmills"
d'you know?
...
Just a Sense of—
i suppose that That
acKnowledgement that    y'know "Yeah    these Questions Matter"

S    yeah

A    y'know and Just because people don't want to Hear them
Doesn't Mean that they Don't

S    Ummm

You link your Questions to the Courage of your conVictions, and also how holding and sustaining Courage can be hard. Your expression 'i'm Not chasing    Windmills' powerfully conveys the affirmation of your questions as real, as not illusions. For you, knowledge of human rights processes has the effect of responding to your questions as an acKnowledgement that they Matter. This gives Courage to resist people who don't want to Hear them: their refusal to Hear has lost its power to mean your questions don't matter.

And yet, I hear anew your Courage in holding fast to your questions from Long before That, and to your own knowledge that they Mattered, and how you've kept them alive despite people not wanting to Hear them.

*Anger and Drive*

Then, in this acknowledgement of your questions Mattering, you revoice the Question that has Always been in your Mind with a newly inflected vigour, and 'Even More of a sense of Anger':

A y'know and and Just and

Even More of a sense of Anger because I Know

i—
i have a Sense that there are Many Women who Lost their Lives
and Nobody even Knows that they exIsted
and What they Lived
d'you know?

so That

i supPose is the kind of

the Drive

S ummm

A do you know?—

but As i said i Haven't kind of figured out What to Do about it or What to
you know How to even Name it As an Issue

S ummm

A y' know but i
like
there's Something Missing on the Register
y' know when we Talk about domestic violence or we Talk about
y'know the efFects
there are So Many efFects of domestic Violence and aBuse
that are Never going to be rePorted and people will Never know that they
Happened

S ummm

This question is for you 'the Drive'. You place it at the heart of your political agency and your knowledge. It reaches into the very soul of human existence, to the knowledge that each one of us exists, to the place between life and death, and of lives that matter and that mattered. For me, it newly reverberates the whole framework of women's human rights, igniting it with the questions, experiences and struggles which are carried in this question.

These are the words that had the four of us so overwhelmed with emotion last year:

> i have a Sense that there are Many Women who Lost their Lives
> and Nobody even     Knows that they exIsted
> and What they Lived

With this knowledge, you contest the boundaries of official discourses of domestic violence and abuse: 'there's Something Missing on the Register'.

This is all so powerful, so passionate. It is a power sustained by insisting on marking the place of non-existence, of silence, of women whose lives will never be verified – even in the face of its own unspeakability: 'How to even Name it As an Issue'.

A    but it was very Clear    and diRect and

Having    the likes of BeiJing
to Hang something On
Say "no This is what We've been Told we deServe"

S    Ummm

A    Y'know
i think there's a Strength
or a Power in being Able to Hold somebody acCountable
or a Government acCountable
and Maybe up till Then i Hadn't been able to have that sense of "Who's
acCountable for    for
for Women's Lives
and Women's exPeriences?"
as opPosed to    y'know "Just get On with it whatEver Way You Can

Or Don't"     d'you Know   and That's
...
there's Something about Nearly
"it's   Women's own Fault if they can't Deal with
these—
imMensely trauMatic exPeriences"

The acknowledgement of 'no This is what We've been Told we deServe' is also a refusal. It clears the waters to reveal the question, 'Who's acCountable for Women's Lives and Women's exPeriences?' It enables a new position of political Power and Strength: to Hold a Government acCountable. Your earlier questions about diverse coping strategies and the labelling of coping strategies are newly animated. You transform them into a protest against the expectation of coping itself, the injunction to 'Just get On with it whatEver Way You Can/Or Don't', and the Fault that is placed upon women who can't Deal with the imMensely trauMatic exPeriences they're carrying.

*Structures in Place to Silence*

And then you deliver a political speech of mind-boggling dimensions and interconnections, joining questions about the validation and meaning of women's Lives, with a perspective which registers 'Lifting the Lid' as a Global Issue. You overlay structures which support violence to Keep Happening, with structures to Keep Quiet about it. You address the damage of silence and the denial of meaning, with a resounding 'No it's Clearly Not' to the silencing effects of 'but sure That's the way it Is'. You analyse the Beijing Platform for Action as an issue of Voice, and round it all off with a new question:

S    and   and—
and How imPortant
was That like that Shift of Emphasis from    the Woman if you like

A    ummm

S    or" Blaming Victims" so to speak
to Holding Governments to acCount?

A    i Think it was imPortant In that
i Knew

i would have Had that Sense of being Able to See that you Can't hold women account—
y'know what i mean? that it's Not women's Fault

S yeah yes

A —But i suppose the Piece that was Missing was
in underStanding
well Who's Is it?
d'you know—
and Maybe Seeing i suppose Seeing it in Terms of
y'know that This is Not just
Something that Happens beHind closed Doors in in the Home or
In whatever institution or whatever
that there are Structures in Place that supPort this to Keep Happening

S yeah

A and there are Structures in Place
Not even to "keep it Happening"
there are Structures in Place to Keep Quiet about it

S okay

A and That's i think the Damage that that Happens for Women
is Not necessarily the
Impact
of
the eVent itSelf
it's the Fact that they're Silenced Afterwards

S okay

A and that Voice
that Coming Back to
if women Don't have a Voice about What they've exPerienced
they Don't have any valiDation that their Lives are have any Meaning
or are Real

S okay
yeah

A do you Know?

S yeah

A and i think That's what the kind of the
you know—
It was something that that i Knew was a reAlity beFore kind of doing the
human rights i Knew that that's kind of that's what was Happening

S yeah

A In that
you know that That's what was Wrong for many women
or That was A Wrong for women—

but i suppose it kind of Helped to Lift
that Lid of
"yeah but sure That's the way it Is" d'you know
was Saying you know "No it's Clearly Not" if
If this is such a Global Issue
If these issues for women
All of the issues for women
that are Named
do you know?

S yeah

A —And i think All of them Speak
y'know Beijing Is about Voice Ultimately
it's about if Women have eduCation they have a Voice
y'know—
in terms of women's involvement in Politics and and Public Life is about Voice
do you know so
so the—
Then That y'know
If all of our if All of our
Difficulties
aRound That
or all the Problems
are around Voice

there's a Question around "Who's Hearing women?"

at Any kind of Meaningful level maybe

S ummmm

A do you know?

S i Do yeah

With love, friendship and solidarity,

Siobhán

**Dear Clare,**

It seems like a long time now since I sat with you for the first time in that now-familiar room of the women's centre, you in the armchair and me on the couch, our cups of tea beside us, the recorder in between the two of us, and this is how your story began:

S: ...
now in Terms Then of y'know— a— y'know "a Story of Voice
that has Some significance to You as a Feminist community Activist"
now You were saying that—
from what— You You thought that you would be more Interested in the
"Silencing of voice"

C: umm
yeah well it's not— i just—we— As a Feminist

S yeah

C As a Worker

S ummm

C As just a parTicipant in Life you know i—
i Talk to Women All the Time
proFessionally and Personally
And i supPose i beLieve that
i've been— this parTicular type of Work i guess i've been doing for
Maybe nearly Twenty Years
and i supPose because of the Nature of the way we do Business in— Society
I just feel that i'm in Probably a very Privileged poSition
—both— Personally and proFessionally
in terms of Hearing people's stories

S yeah

C Or getting the opportunity to Listen to people

S yeah

C And i Don't think That Happens Generally for
for People
—for public Servants for

People    Who    Are
Here    to Serve    soCiety
As in    they get Paid    to Serve    soCiety
So i Don’t think    that
Women’s—

sometimes    or Often
HeartBreaking Stories
or Difficult stories
or disTurbing stories
are                Heard
y’know?

You begin this narrative by naming the position you’re responding to me from. You speak ‘As a Feminist’. You speak ‘As a Worker’. But even in your speaking, you undo and you enrich these categories. They become ‘As    just a parTicipant in Life’. What a beautiful phrase! For me, you liberate notions of life from all those ideas which bind it to individualised, separated life-sequences. Life in this expression becomes a shared reality in which we all participate.

I hear this sense of participation – of your participation - in the language through which you speak of stories. Because the stories you describe here are not simply ‘stories’. Many of them are often,

HeartBreaking Stories
or Difficult stories
or disTurbing stories

To describe a story as ‘HeartBreaking’, ‘Difficult’ or ‘disTurbing’opens up a space of both the teller and the listener. You announce yourself as an affected listener who has been moved by these listenings. And open to being moved. I can still hear your voice in these utterances. I can still remember how you lingered in the space, drawing out ever-deepening reverberations of ‘Stories’, I remember the new accent of each new breath, bringing me from the immediacy of ‘HeartBreaking’ to the reverberations of ‘disTurbing’.

Your narrative is itself for me a site of disturbance. Here already you disturb simple assumptions of voice and hearing. You do not propose that in your hearing and listening, women's voices have been definitively heard and listened to. The relational space you narrate is not one which begins and ends with acts of listening to women's stories. Your account of stories heard is framed by and embedded in a political narrative of women's stories not being heard:

> So i Don't think that
> Women's—
>
> sometimes or Often
> HeartBreaking Stories
> or Difficult stories
> or disTurbing stories
> are Heard

You hear then a not-heardness. You hear silencing.

You lay claim to the political importance of your hearing as a position which is not readily available to others, and particularly 'for public Servants for/ People Who Are / Here to Serve soCiety'. You do not take the possibility of hearing stories forgranted. Hearing women's stories is for you 'Probably a very Privileged poSition'. You speak of 'getting the opportunity to Listen to people'. This sense of privilege is for you defined in relation to dominant ways of social life, 'because of the Nature of the way we do Business in—Society'.

As you continue this narrative, you open up a critique of power and knowledge, and you name this 'way we do Business' as linked to bureaucracy:

C and So you Have people i suppose in positions of Power
that get to Make deCisions
Based on
Extremely Limited inforMation that they have
and so so That's what i mean by "the Silencing of voices" is that
i Just would really
Like if we Took

If we took a more
hoListic apProach to
and i'm i'm Not talking about a feminist organisation i'm talking about a social
Welfare office i'm talking about a
—you know those Places that we
—asSociate with with buReaucracy or deCision-making that
might Have a huge Impact on our lives

S ummm

C y' Know? so
so That's what i Mean i Feel women are
very Silenced
that they don't Get to tell their story
or they Get to t- or they Tell their Story
and— and— People neither Have
the caPacity Nor the Will someTimes
to Feel! i supPose you know to

to Make a— a conNection with that per- you know Just to Feel

it's Like a

it's Like A
it's Not just about the voice it's about the
deSensitising of Stories in a way
if you Ever Actually Get to Tell your Story
to— there's a DeSensi-tiSation
if if if You Or or maybe a Judgement or a Lack of
underStanding or comPassion y'Know?
toWards people and i Think that that has a huge Impact on people's lives

and i Don't Think it Needs to Be that way

Power and decision-making are for you based on 'Extremely Limited inforMation'. You suggest therefore that women's stories carry crucial information, but that this remains outside the locus of official knowledge. The 'silencing of voices' is also then the silencing of knowledge and information. It takes for you the form of particular practices of decision-making: bureaucracy. Your own privileged position then of hearing women's stories is also a particularly knowledged position. By the same token, this is a position of knowledge which is also not heard.

But in the 'huge Impact on our lives' which you describe here, there is more at stake for you than the information content of knowledge and stories, and whether stories are told or not told. You attend to the relationality of the act of telling a story in places such as a social welfare office. And out of an account which draws attention to a lack of capacity or will to feel and to make a connection, you create a new phrase: the 'deSensitising of Stories'. You insert stories into a sensory world of connection and disconnection. Desensitisation includes judgements, lack of understanding and compassion. But you make these lackings active. They move 'toWards people'. You repeat again: they have 'a huge Impact on people's lives'.

These themes become expanded and increasingly more nuanced as you revisit them throughout our conversations. At one point, for instance, our conversation about the singing group in the women's centre takes a narrative turn as you pick up again this issue of bureaucracy. Here, you make a powerful statement, creating a litany which conveys the unrelenting hold of bureaucratic practices on Everyday Life:

C we're Very Slow in soCiety
to Look For soLutions
we See we See y'Know and aGain and i Don't want to Keep i suppose
reFerring to bureaucracy but i mean in our Everyday lives

in Everyday Life People have to Deal with buReaucracy in terms of
getting social welfare Payments signing up for Fás or
getting
a Rent allowance or a community Welfare Payment
getting a Job — Having a Job!
whatEver- whatEver— your Role is in Life even if—
or whatEver you're doing
if you're Parenting aLone
if you're Parenting at Home as in you're Choosing to stay at Home—
you Still have to Go through Bureaucratic Systems if your Child is Sick or
y'Know you'll Have to Fill in a Form for This or you'll have to
so we're inVolved we're imMersed in buReaucracy
and i Just Think That
it i Just Think That
we're Un-iMaginative and Un-creAtive
aBout
the Way we do Business in society

And when you See Maybe
people Suffering
or when you See maybe— people are Suffering

and Sometimes you might

i Might feel that they're Suffering unnecesSarily— it's Not Necessary
that they are Suffering as much
—we could Lessen that Burden for people

S yeah

C it Doesn't it Doesn't
—Why Why would we make it so Hard for people you Know?
by Putting them Through
—y'know If your— If your Life is
is is Burdensome or Difficult
Why Would a "Kind and Caring soCiety"
Choose
to Make it
More difficult? Is it beCause
it's Bureaucratically Simpler?
"this is the Easiest soLution" As in so "we're Looking for Easy soLutions"
so we're—
and That kind of we're looking for Easy soLutions
to Fix Problems
—Short-term Quick Fixes Rather than
Long-Term
Qualitative soLutions

Here, you open up a scenario of Everyday Life as one of having to 'Deal with bureAucracy'. Everyday life is marked and shaped by requirements 'to Fill in a Form'. Your voice takes on a sing-song rhythm which powerfully evokes these ongoing mundane activities of Everyday Life, and bureaucratic immersions:

getting social welfare Payments signing up for Fás or
getting
a Rent allowance or a community Welfare Payment
getting a Job — Having a Job!

Although form-filling and dealing with bureaucracy applies ‘whatEver your Role is in Life,’ the ‘you’s’ of your address, who here inhabit your thought, move in particular contexts. These are subjects of the welfare state, people who deal with social welfare offices, people parenting alone, parenting at home, and who might have a child who is sick. Class, gender and poverty seem to create a context for these dealings with buReaucracy.

In my own reading for this thesis, I encounter the word ‘bureaucracy’ quite a bit. As you know, one of the issues I’m exploring is ‘neoliberal governmentality’, and bureaucracy doesn’t get a good press in these critical readings either. But now when I read the word ‘bureaucracy’, it is indelibly marked for me with the distinctiveness of your voice, your critique, and your ethical awareness. Here, you are a witness to Suffering: you ‘See people Suffering’. Out of this Seeing, you raise a series of questions about suffering, of lives which are ‘Burdensome or Difficult’, about bureaucratic systems as producing further suffering, about the why of this suffering, the why of ‘Putting them Through’ these systems. There is for you a contradiction between the idea of a ‘Kind and Caring soCiety’, and systems which ‘make it    so Hard    for people’.

Your attunement to suffering is one which is attuned to trauma and pain in the lives of many people, and of many women in particular. In our second conversation, you respond to your own earlier account of the desensitisation of stories by attending to the ‘forced’ telling of stories. You develop another phrase : ‘when Systems reCeive a Story’:

C    —And—  and  and Some people are Not
     not Only
     or they’re Not    so Some people are Forced to tell a Story that they don’t Want to
     tell

S    umm

C    And—
     and then    Some people
     Simply
     Don’t
     Want
     to Tell their Story

S	yeah

C	For
i think it came Up there in the Diagram
most Likely   in my Mind   to be for trauMatic reasons because it's too Painful
to speak about or because
they Haven't
Got
the—
the—   i supPose the—
it's Not "opporTunity"
they Haven't got
the supPorts

S	yeah

C	they Need

S	yeah

C	to   enAble   that
Story   Even to unFold   in a  hoListic

S	yeah

C	Natural   environ-  Safe environment  Safe   being   the First thing
—people Must feel Safe to tell a Story

S	yeah

C	you Know?

S	yeah

C	so   so Even
so Even when you're getting
Even when people are Getting a story
Or
let's   Systems   i'm going to call them "Systems"!
[illeg] going to call them "People"  because i Don't!

S	yeah no yes

C	y'know but when Systems   reCeive a Story

S	Yes

C	From a Woman
y’Know? they don’t Even—   they—   they Won’t   Be Getting   the Story they’ll be Getting
the Basics
that asSists   or enAbles the Woman to Get   what she Needs
at that Given Time

S	yes

C	whether it be   a House   or a Room

S	yes

C	or Food   or whatEver it may Be   you know?

Here as you speak, you reconstitute the phrase ‘when people are Getting a story’ in order to shift the focus from ‘people’ to ‘systems’: ‘when Systems reCeive a Story’. The effect of this is to relocate the people, the public servants who are getting stories, from the level of the individual into larger systemic contexts.

Bureaucratic systems demand the telling of stories. But you position people as active in relation to the telling of their own stories. Some people do not want to tell their stories. You link this resistance to telling a story to the pain and trauma which may be at stake for many who tell a story. You make a distinction between ‘the Story’ and

> the Basics
> that asSists   or enAbles the Woman to Get   what she Needs
> at that Given Time

You offer as an example a woman with a need for a house, for a room or for food, actively negotiating her own exposure of herself as she gives ‘the Basics’ to get what she needs, rather than ‘the Story’. You make a distinction here also between the “opporTunity” to tell a story, and the environmental ‘supPorts’ for the telling of the story. The telling of a story is for you an ‘unfolding’. The unfolding of a story can only be enabled by a ‘holistic ... natural ... safe environment’. A sense of safety is ‘the First thing’: people Must feel Safe to tell a Story’.

Your political thinking about these systems is more complex still than the question of receiving and telling stories. Material questions such as needing a house or a room raise issues for you of entitlement and equality. They also raise questions for you of government strategies which produce a situation of 'divide and conquer', as groups define their needs in relation to each other rather than 'the Place/that should be proViding them with the home':

> and i think this is Very—     reFlective of     the Current society that we're Living in
>
> Very Subtly          —whether it's a Local or a Global Government Strategy—
> but     I beLieve    that    groups    reGardless Of    What Type of a Group they Are
> Are          Bickering
> with each Other
> over "things they Have or Don't have
> or Should have   or are enTitled to   or is their Human Right"
> and        and Then      I beLieve
> that       that That creates a diVide and Conquer         —Situation
> ...
> if you Don't have a Home          you Don't have a Home
> and you are enTitled      All of you     to a Home!
> ...
> because they should All be     Putting their Energy     Back     to the Place
> that should be proViding them with the Home
> and it's because they All have an Equal entitlement to the home

Here then you raise larger questions of 'voice': you question the terms upon which political claims are made, how critical energies of political activism are deflected through governmental strategies which produce 'divide and conquer'. Your bottom line here slices through division: 'it's because they All have an Equal entitlement to the home'. This collective 'All' is inextricably linked to the singularity of 'you': 'if you Don't have a Home you Don't have a Home/and you are enTitled      All of you     to a Home!'

But the question of voice, and of being heard, is profoundly connected for you with personhood. It recurs throughout your narrative so that when for our second conversation I produced a transcript of our first conversation, your own opening words 'scream' at you a message of rippling destruction:

C —and i supPose what's what's Screaming At me! from Just that
Text that we've Read There even Only on page One and Two
...
there's Many Many More
that Don't have their voices heard than Do have their voices heard

and That's
what I Think leads to Deep deStruction Really
for a Person
For y'know because the Person
then becomes the Family
then becomes the comMunity
then it becomes soCiety
do you Know what i mean? Ripples Ripples effect Butterfly efFect

*Refusing the World as Given*

You describe a becoming of society through ripples and butterfly effects. The idea of 'society' is not then for you simply 'there' as a kind of solid fixed mass of 'structure'. It is an active process of ways of doing, of systems that receive stories, of stories that can or can't unfold. The music of your voice, the rhythm of your stresses, carries an attunement to social process in a little word you make a big word – Get:

so That's what i Mean i Feel women are
very Silenced
that they don't Get to tell their story
or they Get to t- or they Tell their Story

if you Ever Actually Get to Tell your Story

Your own opportunity to listen is part of a process:

getting the opportunity to Listen to people

And people with power to make decisions don't simply happen to be there - your subtle 'get' introduces a sense of history:

> and So you Have people i suppose in positions of Power
> that get to Make deCisions

But in all of this, in your critique, your deconstructing, in the questions you ask, you refuse to accept the world as given. Out of your opening statement on the silencing of voice, you say 'and i Don't Think it Needs to Be that way'. Of suffering, you say, 'they're Suffering unnecesSarily— it's Not Necessary'. Your critique of unnecessary suffering is in dialogue with the alternative of 'a Kind and Caring soCiety'. You contrast 'Short-term Quick Fixes' and 'looking for Easy Solutions' with 'Long-term Qualitative Solutions.' In saying that, 'we're Un-iMaginative and Un-creAtive aBout the Way we do Business in society', you suggest the importance of imagination and of creativity.

But what makes all this possible for you? How are you able to sustain this refusal? How are able to be so sensitised to Suffering, and the processes which produce it? In the face of it all, how are you able to be so insistent on holding to an alternative Kind and Caring soCiety?

You have of course opened up this alternative thread of story in your opening statement of your own counter-knowledge: 'in terms of Hearing people's stories ... Or getting the opportunity to Listen to people'. And when I wonder early on if you can give me an example of 'the Desensitisation of Stories', the story you tell me is a beautiful one: a story of women singing, and how their singing touches their own lives and the lives of others.

This is a tale of two Seeings. 'we have a Singing group,' you say. You describe the official Seeing of the women's Singing group through the lens of 'job Readiness':

C ... Under the Current
— Practices let's say

Where there's a deMand on—
"job Readiness" And

“Formal emPloyment and Training”
This would be Seen as a “Soft Action”
y’Know?

S: how do you mean “a Soft action”?

C: a “Soft action” i mean
“is Joining a Singing group going to Get that Woman Ready for a Job?”

And yet, for you, ‘because I’m in the position that i’m in’, there is a different Seeing, a Seeing which is also a Hearing.

In the Singing group too is Everyday Life:

C so there’s a Whole Range
Of
EveryDay Life In that group

The EveryDay Life of the singing group is reflected in its diversity.

The significance of Voice here is not in speech, but in singing: ‘they’re Not Speaking with it they’re Singing with their voices.’ And when you describe your Seeing, it is a Seeing which joins voices and bodies in an image of joyful participation:

and I see
Such a Difference in Some of those Women
beCause they’re they’re parTicipating
in Something
that is Joyful to them
that alLows their Voices
to be

let Go from their Body almost! y’Know?

You express your witnessing of this sense of bodily letting go in liberating and expansive images of flight:

you— fi— dePending on on the parTicular Woman's Circumstances
i have Seen Confidence SOaring

In the group In the group
—like of— of IndiViduals i have Seen
people like they're in Flight Almost

There is for you in this a sense of the miRaculous as you place it in the context of the burdens of life:

but That to Me is quite miRaculous Sort of I think
To— to to be
So disemPowered at Various Points in your Life
or maybe OverWhelmed with resPonsibilities
that Might seem UnFair

or Un-neGotiable

But this powerful dynamic doesn't stay contained within the Singing group. The women sing for a diverse range of other groups, they sing in nursing homes, they've sang at conferences, they've produced a CD ... they make a 'comPlete contribution to the community'. And their contributions bring a whole new sense to a social world created through 'ripples':

i mean Bringing— exTending that Joy
Passing on Happiness!
...
So it's
AbsoLutely conTagious

i'm Pretty Certain that!
Anybody that Hears them
Almost has this deSire to get Up and Dance you know?

Your testimonial to the power of the women's voices in their singing is deeply connected too with how you yourself are moved and affected by their singing:

C ... i Have to Say quite Frankly Now—that
i can i can Barely Hold it toGether! when i See them perform! I find it

Very OverWhelming because i Know
Their Stories and i Know Where Some of them are Coming from
and and and—
there's there's a seRenity and a Peacefulness aBout them that
(*almost a whisper:)* i Haven't seen too many Times in my Life
...

S and How do you exPerience That Sense of
"OverWhelmed-ness"?

C: Oh i'd Get eMotional i'd Feel eMotional y'know?— when i Hear them y'know?
i mean First of all they Really Do sound Beautiful

S yeah

C y'Know? and because they're
they're they're Singing Beautiful Songs and they're
they're they're Singing them Very Very Well

The women then in their singing, and you as their witness in your embodied listening and seeing, open up rich and beautiful territories of living. The world you witness the women creating with each other, and which they join with the lives of more others, is one far removed indeed from the diminishing 'Soft Action' vision of 'Job Readiness'.

Your aesthetic appreciation is one which carries a recognition of the women's artistic skill and accomplishment - the beauty of the sounds they produce, and the songs which they sing 'Very Very Well'. You create a language for this vibrant beauty, and for how the women infuse it into the space of social life. Yours is a language of joy, of soaring, of flight, of participation, of movement, of drawing out desires to dance, of a rare sense of peace and serenity.

But it's through no detached self-containment that you voice these appreciations. You describe your listening experience as one of a profound and 'OverWhelming' personal movement, so that you 'can Barely Hold it toGether!'. And you link this experience to a

history of connection through storied knowledge: knowing the women's stories, and knowing where some of them are 'coming from'.

But your critical theme of the Silencing of Voice weaves through this story too. So even as you begin to tell me this story of the Singing Group, you open up the question of its telleability:

> and How How do you Tell a
> —maybe a Bureaucrat a Bureaucrat
> That story and exPect them to have a Value On it?
> that
> Somebody's Quality of Life
> May have imProved
> Or that Somebody's
>
> —Self-esTeem or Confidence
> has Grown Just by
> being Part of Something
> where they Don't Actually Even have to go so Far as to Share something about themselves

To bear witness to the women's singing, to create a language for it, to create the very conditions which make it possible, is to value it. As you describe the emotion of your listening, you move from the immediacy of your listening to the action of the women's network in creating opportunity because it Sees the Value:

> —i Just i Just feel feel Very eMotional because i supPose
> i Feel and This i Feel that the women's Network
> is creAting an opporTunity
> for Those Women
> that No-one else in soCiety is creAting for them
> ...
> we Seem to Be Maybe the the OrganiSation
> that Sees the Value in it

Your story of the Silencing of Voice then is an intertwining of two alternative stories, two Seeings, and two sets of Values. You draw on a powerful affirmation of women's stories,

women's voices and the values of the Women's Network to hold up a social critique of what 'No-one else in soCiety is creAting for them'. When I inquire then about the connection between your hearing the women's singing and your sense of purpose: 'does That make you Think or does it— y'know does it give you— a Stronger sense of Purpose about the women's network or?', your response cuts through to the social construction of silence, and the 'set Up' terms of society:

C: i Think it gives me a Stronger Sense of Purpose about h—
This is y'Know How
soCiety is set Up to igNore a lot of things y'Know?

The discourse you identify of 'set Up to igNore' finds another inflection when in our second conversation we return to the question, 'How do you Tell ... a Bureaucrat ... That story?' , and I check, 'is This in the context of Funding?' You connect funding to justifying the existence of the women's network. But you then broaden this into larger questions about documentation, neoliberalism, and the power of bureaucratic systems to silence the telling of community stories. And you open up the intriguing possibility of 'a Deeper Level of Policy deVelopment':

C — Yeah
in the context Well in the context of JustiFying your exIstence—

S` yeah

C seCuring Funding

And— in the Course of This Meeting that we've had sioBhán i suppose what is
what is— Screaming Out at me and i was Only just Talking about it last Week to some
to One of my—board of Management
Is
and the comMunity sector
have Always
i Don't know i was Going to use the word "Guilty" but i Don't think that's the right Word
—of—
DocumenTation

S umm

C you know yeah "How do you tell a bureau-" you Can't tell a bureaucrat that Story
...
but so i supPose Maybe it comes it comes Down to docuMenting
and and and Certainly
I believe the comMunity Sector
Hasn't
and Some of this is Also bureaCratic

S umm

C —Hasn't
DocuMented
in a Way that Tells the Story
of the People

S yeah

C you Know?
it's a Weakness on the part of— of the community sector
But
it's Probably a Weakness
that was enCouraged
because of the the bureaCratic
Systems in Place
...
So it's it's Maybe
I don't know is it
a Deeper Level of Policy deVelopment—

S ...
the Notion of a Story
Isn't Even in itSelf recognised not to Mention
the parTicular Story that you might Tell

C exActly yeah yeah

S it Has to be all QuantiFied and so on

C yeah
and aGain This goes back to the neoLiberal and and the Whole
EuroPean Model and the Whole
Push

Push from Europe now you know?

*Stamina and Passion*

Yet, your sense of purpose has also got deeper historical roots:

> and i'm Not sure how This is going to Sound but i Think
> My
> Stamina and Passion
> for the Issues that i Work— With and the People that i Work with
> Yeah are Absolutely Born out of my Personal exPerience and so
> it has been my Driving Force i guess

Your story of your Driving Force opens a personal and political history which deepens the meanings of and interconnections of the multiple facets of your identity you announce in your opening statement: Feminist, Worker, Participant in Life, Professional, Personal.

For a start, this is about knowledge. You recognise for example that professional people such as drug or alcohol addiction counsellors who have 'Lived that themSelves' have a special knowledge available to them: 'they Know the Challenges of it'.

For you, this is also a knowledge which connects you with women you work with, and an ability to voice injustice:

> ... Most NinetyNine perCent of Women are
> Really— eQuipped to Speak about
> the inJustices for Women but i Feel
> that i have Lived a Lot of
> the situAtions i Meet every Day

'Lived experience' of course never exists outside context or interpretation. You connect your experience to questions of injustices for women. But in linking your lived experience with your Stamina and Passion as a 'Driving Force', not only do you refuse to forget this knowledge, and insist on remembering it. You also draw on it to sustain your political activism, and to connect with the struggles of women you meet everyday through the situations of their lives.

You speak these words at the end of our first conversation, a conversation which became one of reengaging with remembered voices when I inquire about How Feminism came into your Life. As part of your response, you describe leaving your marriage, moving into a 'Dreadful Flat', and then being approached by a man to go on a Community Employment Scheme.

C And He— they Said to Me they Had a Newsletter and they Asked me "did i Want
to write Something about Women's issues?"
and i Also used to write Poetry at the time!
and they Said "did i want to put a few Poems in the Newsletter?"
so we Kind of started Off from That
Then they asked me "did i want to Write something about women's issues?" and i
Can't even reMember what i
Wrote but i wrote Something about women's issues then whatEver like that
and—
and Then But it Sparked Something In me Then I— i Felt a Spark
When it Came to the "Women's Issues"
And I Felt that Life was so Tough at the Time

S ummm

C d'you know because i— didn't have any Money
and i Literally would be Robbing from one Person to pay the— y' know "Robbing from Billy
to to Pay Jack" as they'd Say ...
S ...
you "Felt a Spark when it Came to
\Writing about women's issues"
C: \Yeah i felt a spark
Yeah i— i Felt Something sort of aWaken In me y'know? Definitely i—
i reMember

Here again are two intertwining stories. There's the story of how Life was so Tough at the Time without any Money. And then there's this other beautiful story of a response called out by the invitation to write in the newsletter about Women's Issues. A Spark! An aWakening of Something In you!

You richly describe the harrowing effects of poverty and gender discrimination in the circumstances of your own life:

... so Anyway we SeparAted and i Moved into this

Dreadful Flat
—y'Know with my Two Children
and i was Quite disTraught because i was
Also Quite Catholic
and— in my beLief system at the Time
and i Felt like Just the most Dreadful person for leaving this marriage but i just Really couldn't i didn't i just
i just Absolutely knew i didn't Want to Be in it any longer
and So i had been Twelve years in Total with him
And— i Moved into this— Flat and—
and i Just remember Sitting on the Sofa One Day
and Thinking to mySelf

"i Don't Even have a Leaving Cert!
i have No Money!
i Can't Work!"
i i had Done a secreTarial Course
Badly!( *laughs)*
So
i said "i have No Work
i have No Skills"
and i Absolutely Felt beReft!
and i Just Thought
"well This is Me now"
and i Just Signed to go onto—
Lone Parents
which aGain because He was Very catholic in his in his Attitude my ex-Husband
So He and he Did just Awful things Really
but He didn't Want me to go onto lone parents because his Pride—
was— and his Dignity he Just thought i "was making a Show of the Family"! *(laughing)*
And so i Went onto to what was "Unmarried Mothers' alLowance" i Think it was at the Time
and i Thought "this is It now this is Me Going to the Bloody office Every week and colLecting my Money"
and Having
No prospects
no House Living in an awful Flat
my Car parked outSide no Petrol in it
Him Threatening to Take it Off me
—because it was His car in His mind
—And— Stuck in a rural Area
And Not being able to Move
and i just and i Didn't know what to Do well i didn't well Actually

there Was nothing to do
i Just Felt comPletely Powerless

Here is an account punctuated by your laughter as you tell me this story now, laughing at doing a secretarial course 'Badly', and laughing at the idea of 'Making a Show of the Family'.

But in this evocative and moving portrait, you weave together the material effects of poverty - No Money, No Leaving Cert, Can't Work, on lone parents Allowance, No Petrol in the car – with the ideological hold of Catholic beliefs which produced the thought for you of being a 'dreadful person', alongside with the making a Show of the Family voiced by your ex-husband. The meanings you invest in the image of your car create a potent picture of powerlessness and precariousness - immobility, trapped, no petrol, and its very status as your car under threat.

But there is a starkness in this memory of bereftness that you hold of yourself Thinking, Sitting on the Sofa in the Awful Flat: 'This is Me now ... This is It now this is Me'. When you speak from the position of the Spark and the aWakening of Women's Issues, you analyse this politically in terms of the forceful violence of social norms, drawing on your own knowledge of the damaging effects of social norms in changing a person's sense of themselves:

C i Wrote some Articles i'm Not sure that they were Gender reLated
but He by sugGesting it to me
Sparked something Else in me

S: so there was "Something" you were Saying that it was "an aWakening"

C: Yeah it was Like an aWakening yeah

S: so was there Something in Terms Of
you Had This This kind of Name "Women's Issues"

C ummm

S to Frame

to kind of give a different Lens On
what was going on in your Life? or

C: Yeah
Yeah because I Just I Just Felt I Just Felt from the Minute
i Made the deCision to Leave my Marriage

S yeah

C that—I was Treated Differently by soCiety

S yeah

C i Felt
discriminAted aGainst and i— i felt discriminAted against i felt
—treated Differently i felt —
there was a Biased Attitude
—and of course it was Hugely Damaging!

S ummm

C Really Very Damaging y'know?—Very—
—to to Change
AnyBody's persPective of themSelves y' Know?—
Forced on you by soCiety
—beCause soCiety has a perCeived Norm and you've Got to Live withIn the parAmeters of That
and of course i I Wasn't i was living outSide of it
y'Know?—

In this narrative, you speak of actively taking an initiative, the making of a decision to leave your marriage. But leaving your marriage is also leaving a 'perCeived Norm of soCiety', its parameters you've Got to Live withIn' , but which you were transgressing - 'i was living outSide of it'. It is in your leaving, the Minute of Making the decision' that you encounter these norms in your interactions with the world - through being Treated Differently, Discriminated against. What you suggest here then is that the Spark and the aWakening was because the phrase 'Women's Issues' responded to your feelings of difference and of being discriminated against.

Your protest against these norms and their effects: 'to Change/AnyBody's persPective of themSelves' is articulated in the images of violence you attach to the working of these norms. It is 'Hugely Damaging', 'Forced on you by soCiety'.

You describe a Looking and Seeing around Women's Issues as you get more active and involved in them:

S and Then in terms of
y'know this "aWakening" and this "Spark" around "Women's Issues" that
that you were exPeriencing Then

C yeah

S that you exPerienced and that you were Open to experiencing

C um um yeah

S So You Actively then started
getting inVolved in issues around women

C Yeah i Started Looking at them then i Started really
Seeing
Issues then for Women\ and
S \and What was that "Looking" and "Seeing"? can you

C i Started to iDentify them i supPose As "InJustices" Or "discriminAtions" Or
and i supPose i Might have been in just a— i Might have—
Seen them From the persPective Of
"Labels and Tags"
that Women
have Carried

that Men don't have to Carry

S yeah yeah umm

C y' Know so y'Know— like there's many— Men that have—
Many children
but they're Not reFerred to as "Lone Parents" or they're Not referred
they don't Have this Label

S ummm

C and it Is a Label\ at the End of the Day\
S \yeah \yeah

C and it's
Also a Label that's Almost
hoMogeneous y'know it's like Everybody gets the same Label and there's No
differentiAtion Made Really y'Know between

S yeah

C and i Don't Know
i'm Not saying that there Should be a differentiation made Either i'm Just saying
that's its just
a Label and there's a a Judgement\ that Goes With it\
S \umm \yeah

You create an image of discrimination as 'Labels and Tags that Women have Carried that Men don't have to Carry'. One of the effects of these labels and tags is to homogenise. But these are labels and tags, and their weight of judgement, are burdens that women have to Carry. Women carrying the label 'Lone Parent' also carry a weight of judgement.

*Standing Together with Other Lone Parents*

You expose the failure of other people to Stand With you, leaving you in the Awful Place where you have to take on the Need to Stand aLone. But you also bear testimony to those who came to Stand With you, and you With Them: other women Standing aLone who were also lone parents - 'and when i Say "Socialising" i'm talking about a cup of Tea or a cup/of Coffee during the day:'

C i Know in a Way
I Felt
"there's Not a lot of people Standing With me Here
there's Not a lot of People supPorting me Here
And it's Necessary
that if i Need to Stand aLone i Stand aLone"

S ummm

C That's an Awful Place to Be!

S yeah

C and At the Time
just At that Time
the People that i Found MySelf aRound at the Time
and i'm Talking about maybe Three Four Five People
were All Lone Parents
were All People
who were Standing aLone
—and it was Only in Standing
we we graviTated towards each other

S Ummm

C And it was Only in Standing With Them that i thought
"oh! my God! we're So disCriminated against!"

S yeah

C "So discriminated against"
—disCriminated against
in extaOrdinary ways

S yeah

C Not just
the most Obvious ones but Just in the in the Little Niches
the InnuEndo

S yeah

C People no Longer wanting to Take you Seriously even Don't have anything
parTicularly
sure you're you're i mean because you're Seen as "a Failure"!

You narrate here how your sense of difference becomes politically interpreted as discrimination: through this collective sense of We. You draw attention to discrimination existing 'in the Little Niches/the InnuEndo', being 'Seen as "a Failure"!', and a shift in the

terms of being taken seriously as a person - ‘People no Longer wanting to Take you Seriously’.

But the strength of your connection with the other women, and the passion of your resistance, shines through in a story you tell about one of the other women. You begin your story by honouring her as a person, and expressing your high regard for her. You then voice a powerful protest which draws out the ferocious depths of the gender discrimination she was subjected to:

C	like i reMember—this   This Woman     One of the Women

S	Ummm

C	and—  Lovely Woman!    Gosh alMighty a Woman that
in my EstiMation Now
AcaDemically could have Reached        Any Heights     she Wanted to

S	yeah

C	But    She— had children Young
And—  she—  had Many children
and she had   them With    and there were different Fathers     to the Children
And
Honest to God     i Truly beLieve
that if People could have Burned her at the Stake     as a    as a Witch they Would have
there was Such!   NegaTivity toWards her
AbsoLutely
Not       a Peep    not a Sound
not a         Murmer     of Any of the Men
who Came     Into her Life

In remembering her, you remember your sense of sadness, a sadness newly experienced in the telling, a sadness shaped by this knowledge of and sensitivity to human cruelty, and also its gendered terms. It is a sadness which affects me too as we both become tearful:

C	and I just

*[whispers]*
i thought it was sad!

[*tearful and louder voice]*
i Thought it was Sad! d'you Know?

S [*tearful]* yeah

C i Just Think oh my God Humans are so Cruel to each other Really y'Know?!
and Men are so Cruel to Women y'Know?!

S i Know ummmm

But even as I say here, 'i Know', I know too that I do not know the way or the depths of what you know. And my tears too cannot be your sadness, so engaged is your sadness with this history, this memory and this woman.

But the sadness you remember is not passive and melancholic: it is a sadness which 'aRoused my Activism'. The scene of your activism here is a wedding in a cottage:

C i Just thought it was Very Sad and aGain i suppose that would have
—aRoused my Activism in terms I reMember—
i Went to this— Cottage there was— a Local Wedding on
...
and One of the Women Said
"Oh i was Talking to that Woman last Night y'Know that Woman that has All the Children by All the different Fathers?"

she was Talking to the Whole Group! of Thirty or Forty People
And i Just i Had to Stop her Just There and Then because i Didn't want to Hear another Word
because i was Right in That Space of Just Thinking
"the World is Awful"
and I said
"Oh yeah She's a She's a Very good Friend of mine" I said "Yeah you Met her? Yeah was she?"

S *(laughs)*

C And she just
And i Silenced Her

(*laughs)*

S yeah

C beCause i Didn't want to Listen to her

S yeah

C and i Didn't want to Listen to her Prejudice or her Bias or her discriminAtion or her
Dare i Say it
—Sort of
Slightly Middle Class—

S ummm

C y'Know Looking Down\ On aNother human Being
S \yeah yeah

Here, you describe a woman initiating a conversation addressed to the assembled gathering about 'that Woman', objectified as 'that Woman that has All the Children by All the different Fathers". In her utterance, you hear prejudice, bias, discrimination, a 'Slightly Middle Class ... \Looking Down On aNother human Being'. Here indeed is discrimination in 'the little niches and Innuendo'.

In the moment that she has spoken this, your response is a refusal to listen. You are seized by an imperative to interrupt and to stop her words: 'i Had to Stop her Just There and Then because i Didn't want to Hear another Word'. It is a response enabled and animated by your knowledge of the world, from the place you are inhabiting, 'Right in That Space of Just Thinking/"the World is Awful".

And how do you do this? What is the form your activism takes here? Why, this beautiful, declaration of friendship in the strongest of terms: 'She's a Very good Friend of mine'. With the power of this apparently simple utterance, you slice through the objectifying terms carried in the phrase, 'that Woman' so that, 'i Silenced Her'. Your silencing of Her is the silencing and stopping of the emerging discourse of 'Looking Down On aNother human Being'.

Not to mention of course the fact that now the two of us are laughing!

But your sense of the wrongness of this situation is not resolved for you by your intervention. Indeed, the requirement to intervene itself registers the wrongness of a situation that would otherwise have 'gone on':

C But i don't i i Think it's Wrong that we have to do that
cos if I hadn't have been there She'd have Just

S yeah i Know

C would have gone On

*Thoughts, Language and Writing*

When you told me the story about the community newsletter conversation, and you mentioned that you wrote poetry at the time, it jarred so much with your thought, as you sat on the sofa of 'I have No Skills', that I was curious to hear more. 'and How did you come to be writing Poetry?' I asked you. You explained that you had joined a Writers' Group at the suggestion of a friend:

> I would without Fail say i was Traumatised i felt Traumatised
> By my situAtion
> ...
> Actually a Friend of mine had Said to me
> 'Why don't you Write?' y' know she was she wrote Poetry herself
> and i said 'Me write Poetry?!'
> and she said 'Yeah Why don't you just Write Get it Out?'
> and so i Just took her adVice and i Just started Writing

When you speak about your relationship with writing, you open up a another range of unique knowledges about language, thoughts, class, trauma and 'the fraGility of Humans'.
You speak about being 'Caught in the Suffering of the Trauma', and your own response of 'Finding a Way to Put some Order on Thoughts :

S ... and did You Find at the Time just the Act of Writing itSelf

SomeHow

in What Way did it Help you   would you say?

C   well i Think   i Think   when   y'know Things   Are
trauMatic in your Life   I Think
You   you're Caught in the Suffering of that Trauma
And so
you Have   to Find   Not "you Have to Find"   But   it's Helpful
to Find
a Way   To   Put some Order on your Thoughts

S   yeah

ummm

C   and to acKnowledge thoughts MayBe as well

S   yeah

C   that you Don't even
cos Thoughts Come   At us

S   yeah

C   so Many of them so Often we Can't y'know i Think that—   if you
that   when   you Capture some of them you can

S   Ummm

C   sort of—

i Think it might have Helped me   Maybe to get a Shape
on   on Things in my Head

S   yeah

C   y'Know?

You found writing poetry as 'a Way   To   Put some Order on your Thoughts' and to

‘Maybe to get a Shape/on on Things in my Head’. But the active image of Thoughts you create here – ‘Thoughts Come At us/so Many of them so Often’ – overturns any simple understanding of thoughts as existing in and emanating from an interior world. You vividly evoke a sense of Thoughts which appear to come from an external source, with their Comings characterised by a multiplicity and a frequency which eludes order and shape. You name some of the ways in which writing was helpful: in acknowledging thoughts, capturing some of them, and putting them into some order and shape in your head.

In the following act of remembering, you highlight thought and pain as social phenomena through the image of being Haunted by societal expressions:

C I reMember Everything aBout
Being Separated
i reMember
the Pain i Felt at the separAtion i reMember
—the Pain i Felt about my Children coming from
what was
Called
“a Broken home”
That’s how we reFerred to Separated Families at the Time
“Broken Home from a Broken Home”!
and so I was
Haunted by All these
soCietal exPressions

Even as you voice this phrase ‘Broken Home’, your chorus of repetitions conveys a sense of the unrelenting nature of the Hauntings, tied to a sense of unrelenting Pain. Just one of ‘All these soCietal exPressions’.

With such eloquence of expression, it wasn’t a surprise for me to learn that you wrote poetry. In our second conversation, I was interested in hearing more about how you came to write poetry:

S —
but what i’m Really Interested in is How you Came to be Writing Poetry
well i Asked you that at the Time

C and What did i Say?!

S And You Said
*[rustle of paper]*

yes

C i Don't write Poetry anyMore by the way

but i'm Going to Start aGain! (*laughs)*

S Well
i Have to Say

when I Read This
and How you Speak and d'you Know?
Your
d'you Know?

C yeah! yeah!

S like it's Kind of like "Oh yeah She writes poetry That makes sense"
(*laughs)*

C (*still laughing)*

S d'you know it doesn't surPrise me in the Least

C yeah

But out of this exchange, you initiate a story you suggest might be interesting for my thesis: the story of 'how i Stopped Writing Poetry'

C — Yeah i do you Know what i'm Going to Tell you Now Actually is—
what's InteResting what might be InteResting in This is how i Stopped Writing Poetry

S OH oKay

C (*laughs)*
How i Stopped writing Poetry

and i supPose just This Might
—Or— Might Indicate Maybe
the fraGility

S Ummm

C Of
Humans

Skilled story-teller that you are, you first set out various contexts for your story. The first of these addresses Traumatisation, and you pull together all the various strands of your story by emphasising your Trauma as produced through the interlinking of a Whole vaRiety of Things:

—And as i Said i i beLieved i was I AbsoLutely beLieved i was
Traumatised at the Time
Through a Whole for by a Whole vaRiety of Things
that were All interLinked
—But

—so Yeah i Was looking to exPress mySelf

There is a double agency here in your phrase 'i Was looking to exPress mySelf': the agency of expressing yourself, and the agency of looking for the means to do so. As a form of resistance against the assembled and interlinked Forces of Traumatisation, there is a strong sense here of how precious your writing was to you. You also describe your pride and pleasure, and the pride of your father, in having a poem published in a book: 'i was deLighted with myself ... I was Thrilled ... "I got a Poem Published!"'

The second context you set out is that of eduCational atTainment. And now you highlight the precariousness of your very means of expression, Writing Poetry, linked to a Fear of Writing contributed to by ideas around eduCational atTainment:

C and Also as Well

and— i Think this is Kind of Interesting because it Goes Back to the eduCational atTainment
is that
i Didn't beLieve i could write Poetry because i Didn't Really know "well What's the defiNition of 'Poetry'? is it Writing things that the two Last words Rhyme? Or is it
What Is it? like
and I wouldn't know— a Sonnet or i wouldn't know a This and i wouldn't know a That and
—so beCause i don't Have those
Technical Skills

S Ummm

C I don't Think i would be able to write"
—so That's— That's— That was Probably
—Something that was conTributing to my— sort of— Fear around Writing

While poetry as a response to trauma is for you 'a means of expression', here you set out other understandings of poetry framed by the question 'What Is it?'. There's a sense here of technical skills and answers to these questions about 'It' which appear unavailable to you because of your level of educational attainment - as you lyric, 'i wouldn't know a This and i wouldn't know a That'. Poetry then carries its own Hauntings. So coexisting with your statement, 'i Was looking to exPress mySelf' is another thought: 'I don't Think i would be able to write', which you link to a Fear of Writing. Of course, this heightens all the more the significance of your initiative in going along to the Writers' Group.

C but How i came to Stop Writing Poetry
Was there was this This Man that used to Come to the Group
and he came This is he was Only— he Only came Twice to the group at least I only enCountered him Twice
...
but Anyway he Said he he Said— that he was "deLighted to be Coming to the Group"
and he Said
—"I have been Going to aNother Group In aNother loCation in [...]
And he said

"And i Have and i was There Only— Two days aGo or Three days aGo"
He said "and there was a Couple of Secondary school Teachers that were Part of the group" he said
"and Let me Tell you All Something"
he said
"you Would Not Get the Poetry
Out of
Primary school kids"
he said "it was
So Awful they Couldn't Even
gramMatically"

—

and i reMember Literally almost my Breath being Taken aWay
And i thought [*whispers:*] "i can't come here anymore!"

You dramatically perform your own reduction to this tiny, thin, whispered voice of a thought, a thought of not belonging - "i can't come here anymore!" - in response to the man's booming voice of authoritative judgement – 'and Let me Tell you All Something'. You then reflect on the power of the legitimised discourse, and draw conclusions about its destructive effects:

C So He

I alLowed him i Won't say "He" i alLowed him to DeleGitimise

S ummmm

C and i Never went back to the Group aGain
and i Just Hmm! Think that's Interesting that Story

S that's Very interesting Yeah

C He y'Know
he was deScribing Their educational atTainment

S yeah

C y'know? "they were Secondary school teachers"

S yeah

C "And they were Writing this

Poor
Nonsense!"

S ummm

C And I

and i Never went Back i never Wrote after That!
can you beLieve that i Never wrote Poetry aGain after That?

That's
how Easy it is to disMantle a Human Being

Your telling of your story renders achingly palpable the ease of this disMantling. The fragile moment of a breath. A Breath being Taken aWay. The thought 'i can't come here anymore!' which reverberates into a future where 'i Never went Back i never Wrote after That!'

But your telling of your story is also one which disMantles the disMantling. Your analysis, 'I alLowed him to Delegitimise,' which refuses to say 'He delegitimised,' distils complex questions of agency. It is of course tempered in the first instance by your point in telling me this story: your knowledge about the fragility of the human and how easy it is to dismantle a human being.

Your narrative deconstructs the terms and conditions of this alLowance, the powerful and historical discourse of educational attainment which shapes it, and which carries into this moment of A Breath being Taken aWay. You draw attention to the man's emphasis on educational attainment: 'he was deScribing Their educational atTainment ... they were Secondary school teachers'. And there's you as a listener without a Leaving Cert. You draw attention to how you hear the terms of his critique: the Poor Nonsense produced by Secondary school teachers with poor grammar. And there's you a listener with your Fear of Writing.

But although you now yourself have a Masters Degree, in naming this an act of Delegimisation you refuse the terms of legitimacy based on educational attainment. In saying, 'I alLowed him to Delegitimise', you appear here to lay claim to an alternative legitimacy, an alternative writing position which reconnects with writing as a means to 'exPress mySelf'. What do you think?

But while this moment of your 'Breath being Taken aWay' effects a powerful closure on writing poetry as a means of shaping and ordering your thoughts, writing poetry is also the opening for the conversation about writing in the community newsletter about Women's Issues. Out of this Spark and aWakening, another story emerges centred on creating meaning through Women's Issues: a story of exposure, learning, Focusing Attention, and Making Sense:

> so i Would have just got
> More exposure and More exposure and More exposure      and then Suddenly and
> then beiJing and
> and Then i apPlied—      for    a Job    as a women's deVelopment Worker
>
> And     i Got the Job
> i was Thrilled! *(laughs)*
> ...
> i Just
> Knew
> that Everything i had Said        in the Room made
> Sense
> ...
> so i     so i just—so i supPose the Difference
> Maybe     Even in the Two Years from
> y'Know the situation where i wouldn't even Go on the scheme to Now i was apPlying
> for a Job and beFore i even Left the Interview room i knew i Had the job
> Not beCause        but just because i— i Felt I     Really     Had
> Learnt so Much
>
> by just Focusing my Attention on that Area

In our third conversation, I pick up again the thread you laid down of the Beijing Platform for Action, and you respond by again invoking the power of remembering:

S "and then Suddenly and then beiJing"

C yeah
Oh my God yeah i'll Never forget beiJing

You then create a narrative of the Beijing Platform for Action which places it in a global and historical context, but you do this from the position of your own community location.

You speak of your lack of access to an academic platform, and so the importance of hearing about the Beijing Platform for Action from Banúlacht. You also emphasise the tangibility of the Beijing Platform for aCtion's Critical Areas for 'Ordinary women ... '. You speak of your excitement in connecting with a global women's movement of solidarity, and of women 'Finally being Taken Seriously'. You counterpose this with the 'disGraceful' failure of the Irish government to implement, the Joke of its implementation strategy, as you highlight the need to be building on the Beijing Platform for Action.

C and it was Like Beijing Happened
Out of Nowhere that
y'know Here i was Working On— i was Working on women's Issues—
Probably!
Thinking!
as "the Only Woman on the Planet that was Working on women's Issues!"

S right

C y'Know—
that Sense of sepaRation or
...
Not "i Just' i Was! UnaWare of All the Work That was Happening

and Actually— Bejing is a is a Brilliant exAmple I Think

S umm

C of—
of— in two Thousand and ThirTeen Stepping Back in Time
about How
women Can
—Can come toGether
Can—

—create Did create SoliDarity
it was Probably
the Largest Global
Shift

...
And i supPose
beCause I didn't have access Really to the acaDemic world and i Didn't Know the Discourse on "Feminism"—
And— i Wouldn't have conSidered myself to be "an acaDemic Person"
—i Didn't Have—
the Access to that Platform Let's say

S yeah

C But
When
and i Didn't i Wasn't inVolved in the Leadup to BeiJing—
I was Hearing about it After it happened

S Okay

C And saying that "My God!"

S and How did you "Hear about it After it happened"?

C of Course it's banÚlacht as Well like y'Know\ and banÚlacht
S \right okay

C And i reMember Maeve Taylor coming Down and (laughs)
it was Probably the Only Time in my Life!— withIn this— Sector
That i was comPletely GobSmacked about this i was like
i Mean i was Honest to God i could have Started my own Religion around it you know i was Thinking

S (*laughs*)

C "This is our Bible!" y' Know! i was
Deeply excited
... Beijing Was
Really Tangible I thought y'Know what i Mean?

S in what Way was it "Tangible"?

C Because it was Naming the Critical Areas it was Breaking Down the Critical Areas

S ummm

C —it
—that there were Twelve of them

S yeah

C and and I just Thought "this is Very conCise this is
Very acCessible" it was Very acCessible
to Ordinary Women who didn't have Access to acaDemia Like
mySelf

S yeah

C so That was what was Brilliant about it
And Also it en- it enCompassed
Hundreds of Women going— WorldWide which No other— No other
Framework— Did prior to that
Even if you look Back on the world Conference the First couple of World
Conferences on Women
They Were what Gathered the moMentum for beiJing

S ummm

C y'Know?
—And—

and Even and Now when you Look at it when you when you Look at—
it's Still— it's gone Back now and i don't Know if this is
the neoLiberal—
Influence i'm pretty Certain it would be a Factor of it
is that This is where the DefragmenTation is coming where
and Also as Well Now in twentythirTeen it

and the Global the Global Economic Crisis
because i think it Is global
or the Global Crisis that inCorporates the environment and— All the Other things
is that—

—

Now We— i mean—
in BeiJing in nineteen ninety Five
in a if you were there was Some Sense of that
Governments Meant it a Hundred and Eighty-Eight Signing Up to it i mean
there was a Real Sense of
i suppose Finally being Taken Seriously
Violence against Women Does exist
Health issues for women specifically To women Do exist
etCetera etCetera aCross the Twelve Critical Areas
And Actually i think it's Hugely and So in an IdeaListic world
Beijing Came
and Beijing Went
and Actually we should have All those things impleMented Now—
or we Should be AbsoLutely well on our way to having All of those Things impleMented
and we're Not

S ummm

C And I think That's eNormously Telling I think Okay
So
in Nineteen ninetyFive twoThousand I actually believed Two-Thousand-and-Seven
when the Irish Government
FourTeen Years After! BeiJing Brought in the National Plan for Women
disGraceful

S ummm

C AbsoLutely DisGraceful

S ummm

C and Even when they Did bring it In
I was on the implemenTation— I was on the implemenTation committee
—as a repreSentative of the National women's Council

and It was a Flippin Joke
...

C and Now
—how Many years Later?
nearly Twenty years Later
we have

Far more Issues
to Add

S yeah

C We should have been Building On the Beijing Platform for Action

But in reflecting on your story of activism, this act of friendship and solidarity at the wedding in the cottage which challenged Looking Down on aNother Human Being', you also open up challenges for the 'We' of feminist movement. The feminist movement for you cannot only be about challenging structures and infrastructures, but must also embrace an ethical politics of difference which involves us challenging ourselves:

C and We have to Question as Women That

S umm

C do you Know what i Mean?
and the Feminist Movement
is Not just about
Oh well
I mean
it's Not just about— DeconStructing
DeconStructing
patriArchal— Structures and InfraStructures
but it's aBout
Challenging Challenging ourselves as women in In our beLiefs

S yeah

C d'you Know? because we Have to Recognise

I have to recognise
that there are
Thousands and Thousands of women out there that i      Might not aGree with their oPinions about things
but i Still have to Listen to them
d'you Know what i Mean? And so
i   i   i Think it's
there     there's No—  i Mean it's
Now
i'm going to sound Really off now it's  i beLieve it's Actually Ethically and Morally Wrong
to Be
—to      be—
to be so Cruel to each other like that! we  Have to     Question our Ethics y'know?

S          umm

C          and that we sup-  and That there's
And And And we Have to
Bow    on Some Level    To     our Differences

S          yeah          umm

C          B-  and Recognise our commoNalities

Yours in love, friendship and solidarity,

Siobhán

Chapter 8

## Of Mermaid Turnings:
## Trauma Knowledge and Women's Community Education

### *Na Murúcha a Thriomaigh*/The Assimilated Merfolk

*Ar an gcarraig lom seo ar a gcuireann siad isteach*
*an t-am de ló is a ngainní á dtriomú acu*
*tagann galair cnis mar oighear is gríosach orthu*
*is codladh grifín ón mbríos gaoithe is fiú ón leoithne,*
*rud nár thaithíodar as a n-óige is nár chleachtadar riamh*
*ar na bánta íochtaracha ...* *(l. 26)*

Barely have they put in on this bare rock
than their scales start drying out
and they suffer such skin complaints as windgall and blotching
and get pins-and-needles from the breezes, never mind the zephyrs,
unaccustomed as they were to either
on the underwater plains … (p. 27)

Ní Dhomhnaill's opening poem which introduces the merfolk tells of their suffering from new skin conditions in their adjustments to the breezes of Life-Above-Water of which they have no experience. Some who came up 'on one particularly blasted and bleak island' had a particularly hard time, but the islanders had little sympathy:

*Bhíodar lán de phiseoga,*
*á rá, má lean an méid sin den mí-ádh nó den drochrath iad*
*nach foláir nó bhí sé tuillte acu.*
*B'in a bhfuaireadar de láchas*
*ós na daoine gur chuadar ina measc*. (l. 58)

They were so full of superstition
they said that anyone with so much bad luck and misfortune following them
must have done something to deserve it.
That's as much kindness as the merfolk ever saw
from the people among whom they'd fetched up. (p. 59)

While the opening poem, 'Na Murúcha a Thriomaigh', is translated by Muldoon as 'The Assimilated Merfolk,' the translation, as Bennett (2008) notes, gives it a 'smoother surface' (p. 2). 'A thriomaigh' literally means, 'that were dried out'. The significance of this 'drying out' is emphasised again in a later poem:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Sé bunús an scéil go léir, ar ndoigh, ná tráma*<br>*a dtriomaithe. (l. 106)* | What lies at the bottom of all of this, of course,<br>is the trauma of their being left high<br>and dry. (p. 107) |

The story of the merfolk's move to dry land then is one of a traumatic encounter. For Bennet (2008), 'being left high and dry' does not capture the central importance of 'triomaithe' – 'the stiffness, the debilitation, even the anti-creative connotations of drying up and out' (p. 2). The poem itself tells of how the merfolk 'put away from them all songs, music, dancing, /card-playing, sports and pastimes – /anything on which you couldn't make a quick profit /and get on in the world and have some sense of security' (p. 107)

This traumatic encounter is one of the need to forget about water. As Phillips (2008) writes, 'Our needing what we need becomes a kind of hell if, like the mermaid, you can only live on the land by forgetting about the sea, by abolishing all thought of what originally sustained you' (n. pag). To hide their gills, the women wear neck-ornaments and the men wear red kerchiefs. They clean their hair with dry shampoo. The word 'water' must never be mentioned, or 'anything else that smacks of the sea' (Ní Dhomhnaill & Muldoon, 2007, p. 77). According to the doctor, 'the uvula/ is displaced in the vast majority of them' (p. 27). By the time the cure takes effect,

| | |
|---|---|
| *Tá dearmad glan déanta acu*<br>*faoin am seo ar shuathadh mearathail na*<br>*gcaisí doimhne*<br>*is ar chlaisceadal na míol sa duibheagán.* | By now they've clean forgotten<br>the dizzying churning of the deep currents<br>and, from the abyss, the whales' antiphonal<br>singing. |

And yet, there can be no escape from water. Words that are 'still imbued with the old order of things' become linked to memory's debris:

*Fágann na rabhartaí earraigh a rianta fós*
*ar chlathacha cosanta a n-aigne; gach tonnchosc díobh*
*ina ghlib ag bruth farraige is ag brúscar raice* – ... (l. 28)

The high spring tides leave their mark
on the sea-walls of their minds, the edge of every breaking wave
ragged with flotsam and jetsam and other wreckage ... (p. 29)

Sometimes, the mermaid's daughter has the sense of 'the room filling with water,' and has no words to express it to the psychiatrist:

*Tá strus uafásach*
*ag roinnt leis na mothúcháin seo go léir.*
*Tar éis an tsaoil, níl rud ar bith aici*
*chun comparáid a dhéanamh leis.*
*Is níl na focail chearta ar eolas aici ar chor ar bith.*
*Ag a seisiún síciteiripeach seachtainiúil*
*bíonn a dóthain dua aici*
*ag iarraidh an scéal aisteach seo a mhíniú*
*is é a chur in iúl i gceart*
*don mheabhairdhochtúir.(l. 30)*

A terrible sense of stress
is part and parcel of these emotions
At the end of the day she has nothing else
to compare it to.
She doesn't have the vocabulary for any of it.
At her weekly therapy session
she has more than enough to be going on with
just to describe this strange phenomenon
and to express it properly
to the psychiatrist. (p. 31)

The English translation 'doesn't have the vocabulary' does not quite capture the sense of 'right knowledge' of '*is níl na focail chearta ar eolas aici ar chor ar bith'*which literally means,'she doesn't know the right words at all'. Ultimately, she has no words for 'water':

*Níl aon téarmaíocht aici,*
*ná téarmaí tagartha*
*na focal ar bith a thabharfadh an tuairim is lú*
*do cad é 'uisce'.*
*'Lacht trédhearcach,' a deir sí, ag déanamh a cruinndíchill.*
*'Sea,' a deireann an teiripí, 'coinnibh ort!'*

She doesn't have the terminology
or any of the points of reference
or any word at all that would give the slightest suggestion
as to what water might be.
'A transparent liquid,' she says, doing as best she can.
'Right,' says the therapist, 'keep going.'

Of course, in the sea, 'water' is not a word but the element in which mermaids swim. 'Water' is the language itself, fluid and relational and without boundaries. And when the 'born-again mermaid' has a memory of the sea, it is a bodily one, with 'shuffles of pleasure and shudders of apprehension hitting her in alternating waves':

| | |
|---|---|
| *Ina matáin is mó a bhraitheann sí é seo*<br>*is ní ina ceann. Cuimhne chorpartha is ea é*<br>*seachas ceann intleachtúil. (l. 120)* | She remembers this in her actual physical make-up<br>and not in her head. It's a muscle memory<br>rather than a mental one. (p. 121) |

Towards the end of the mermaid's life, there is a new sense of speech:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Bhí sí riamh domhain.*<br>*Ach anois tá sí ag labhairt aníos chughainn*<br>*as tobar gan tóin. (l. 140)* | She was always deep,<br>But now she seems to be talking up to us<br>from a bottomless well. (p. 141) |

Does this 'bottomless well' suggest infinite possibilities or devastating estrangement? For Phillips (2008), this is 'at once a new picture of what it might be to be deep and of how far we can feel from our origins' (n. pag). He suggests that it invites thinking about the difference 'between talking something up and talking down to people' and also 'how easily a bottomless well might begin to seem like a bottomless pit if no one can hear you'. But he also suggests that the banality of 'trouble with boundaries' is 'played off against the extraordinary vision' that, 'If everything in the language runs into everything else, it both crashes and blends. What the mermaid has learnt are the hollows of insulation'. Bennett (2008) too suggests that it seems that the ungrounded, unstable ocean that surrounds and, ultimately, consumes *The Fifty Minute Mermaid* is an enabling environment.

Writing of the importance of holy wells, and of one well in particular, Ní Dhomhnaill (2005) describes it as 'a place of a deeper reality – known in Irish as *an saoleile,* the "otherworld"' (p. 157). The accessibility of this deeper reality is linked for her with *dinnseanchas* where the well is part of a landscape which is a 'profoundly woven network of interlocking stories' (p. 159). It is this which mediates between this and other worlds, but also between past and present so that it 'allows us glimpses into other moments in historical time' (p. 160). The mermaid speaking from the *tobar gan tóin* then speaks from a liminal rationality of stories and remembering, unavailable from the 'Cartesian, Appolonian, "civilised" perspective ... which flattens all obstacles to linear progress' (p. 158).

The mermaid's return to 'Land-Under-Wave' begins with a discovery of *an cochall draíochta/*the magical hood:

<table>
<tr>
<td>Bhí sé mar a bheadh an cochall draíochta<br>a bhí curtha i bhfolach le cianta sa chúl-lochta<br>aimsithe aici de bharr a síorphóirseála.<br>(l. 142)</td>
<td>It was as if<br>she'd one day stumbled upon the magical hood<br>that had been hidden for ages up in the back loft<br>simply because of her endless poking and pottering about. (p. 141)</td>
</tr>
</table>

From this 'poking and pottering' in the back loft, a new image emerges then of the mermaid looking onto the world of dry land from her own watery world:

<table>
<tr>
<td>Go hobann, d'oscail sí an dá shúil le chéile<br>is d'fhéach orm go cúramach<br>is gan aon oidhre eile uirthi<br>ach rón a chuirfeadh a ceann aníos ón bhfarraige<br>is a d'fhéachadh ort go fiosrach.(l. 144)</td>
<td>Suddenly, she opened both her eyes together<br>and stared at me very intently,<br>looking for all the world<br>like a seal putting its head out of the water<br>with a very knowing look. (p. 145)</td>
</tr>
</table>

With this knowing look, the mermaid says to the poet, 'Your hair's nowhere near as red as it used to be,' leaving the poet to wonder 'if she knew all along who I was'

<table>
<tr>
<td>nó arbh é a bhí san abairt obann aonair úd amháin<br>ná mar a bheadh bréitseáil míl mhóir os cionn an uisce. (l. 144)</td>
<td>or if that single, sudden sentence<br>was like a whale leaping and launching itself out over the ocean. (p. 145)</td>
</tr>
</table>

Drawing on the narratives of Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare, this chapter picks up the themes I have presented in this account of Ní Dhomhnaill's mermaid: of transformations and turnings, of traumatic ejection, cures and therapies, memory and forgetting, language and speakability, a lack of empathy from the 'superstitious' people on dry land, and of finding possibilities for knowledge.

**How Does Pain Enter Politics?**

**LG:** it Is it's it's Such a Huge Problem! i Don't think i Think people say Flippantly
"One in Five"
they Don't Actually Know what they they Don't Know! like it's Just
Huge! it's a Huge
problem
it is eNormous it's Everywhere it's Everywhere

And and—it is and reGardless of That— Even though it's Everywhere and
there's— aWareness Raising CamPaigns and there's everything
People can Still be Very aLone because They
they Don't See their— Maybe it's just you Don't see your Life exPerience in
the kind of Sterile Language we Use aRound
domestic aBuse or domestic Violence Even That you know they Don't See
—getting a Slap across the Head or
a Kick y'Know and and i Know that people enCourage
they'd Say y'Know "Say it for What it Is and Do That"
but it's it doesn't Happen it's Just Too Harsh and and People Shy aWay from it
and So
it Closes People In to their Own experiences "and say domestic aBuse" "abuse" is a
Very SteRile Thing to Talk about
which "is That what He does to Me or what He Says to Me?" that's it's
Course they think it's something Different cos it Is something Different it's Their's!

Lady Gaga opens up a political paradox of pain. She highlights the enormous everywhereness of violence and abuse in women's lives, and of awareness raising campaigns. She contrasts this with the sheer and utter loneliness of the experience itself. This same devastating estrangement is suggested in Ní Dhomhnaill's (2007) image of the mermaid who 'seems to be talking up to us/from a bottomless well.'

Ahmed (2004) too highlights that the pain of others is continually evoked in public discourse, as that which demands a collective as well as individual response (p. 20). She notes that pain itself is often represented in Western culture as 'a private, even lonely experience' (p. 20). Ahmed then poses the question, 'how does pain enter politics?' (p. 31).

To this question, Arendt (1958) seems to offer a bleak response. For her, any experience – 'even the greatest forces of intimate life – the passions of the heart, the thoughts of the mind, the delights of the senses' – are characterised by an 'uncertain, shadowy kind of existence ... unless and until they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a

shape to fit them for public appearance' (p. 50). But for her, pain is the experience which, unique among all experiences, cannot be seen and heard by others. The very nature of pain appears to defy the possibility of public appearance which for her constitutes reality: 'the most intense feeling we know of, intense to the point of blotting out all other experiences, namely, the experience of great bodily pain, is at the same time the most private and least communicable of all' (p. 50). Arendt seems to exceptionally remove pain from her account of the political:

> Not only is it perhaps the only experience which we are unable to transform into a shape fit for public appearance, it actually deprives us of our feeling for reality to such an extent that we can forget it more quickly and easily than anything else. There seems to be no bridge from the most radical subjectivity, in which I am no longer "recognizable," to the outer world of life. Pain, in other words, truly a borderline experience between life as "being among men" (*inter homines esse)* and death, is so subjective and removed from the world of things and men that it cannot assume an appearance at all ... Nothing by the same token ejects one more radically from the world than exclusive concentration upon the body's life, a concentration forced upon man in slavery or in the extremity of unbearable pain. (Arendt, 1958, p. 51)

The question then, 'how does pain enter politics?' is rife with tension. If politics concerns the social world, and if pain experience is constitutively outside the space of public appearance as Arendt appears to suggest, is a politics of pain therefore a contradiction in terms?

Yet, in the very act of naming domestic violence and abuse as 'Everywhere', and in her reference to awareness-raising campaigns and 'One in Five', Lady Gaga's account already registers the revolutionary achievement of the feminist movement in transforming private pain into a public and political issue. This historical accomplishment provides an important antidote to Arendt's characterisation of pain as so 'removed from the world ... that it cannot assume an appearance at all' (p. 51). The feminist terms of the appearance of women's stories of trauma underscore the crucial context of political movement, a point emphasised by Herman (1992) in her ground-breaking *Trauma and Recovery.* The political rallying cry of 'One in Five' carries what Nixon and Humphreys (2010) describe as the message at the centre of the movement: 'that domestic violence is common, that it is based in gender inequality and oppression of women, and that it affects women of all social standings, effectively cutting across stratifications of ethnicity and socioeconomic status' (p. 138). This

straightforward message, ‘easily conveyed and unambiguous’, has, they suggest, played no small part over decades in ‘transforming domestic violence from a private concern into a significant and widely recognized public issue that has considerable resonance outside the movement itself, within the spheres of both policy and service provision’ (p. 138).

But Lady Gaga now throws this message into disarray. The message of ‘One in Five’ can be spoken ‘flippantly’, opening up for her a gulf of ‘they Don’t Know!’ between the message and the actuality. And while the message may be ‘easily conveyed and unambiguous’ in the spheres of policy and service provision, Lady Gaga suggests that its powers with the women she works with are limited. Indeed, for her the political discourse of domestic violence and abuse is characterised by ‘Sterile Language’. The call to ‘Say it for what it Is’ in the language of ‘domestic abuse’ can sometimes be, she suggests, ‘Too Harsh,’ having the effect that ‘it Closes People In to their Own experiences’. The unifying impulse of One in Five dissolves into ‘Course they think it’s something Different cos it Is something Different it’s Their’s!’

Does Lady Gaga’s protest amount then to a refusal of politics altogether? Are we now left with an amorphous collection of different pain experiences, without the secure foothold into the political domain afforded by One in Five? How we respond to these questions turns on how we understand the loneliness of pain, and what this in turn means for understandings of ‘the political’.

For Ahmed (2004), the solitariness of pain is intimately linked with its implication in relationship to others. Turning around Melzack and Wall’s (1996) suggestion that ‘Because pain is a private, personal experience, it is impossible for us to know precisely what someone else’s pain feels like’ (p. 41, cited in Ahmed, 2004, p. 29), she suggests instead that, ‘it is because no one can know what it feels like to have my pain that I want loved others to acknowledge how I feel’ (p. 29). For her then, pain, even while solitary, cannot be private, because of its connection to the experience of being with others. Ahmed’s emphasis on the sociality of pain throws up the paradox that ‘what separates us from others also connects us to others’ (p. 25).

In this regard, we can return again to Arendt's text, and read it through her own distinctive politics of appearance. What she calls the 'most radical subjectivity' of pain is inherently relational, based on the lack of a shared reality in the world between people. More specifically, this lack is an *active* collapse of relationality and so of the political. Pain is mediated through a lack of recognition: 'I am no longer "recognizable," to the outer world of life'. It involves a radical ejection from the world - intensely and unbearably *forced* on 'the body's life'. This ejection then 'deprives us of our feeling for reality' which summons up Arendt's notion of 'privation' as linked to the absence of the political (see Chapter 3). This deprivation is so radical that 'we can forget' reality – the world of life between people which marks the human condition of uniqueness in plurality.

Arendt's analysis of pain brings us into the territory of the mermaid 'dried out' through being ejected from her life of the sea. Dry land means forgetting about the conditions which sustain life. The mermaid's existence is 'truly a borderline experience' between life in the sea, and death on dry land. The figure of the mermaid renders all of this as 'the body's life' (Arendt, 1958, p. 51) – the requirement to walk with legs, to hide her gills, to have operations on the uvula. The body of the mermaid, in other words, holds the memory of both the history which is concealed, and the mode of its concealment. 'Pain', as Ahmed notes, 'is not simply an effect of a history of harm; it is the *bodily life of that history'* (p. 34).

But Arendt's 'privation' of pain is not absolute. Before she collapses pain into the apparently irredeemable finality of 'it cannot assume an appearance at all', she first writes more tentatively, 'There *seems* to be no bridge' (my italics). Here then at least is some implicit glimmer of a bridge, albeit a bridge whose reality is the liminal fragile existence of 'truly a borderline experience' between life and death. The bridge of 'becoming recognisable to the other world' might be built on what is already known: 'We know your pain', the bridge-builders say. And yet, absorbed into the already known, the particularity and specificity which marks the embodied experience of pain is then violated. The ethic of the narratable self is on the 'life' side of the 'borderline' between life and death, since it 'desires a *you* that is truly an other, in her uniqueness and distinction' (Cavarero, 2000, p. 92).

This is the ethic announced by Lady Gaga. The flippancy with which she suggests 'One in Five' can be spoken - 'They Don't Know!' - is not a claim that she herself can know the pain of another. In this short narrative, Lady Gaga moves pain experience away from a statistical average, and away from the call to enter a pre-constituted discourse – to 'Say it for what it Is'. She returns it instead to the world of actual embodied individuals: 'is that what He does to Me or what He says to Me?' She restores pain experience to an ontology of uniqueness in plurality, where her own voice is of the plurality which affirms uniqueness: *Course they think it's something Different cos it Is something Different it's Their's!'* In so doing, she powerfully affirms the relational ethic of the narratable self.

Lady Gaga's account opens onto fundamental issues with regard to the question 'how does pain enter politics?' This includes the question as to whether an accumulation of pain experiences through the statistic of One in Five, the political rallying cry of feminists throughout the western world, including Ireland, can do justice to the politics of women's pain. Is this abstracted, substitutable One in danger of misrecognising and dissolving the ontology of pain and violence, and therefore the foundations of a transformative epistemology and politics? If I do not recognise myself and my own pain in the language which others invoke on my behalf, is this a matter of political significance in its own right?

Lady Gaga, in other words, stands on the lost bridge of the Arendtian text. So too do Alice and Clare.

**Turning into 'Mental Health'**

Like Ní Dhomhnaill's mermaid, Alice describes a turning:

A my Issue i suppose is around
women Not having Voice
that Then turns Into "mental health"

**S** Okay

**A** or is Labelled as "mental health"

In her work as a facilitator of feminist community education, Alice hears women's stories. In her hearing, she discerns two narrative strands from many of the same women: narratives of trauma and abuse, and narratives of 'mental health', including 'the Fact that they're on Tablets — Anti-depressant Tablets for Years and years and years without Any kind of reView'.

For Alice, a lack of voice around trauma and abuse becomes transformed into the mental health discourse of 'depression' and is treated on this basis.

'Depression' is one of the major 'mental disorders' described by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.; DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013b). Of the 'depressive disorders', it states:

> [T]he common feature of all of these disorders is the presence of sad, empty, or irritable mood, accompanied by somatic and cognitive changes that significantly affect the individual's capacity to function. What differs among them are issues of duration, timing, or presumed etiology. (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a)

That the 'presumed etiology' of such sadness, emptiness or irritable moods among women has a biological basis is suggested in the 2010/2011 report of the National Advisory Committee on Drugs (NACD, 2012). It reports lifetime use of prescribed anti-depressants as 13 percent of women and 8 percent of men, or, in Alice's words, being on 'Anti-depressant Tablets for Years and years and years.' Contesting this medicalised discourse of women's pain, Alice draws on an alternative discourse of trauma, history and human rights abuse.

'Trauma' means a wound. It is a metaphor borrowed from the notion of physical hurt to describe psychological pain. The language of 'trauma' is an integral part of the discourse of violence against women. Its roots lie with the success of U.S. Vietnamese War veterans in lobbying the American Psychiatric Association (APA) to construct a diagnosis for the long-term psychological damage incurred by soldiers in combat (Burstow, 2003). This resulted in Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a diagnostic category in the DSM. The category was taken up and adapted by feminist therapists such as Herman (1992) as relevant to survivors of childhood sexual abuse, women subjected to domestic violence, and others

routinely wounded in a patriarchal society, just as men are traumatized in combat. Feminists effected important changes in trauma theory. In particular, the DSM requirement that the traumatizing event be outside the range of normal experience explicitly made room for common events such as childhood sexual abuse and violence against women. Burstow (2005) notes that the popularization of PTSD discourse among professional workers has resulted in greater awareness of the long-term harm of violence against women and children (p. 443).

But the PTSD category is not benign. As stated in the DSM-5:

> Trauma and stressor-related disorders include disorders in which exposure to a traumatic or stressful event is listed explicitly as a diagnostic criterion. These include reactive attachment disorder, disinhibited social engagement disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), acute stress disorder, and adjustment disorders. (American Psychiatric Association, 2013c)

The PTSD category, as Burstow (2003) argues, is a function of the power of psychiatry, mediated by the psychiatric text: 'Insofar as trauma practitioners use the texts, we involve ourselves with psychiatry, thereby extending its power' (p. 1300). She argues that both dominant and less dominant conceptualizations of trauma, including feminist ones, are highly problematic: 'most feminist practitioners who work with trauma have accepted much of the conceptual baggage that comes with institutional psychiatry' (p. 1299), using medical language such as *recovery*, *symptoms*, and *diagnoses.* The effects of this are to seriously minimize the problems with psychiatry, and to obstruct radical praxis.

Burstow (2003) suggests, however, that the most formidable reason for retaining the concept of *trauma* is that it is part of everyday vocabulary, and a conceptualization that psychologically injured people claim for themselves. It is also a sensitizing metaphor that conveys a sense of the overwhelming nature of the experiences: 'given that *wound* connotes violence, *trauma* and *wound* lend themselves to relating the psychological injury to violence, including violating social structures' (p. 1301). She argues therefore that the trauma territory not be ceded to psychiatry, but that we continue to build our own critical discourse.

Alice contributes to this building of a critical discourse. The issue of systemic abuse is integral to her challenge to psychiatric discourses. But for her, this is not a matter of grafting questions of human rights onto a trauma narrative. In her listening to women's stories, Alice discerns a lack of voice which is a burden to be carried, like the mermaid deprived of her tail and who must learn to walk with legs. Her account evokes what Arendt calls the 'uncertain, shadowy kind of existence' of privatized experience:

**S** is what that's a Really Interesting iDea that sense of
"Carrying
a Lack"

**A** uhum

**S** so it's Present but it's Lacking

**A** uhum uhum yeah
because it's— beCause there's no Way for it to come Out
women Often asSume it's Not important
or it's Not There or there's Nothing that they can do about it
it Is what it Is and
and you know the Women that we work with
there's a Huge amount of kind of self Blame and
– y' know—
a Very Fatalistic apProach d'you know?

For Alice, the inexpressibility of experience is linked to a dissociation from agentic possibilities, attached to the immobility of 'it Is what it Is.' In Cavarero's (2000) terms, this is 'mere empirical existence' where life is 'an intolerable sequence of events' (p. 56). Ahmed (2004) similarly notes the fetishism, and the work of transformation involved, in cutting the wound off from a history of 'getting hurt' or injured. She argues that, 'It turns the wound into something that simply "is" rather than something that has happened in time and space' (p. 32).

The 'it Is what it Is' perspective also informs Burstow's (2003, 2005) challenge to the diagnostic label of PTSD. She argues that the 'post' in 'post-Traumatic' cuts the event off from its history. The traumatic event itself therefore becomes nothing but a preceding event, while its aftermath is turned into a 'disorder' (2005, p. 443). The very notion of 'anxiety disorder' suggests that anxiety is inherently problematic: 'What is not pleasant becomes a

symptom and, as such, pathologized' (p. 432). As a case in point, she notes that among the criteria for diagnosing PTSD are 'efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversations associated with the event' and 'efforts to avoid activities, places, or people that arouse recollections of the trauma' (p. 433). The meanings that traumatized people themselves make of the traumatic events of their lives are therefore unimportant: 'the purposive responses of stressed people are decontextualized and depicted as symptoms of a disease' (p. 433). However benign intentions might be, then, people are subjected to 'a naming controlled by a powerful international institution at arm's length' (Burstow, 2003, p. 1300) which imposes a stigmatized identity. '[T]heorized as symptoms of a disease', writes Burstow (2005), 'the stage is set for the practitioner to try to eradicate the symptoms, whether through drugs or other means', in other words, 'to try to deprive traumatized people of necessary and vital coping skills in the name of help' (p. 434).

The effect of the diagnosis is to disconnect the event from the social relations which produced trauma, and therefore to sustain the interests of power:

> [T]he woman who was raped who is terrified when she walks down the street and sees men ... is, indeed, reacting to something that resembles an aspect of the original traumatizing event ... While the *post* in *PTSD* creates the impression that the problem is gone and that the person is mistakenly reacting as if it were not, the problem remains ... [T]he social relations in the present contain the same power dynamic as those that culminated in the rape. Her fear, correspondingly, is not simply the result of an unfortunate trigger; and it is not a sign of a 'disorder'. It is an attunement to genuine danger. (p. 436)

Trauma therefore cannot be considered a disorder, or 'free-floating feeling or set of feelings or orientation' (2003, p. 1306). It is rather an active response to 'profoundly injurious events and situations in the real world and, indeed, to a world in which people are routinely wounded' (p. 1302). Burstow highlights therefore that the underlying assumption of a PTSD diagnosis and other diagnoses, is that the world is essentially 'safe and benign' (p. 1304). It imposes a hegemonic worldview based on a normative 'cloak of invulnerability (p. 1304) reproduced in the therapeutic goal for survivors to return to a 'normal' orientation in which they canonce again 'trust in the goodness of others' (1298). The active knowledge-based coping responses of traumatised people are therefore pathologised as 'symptoms' of a disorder.

This is also the point for Alice. She conceptualises processes of labelling at stake in 'depression', and the resulting responses of offering medication to women, as practices of Fitting In to a Norm. She further draws attention to the concealment and containment at stake in her image of how 'soCiety Has to Put it in a Box' and how 'dePression' is 'Easier than Lifting the Lid on the efFects of the Trauma'. She draws attention to the importance of coping responses. For herself, this was reading books.

The reading of books, so far at least, has escaped the diagnostic attentions of the DSM.

> —it's it's it's kind of a Fluke in a Way in that
> y' know—
> I
> the biggest Influence on my— for the Whole of my life has been
> —a deSire to Read

Alice however describes this as the most important influence in her life, as her way of coping with childhood abuse:

**A** d'you know
but—
no it was just it was the Reading that
Not Even like Even beYond kind of enid blyton or whatever
that It was about
"there are Other Worlds outSide the One that I Live in"
...
and That i Think brought Hope
that i didn't Have to
Follow
What i Saw

From this position of recognising the importance of her own coping responses, she traces her critique of the label of 'mental health' to a history of personal questioning about different coping responses, the Fluke of her own reading connecting her with others through difference:

> i suppose iNitially the question would be like you know
> "how can Some people deal with Some stuff or Why do people deal—Some people deal with stuff in One way and then Other people will choose a Different way"

Burstow (2003) similarly writes that,

> Whether traumatized people use more conventional means, or whether they slash or starve themselves, they are actively coping. As such, the so-called symptoms are best theorized as survival skills. Correspondingly, traumatized people are most adequately conceptualized as competent. (p. 1305)

Alice further extends, or turns around, the question of being labelled through coping strategies. She raises questions about how these labels can silence histories of abuse. Reflecting on young people becoming addicted to drugs or alcohol, she asks:

> it's Just— to think there's More Questions to be Asked
> in terms of you know
> Was their issue really "Drug adDiction" or?
> Was there More—Is there More to it?

In Alice's questions, then, about labelling, can be discerned the Arendtian account of pain 'in which I am no longer "recognizable," to the outer world of life (Arendt, 1958, p. 51). Of Arendt's borderline experience between life and death, Alice too has a question:

> i suppose there's Always been a Question in my Mind about you know
> What about the Women
>
> Who are Dead
>
> as— as an Indirect result of of domestic Violence or Trauma?
> y' know so
> Women Who
> —committed Suicide
> —beCame adDicted to Drugs and Alcohol
>
> d'you know there's like there's there's Just a Sense of Un
> an Un UnHeard
> Group of Women
> whose Stories are Never going to be Heard

But 'Lifting the Lid' of the Box is not for Alice some grand political gesture. Lifting the lid is a very particular act of relationality: 'Not recognition ... Verification'.

The notion of 'recognition' of course has an important political calibre (see e.g. Fraser &

Honneth, 2003). Arendt too describes how pain means 'I am no longer "recognizable," to the outer world of life.' Unfortunately, I did not explore with Alice the meaning for her of the difference between 'recognition' and 'verification'. Her insistence on the difference nonetheless invites reflection about the relational nuances. The etymological root of 'recognition', in the verb *recognoscere* meaning 'know again, recall to mind', might be interpreted as implicitly privileging the pre-existing knowledge of the recogniser in the act of recognition. In contrast, the etymological root of verification in *verificare,* to 'make true' (Online Etymology Dictionary), begs no such claims:

> you know and i Think that's what's Missing for a Lot of the women that we would
> Deal with
> is that    you know    Their Lives are not Verified in Any way
> their exPeriences are not
> there's No VerifiCation that they Happened or that they Mattered

Alice's centering of responses to another which verify the other's existence, and that her experience happened and that it mattered, calls out Cavarero's (2000) 'language of the existent [which] assumes the bodily condition of "this and not another" in all of its perceptible concreteness' (p. 20-21). This is ontological affirmation: to 'think that my "I" exists' (p. 56). This then is where the pain of 'the body's life' (Arendt, 1958, p. 51) becomes an event. As Ahmed (2004) writes of her own mother's pain: 'Through such witnessing, I would grant her pain the status of an event, a happening in the world, rather than just the "something" she felt ... Through witnessing, I would give her pain a life outside the fragile borders of her vulnerable and much loved body' (pp. 29-30). Alice's Lifting the Lid response of verification is an ethical response entirely based in responding to this vulnerability of the human condition – of someone who needs someone[13]. It is at the same time a critical response to hegemonic norms of invulnerability.

[13]In response to reading this chapter, Alice wrote to me that, for her, the distinction between recognition and verification is: 'recognition = this happened, verification = this happened to you' (personal communication).

## Living Outside the Norm

Clare too describes a turning. She tells a story of a radical and traumatic identity rupture, a historical rupture in her personal life narrative, 'from the Minute i Made the deCision to Leave my Marriage', and the bereftness of 'This is Me now'.

Clare gives powerful expression to Arendt's account of being 'no longer "recognizable," to the outer world of life', and of a radical ejection from the world:

> —and of course it was    Hugely Damaging!
> ...
> —to    to Change
> AnyBody's persPective of themSelves    y' Know?—
>     Forced on you by soCiety
> —beCause    soCiety has a perCeived Norm and you've Got to Live withIn the parAmeters of That
> and of course i    I Wasn't    i was living outSide of it

Clare locates her account of being 'traumatised by society' firmly in a social and political world of human encounters, discrimination and social norms, and 'in the Little Niches    the InnuEndo'. She describes being 'Treated Differently ... People no Longer wanting to Take you Seriously ... you're Seen as "a Failure"!' With regard to her friend, she describes her anger about people 'looking down on another human being' and how 'Humans are so Cruel to each other Really y'Know?!' In Clare's account, the lack of recognition is not simply *because* of being ejected from the world, but is part and parcel of what constitutes that ejection, the living outSide a perCeived Norm.

It is precisely because trauma involves embodied encounters with other human beings that Burstow (2003) emphasises its political nature: 'Specific traumatic events happen to specific people in specific locations and within specific contexts, and they inevitably involve other human beings. As such, trauma is inherently political' (p. 1306):

**C**    yeah and i felt Different    aBout
it was like when you— no matter Who you met whether you Met
a social Welfare Officer    a comMunity Welfare Officer
—Anybody of an ofFicial Nature

You Had to Spend
well you Did or you Didn't But it was In your best Interests that you
Somehow Proved to the to this Person your "Worthiness" for whatEver it Is that you were Looking After
or Looking For
...

**S** ...
you know you Felt Anyway in Some way "beNeath"

**C:** um yeah aShamed

Edkins (2003) notes the betrayal of trust which is at stake in the collapse of social relations: 'What we call trauma takes place when the very powers that we are convinced will protect us and give us security become our tormentor' (p. 4). She links the devastating consequences of trauma to the intimate connection between our sense of who we are, and the social context in which we place and find ourselves:

> Our existence relies not only on our personal survival as individual beings but also, in a very profound sense, on the continuance of the social order that gives our existence meaning and dignity: family, friends, political community, beliefs. If that order betrays us in some way, we may survive in the sense of continuing to live as physical beings, but the meaning of our existence is changed. (p. 4).

Burstow also highlights the destruction of witnessing as part of traumatization: 'Significantly, most of the rest of the world does not know about the traumatizing event or situation, or at least has no real appreciation of it. This being the case, the traumatized person or community feels profoundly alone' (p. 1304). This is also precisely the point for Clare:

I Felt
"there's Not a lot of people Standing With me Here
there's Not a lot of People suPorting me Here
And it's Necessary
that if i Need to Stand aLone i Stand aLone"

S ummm

C That's an Awful Place to Be!

Crucially then, in the collapse of social relations which constitutes trauma, in the broken illusions of safety and security, relations of power become exposed. As Edkins (2003) writes,

'It has become plain to a survivor that the appearance of fixity and security produced by the social order is just that: an appearance' (p. 8). While traumatic events are overwhelming, in stripping away accepted meanings, they are also a revelation: 'They reveal the contingency of the social order and in some cases how it conceals its own impossibility. They question our settled assumptions about who we might be as humans and what we might be capable of. Those who survive often feel compelled to bear witness to these discoveries' (p. 5). Clare too describes this revelation through her friendships with other women who were parenting alone:

C And it was Only in Standing With Them that i thought
"oh! my God! we're So disCriminated against!"

S yeah

C "So discriminated against"
—disCriminated against
in extraOrdinary ways

S yeah

C Not just
the most Obvious ones but Just in the in the Little Niches
the InnuEndo

Her Standing with one of her friends against discrimination and cruel talk (see Letter to Clare, pp. 311-312) is from this space of knowing the awfulness of the world:

because i was Right in That Space of Just Thinking
"the World is Awful"
and I said
"Oh yeah She's a She's a Very good Friend of mine

But Edkins (2003) notes too how 'the language we speak is part of the social order, and when the order falls apart around our ears, so does the language. What we *can* say no longer makes sense; what we *want* to say, we can't. There are no words for it. This is the dilemma survivors face' (p. 8).

Clare too draws attention to the language of the social order:

That's how we reFerred to Separated Families at the Time
"Broken Home from a Broken Home"!
and so I was
Haunted by All these
soCietal exPressions

She describes the impulse to try to put language on her experiences, and Shape and Order on her Thoughts, through writing poetry:

I Think
You you're Caught in the Suffering of that Trauma
And so
you Have to Find Not "you Have to Find" But it's Helpful
to Find
a Way To Put some Order on your Thoughts

S yeah

ummm

C and to acKnowledge thoughts MayBe as well

S yeah

C that you Don't even
cos Thoughts Come At us

S yeah

C so Many of them so Often we Can't y'know i Think that— if you
that when you Capture some of them you can

S Ummm

C sort of—

i Think it might have Helped me Maybe to get a Shape
on on Things in my Head

In this regard too, Clare suggests that relevant to my thesis might be the story of 'how i Stopped Writing Poetry' because

This Might
—Or— Might Indicate Maybe
the fraGility

S Ummm

C Of
Humans

And so she tells the story of a comment from a man in her writing group, to which she responded with the thought ‘i can’t come here anymore!’, in order to highlight:

That’s
how Easy it is to disMantle a Human Being

Burstow (2005) also highlights how the ‘cloak of invulnerability’ which sustains the social order is precisely what is challenged by experiences of trauma. This knowledge of vulnerability, that ‘the world can get at them’, locates traumatised people in a crucially, albeit devastatingly-earned, knowledged position about the social world. People who are not traumatised ‘maintain the illusion of safety moment by moment by editing out such facets as the pervasiveness of war, the subjugation of women and children, everyday racist violence ...’ (p. 435). People who have been badly traumatized however are less likely to edit out these dimensions of reality. Once traumatized, a person ‘loses that cloak of invulnerability’ (Burstow, 2003, p. 1298), knowing that the world can get at them:

> For the most part, traumatized people experience the world as dangerous ... because events or conditions have brought home how very dangerous the world is and have precluded the editing out practices by which less traumatized people construct an essentially safe and benign world. (Burstow, 2003, p. 1304)

Clare however also emphasises the importance of the specific context of her story about the fragility of the human being: the knowledge of fragility emerges in response to the silencing effects of officially sanctioned knowledge:

and— i Think this is Kind of Interesting because it Goes Back to the
eduCational atTainment
is that
i Didn’t beLieve i could write Poetry
...
He said “and there was a Couple of Secondary school Teachers that were Part of
the group” he said
“and Let me Tell you All Something”
he said
“you Would Not Get the Poetry

Out of
Primary school kids"

Herman (1992) describes how a victim who is already devalued 'may find that the most traumatic events of her life take place outside the realm of socially validated reality' so that '[h]er experience becomes unspeakable' (p. 8). These devaluations are highlighted by Clare: the 'Labels and Tags that Women have to carry'. She describes how these 'labels and Tags' pervade identity. She remembers sitting on the sofa one day thinking 'This is Me now' – a Me with No Money, no Leaving Cert, No Work, No Skills, Can't Work, and feeling 'Absolutely ... beReft!' Intertwined with this she draws attention to a strong Catholic identity, so that she is the 'most Dreadful person for leaving this marriage', reinforced by societal phrases such as 'from a Broken Home.'

Yet, as I listened to again and transcribed Clare's harrowing story, a very different knowledgeable subjectivity suddenly burst through in one statement:

i just Absolutely knew i didn't Want to Be in it any longer

(see Letter to Clare, p. 304).

I shared this with Clare in our next conversation:

S And
in the Middle of All of that
there is This Line Here
that Really jumps Out at me

C yeah?

S which is This one
...
through All of that
You said
you "I just AbsoLutely Knew i didn't Want to be In it any Longer"

C yeah yeah That's tr- yeah

I share with Clare my sense of the strength and power of the knowledge carried in this statement, such that it was strong enough to go against her then strong Catholicism, to sustain

an endurance of the Dreadful Flat and the other societal oppressions and traumas involved in leaving her marriage. I also connect it with an earlier discussion in which I had filled her in on my developing research intention to explore the organisation of silence (Clair, 1998) around violence against women:

S do you Know what i Mean?

C yeah yeah yeah i Do yeah
it's a Very good Point yeah

S it's Just so Powerful

C yeah

S and and in a Way in terms of the organisation of Knowledge it's like
the the Organisation of Silence
it's like That's the Knowledge that has been Silenced
through All Everything

C yeah yeah

S and what I'm what I'm really— what i'm sort of
what i'd be Really Interested to Know is
it's like in Your "Not Wanting

to Be in That reLationship any longer"\ and your "Absolute Knowledge"
C \uhum umm

S there Must have been Some sense of Something Else that you Wanted
Some you know Even if you weren't Able to Name it or
but like That's that Knowledge is so Strong!
"i just Absolutely Knew i didn't Want to be In it any Longer"

C umm

S it was Able to Go to Go through Everything Else

C umm

i don't Know what to Say about that Really you know?
—

S it just it's Almost Like you were Holding Onto Other possiBilities for Life

C well
i Wonder is it Something to Do with the—
I don't Know now because i'm Shooting in the Dark here now

S yeah

C My dark!
i Wonder is it about—

aGain as You said it's aBout the Silence
it's aBout
Every Human Being
Regardless
and i mean reGardless of Anything
intelLectual capacity—
reGardless of Everything
Have Must have the ability—
To— Make deCisions
because They're the Experts on their Lives

S yeah

C And—
we get Silenced through soCietal Norms
And Through—
All sorts of Norms in soCiety you know
and—

And
so Maybe— Maybe That's Just aBout
That Sentence is Probably just about
a ReaLiSation maybe on My part
that i Couldn't be Silenced any Longer

S Ummm

C i Couldn't be Silenced any Longer

S yeah!

C —What's that Beautiful Quote—
by aNais Nin
it's "if I"

i Don't can't reMember the quote but it's "if i Don't go Out and
Do my Thing i'm going
if i Don't go Out and creAte my Dream i'm going to Die in somebody Else's'

S yeah!

C and i was Going to Die in somebody Else's Dream
or Somebody Else's Norm—
y'Know?

S Yes yeah

C i Felt
when i was Leaving the reLationship And
and Also what i want to say as well there is
that there was Huge
that Even Though
i had— i Probably didn't Recognise it that i No Longer wanted to be Silenced

S ummm

C Clearly i'm Only even Recognising that Now

S ummm

C But

—Yeah i Think i would have Died there
i Honestly think i would have Died there y'Know—
and—
and i suppose That's what i'm trying to say
in the Long way around is that
we Really can't Si- if we if we Silence people we Kill them we Kill their Spirit y'Know?
—And
so I was Fortunate let's Say
i was Fortunate eNough to Have
That—
to be Able to Say "i Can't Do this anyMore" to Have that Feeling that i Absolutely Knew i mean That was That was a Good thing

For me, this was a deeply moving moment of narrative creation and becoming. Clare consciously moves into the liminal territory of 'shooting in the dark'. Around this newly-reclaimed narrative fragment of the knowledge embedded in her act of leaving her relationship, she weaves a new political narrative. She connects this knowledge to the silencing effects of societal norms, and a new realisation that 'i Couldn't be Silenced any Longer'. Her voice is in dialogue with my voice, but she expands the meaning of silencing through a dialogue with the voice of journal-writer Anais Nin. In not remembering the actual quote of Nin which she reaches for, her voice is highly 'double-voiced' as she interanimates

Nin's voice with her own. 'i Couldn't be Silenced any Longer' now involves movement, creativity and dreams: 'if i Don't go Out and/ Do my Thing ... if i Don't go Out and creAte my Dream'. It also involves the destructive effects of not going out: 'i'm going to Die in somebody Else's'. But Clare reshapes this into a more explicitly politicised discourse which turns 'somebody else's Dream' into 'somebody else's Norm'. All this makes available for Clare a new narrative of the possible consequences had she stayed in her relationship: 'i Honestly think i would have Died there'. The death here is a death of the spirit as articulated by Clare's expansion of this into an ontological statement about silence and the human condition: 'if we Silence people we Kill them we Kill their Spirit y'Know?'

Clare powerfully gives substance to Arendt's (1958) borderline experience between life and death. Yet, even as Clare considers herself fortunate to have had this absolute knowledge, leaving the relationship in itself did not free her from somebody Else's Dream or Somebody Else's Norm:

C

But
I— i Think that—

I Went aGainst the Grain in Leaving the reLationship
And

and there was— that Even though i think i might have Died within if i'd have
Stayed within that Space
there was a Part of me that Died withOut it— outSide of it as Well
BeCause
I was
What's the Word for it now?
I was Going against what's conSidered to be "Norm"

### Linearised Time and the Politics of Memory

We might perhaps say that the trauma which Clare describes, forced on her by society, is of the past and that, in modern Ireland, apart from the prohibition on abortion, Catholicism no longer holds the same power to control women. But at the time of our first conversation, Alice speaks of the ongoing struggles of women who were incarcerated in convent-run

Magdalene Laundries to receive official recognition by the state of its active role in their incarceration:

**A** and Women are Still Struggling to have their Voice Heard Through the likes of the magdalene Laundries or whatEver
...

and Even that Call you know "we Want a Hearing Into this we Want an inQuiry Into this"
Screams of
"we Have no Voice"

Such stories of pain must be heard, as Ahmed (2004) notes with regard to the Stolen Generation of indigenous Australians. But she asks: 'what are the conditions of possibility for hearing them?' and in particular of being 'heard justly' (p. 34). She suggests that our task is '*to learn to hear what is impossible'* (p. 36, her italics). This is only possible 'if we respond to a pain that we cannot claim as our own ... in such a way that the testimony is not taken away from others, as if it were about our feelings, or our ability to feel the feelings of others' (p. 35).

Shortly after this conversation with Alice, there was a public inquiry into the state's role in the suffering of the Magdalene women. Following the McAleese Report (2013), the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, made a state apology to the women whose experiences were the focus of the report[14]:

> What we discuss today is your story. What we address today is how you took this country's terrible 'secret' and made it your own ... But from this moment on you need carry it no more. Because today we take it back. Today we acknowledge the role of the state in your ordeal ... Those 'values' those failures those wrongs [*sic]* characterised Magdalene Ireland. Today we live in a very different Ireland with a very different consciousness awareness – an Ireland where we have more compassion empathy insight heart *[sic].* (thejournal.ie, 2013)

Is this a just hearing? The form of the apology transforms the stories left behind by each unique, vulnerable bodily life into a generic 'your story'. 'Your story' is fetishised as akin to a heavy but transferrable parcel which 'you took' but now, through the apology, 'we take it back'. To 'hear the other's pain as my pain', writes Ahmed (2004), ' ... involves violence' (p.

[14] The report has been challenged *inter alia* for privileging institutional forms of documentation over survivor testimonies (see McGarr, 2014).

36). The presumption to ‘take it back’ wrenches women’s traumas from their bodily lives and histories: ‘you need carry it no more’. Yet, ‘[t]he affectivity of pain is crucial to the forming of the body as both a material and lived entity’ (Ahmed, 2004, p. 24). An awful equivalence is created then between ‘you’ and ‘we’ as carriers of the burden. The women’s traumas are then appropriated to bolster a particular national identity through the construction of two ‘Irelands’: the ‘Magdalene Ireland’ of the past, and the ‘very different Ireland’ of ‘today’, characterised by ‘more compassion empathy insight heart’. This is a time which depends on a linearised move of ‘progress’ that closes off the past from the present. The effect is to merely replace one moral self-regard for another, reinstating the refusal to hear the silences and secrets carried in ‘today’.

Edkins (2003) argues that one of the most important implications of rescripting traumatic memory into linear time is that memory is depoliticised (p. 52). The actual emplotment of trauma narratives transforms them into something which they are not: ‘experiences which are contained in time, indeed which happened in the past and are now finished’ (p. 155):

> [L]inear, homogenous time suits a particular form of power – sovereign power, the power of the modern nation-state. Sovereign power produces and is itself produced by trauma: it provokes wars, genocides and famines. But it works by concealing its involvement and claiming to be a provider not a destroyer of security ... By rewriting these traumas into a linear narrative of national heroism ... the state conceals the trauma that it has, necessarily, produced. (p. xv)

The Taoiseach’s time of ‘today’ elides the Magdalene women’s struggles for a hearing in the time of today, which for Alice ‘Screams of “we Have no Voice”’. The time of today is also the time of broken promises to care for the life of the body: JFM Research (2015) reports that the 500 women who signed up to the redress scheme ‘have not received the full range of health and community care services promised by the government in 2013’ (p. 4).

Alice offers an alternative perspective to the Taoiseach on the Ireland of ‘today’:

**A** So it’s like When i do “women creating changes toGether” ThroughOut the Course i’ve Yet to be Not Shocked by Something i Hear

**S** umm

**A** d’you know and Even though i’m Hearing it kind of Year after Year after Year

about different things that are Said or Done to women
In these various different Areas of their Lives

**S** ummm

**A** It's Still— And and So it Should it Should be shocking
because it Is shocking

**S** ummm

**A** but it's Not Out there d'you know?
...
and it it kind of reMinds me of you know of this Hierarchy of Need or
Hierarchy of
Pity
that we Have you know in Terms of
Who do we feel Sorry for in soCiety or
Who do we have Empathy for?
and Often the Women that We Work with Nobody has empathy for them
because they're Seen as
—"Low-Skilled"
—"a Drain on soCiety"
—y'know "Not contriButing"
that Kind of thing
and

and there's just a Lack comPlete Lack of Empathy for the fact that y'know
These people have had horRific experiences

The normative power of such phrases as *'Low-Skilled', 'a Drain on soCiety', 'Not contriButing',* are those of the neoliberal moral universe which sets the terms for the successful autonomous self-governing invulnerable self. Following Clare, these are the 'hauntings' of neoliberalism – the Someone else's Norm and Someone else's Dream which Kills the Spirit. As Edkins (2003) writes, the dilemma survivors encounter is that, 'The only words they have are the words of the very political community that is the source of their suffering. This is the language of the powerful, the words of the status quo, the words that delimit and define acceptable ways of being human within that community' (p.8).

Alice highlights how such phrases, in their 'lack of empathy', fail to recognise the particularity of women's histories, including often horrific experiences. As previously noted, Ahmed (2004) too describes the 'failure of presence' which circulates through what she calls

‘sticky words’ (p. 46). Detached from particular bodies, they transform others into objects of emotion as the perceived agents of ‘our’ injury – in this case, a ‘drain’ on resources through a perceived failure to ‘contribute’. What is concealed, of course, is the state’s role as a ‘destroyer of security’ (Edkins, 2003). Alice re-positions the failure from its location ‘in’ women into a society which has a ‘comPlete Lack of Empathy for the fact that y’know/These people have had horRific experiences’.

As Burstow (2003) notes, traumatizing reactions by others ‘greatly compound trauma and constitute part of the objective basis for the sense of aloneness, the terror, the worthlessness, the despair, and the collapse of witnessing’ (p. 1306). But echoing the connections which Clare and Alice make between these responses and social norms, Burstow too notes that such reactions are determined to some degree by the values and structures of society: ‘That is not to say that there would be no trauma in a noncapitalist, nonpatriarchal, nonracist society, but it would hardly have the dimensions that it currently has’ (p. 1307). In this sense, systemic oppression traumatises everyone, but not equally so:

> Oppressed groups are subject as well to what Root (1992) called the insidious traumatization involved in living our everyday lives in a sexist, classist, racist, ableist, and homophobic society: the daily awareness of the possibility of rape or assault, the daily struggles to stretch insufficient wages so that the family eats, encountering yet another building that is not wheelchair accessible, and seeing once again in people’s eyes that they do not find you fully human. (p. 1308)

She, too, argues that ‘officially mandated institutions of help, especially arms of the state, must be understood as central players in the traumatizing of people and communities’ (Burstow, 2003, p. 1307). Trauma, argues Burstow, is not only ‘magnified exponentially in the name of help’ by ‘institutions that occupy central locations in the relations of ruling’ but it is systematically produced by them (p. 1307). Part of this systematic reproduction of trauma is the systematic reproduction of silence:

**A** and there are Structures in Place
Not even to “keep it Happening”
there are Structures in Place to Keep Quiet about it

**S** okay

**A** and That's i think the Damage that that Happens for Women
is Not necessarily the
Impact
of
the eVent itSelf
it's the Fact that they're Silenced Afterwards

**S** okay

**A** and that Voice
that Coming Back to
if women Don't have a Voice about What they've exPerienced
they Don't have any valiDation that their Lives are have any Meaning
or are Real

These 'Structures in Place to Keep Quiet about it' are about silencing knowledge: 'the act of labelling sets the stage for attempting to rid survivors of their knowledge, pushing them to return to a Pollyannaish view of the world that the trauma has already shown to be inadequate' (Burstow, 2005, p. 435). This is the significance of the linear scripting of '*post*-Traumatic'. 'Recovery' as the aim is about reinserting survivors into structures of power: 'Survivors are helped to verbalise and narrate what has happened to them; they receive counselling to help them accommodate once more to the social order and re-form relationships of trust' (Edkins, 2003, p. 9). What the state attempts in its response to trauma is to render survivors 'more or less harmless to existing power structures', so that 'victimhood offers sympathy and pity in return for the surrender of any political voice' (p. 9). She cites Milan Kundera that the struggle against power 'is the struggle of memory against forgetting' arguing that, 'Resistance to this re-scripting ... constitutes resistance to sovereign power' (p. xv). As Clare states with regard to her listening to women's voices and stories:

**C:** i Think it gives me a Stronger Sense of Purpose about h—
This is y'Know How
soCiety is set Up to igNore a lot of things y'Know?

Edkins (2003) states that 'when our expectations of what community is, and what we are, are shown to be misplaced, then our view of ourselves has to be altered – or we have to fight for political change, in other words a reformulation of community' (p. 9). For Burstow (2003), also, 'insofar as regaining power is central to what so much traumatized coping is about, an absolutely critical direction for radical trauma praxis is redirecting some of the focus off

controlling self and onto acquiring real power in the larger world' (p. 1311). Part of this is, following Freire (1970), 'the seeming impossibility of fulfilling their ontological vocation to name the world in order to change the world' (p. 1308). She argues therefore that, 'In general, although psychological work must, of course, be integrated, I am advocating that trauma work move more in the direction of critical adult education' (p. 1313).

**Women's Community Education and Women in Action**

Like Clare, Lady Gaga too describes a Dream:

> and That was the kind of Thing that I—that My Dream was
> that it was Never going to be Dry and Stale that it was going to be Open and Fluid
> that Lots of you know we Didn't have to s- Start out and say "we're going to Work on
> eduCation and emPloyment" that We were just going to be Open and we were Just going to
> —you Know
> we were going to Go where the work Took us and we were going to be Guided by what Women were Coming in and Telling us
> and i'd Always had a Dream cos at One time we Dreamt we'd have a Bus and we'd Go aRound you know

Against somebody else's dry and stale normative dream of 'eduCation and emPloyment', Lady Gaga's dream is of being Open and Fluid. This is a nomadic dream of being 'Guided by what Women were Coming in and Telling us'. It finds its imaginary in the dream of a Bus to evoke movement outwards to listen and to respond to women's voices.

This marks the Arendtian political. For Lady Gaga the Public doMain is a feminist space that arises through women telling their stories to each other to create new meanings:

> so Feminism
> Things Once y'Know
> we beCame Once
> Private Issues started being Brought into the Public doMain That was the Key
> Once Stuff that was going On and they Started to
> Feel Safe eNough to Talk about it
> And Then Hear from Other Women

and Then
the disCussion that'd Follow
it Stopped being    just
Something that Happened to You
In a Vacuum

**S** ummm

**LG** it Started    to have a Whole New Meaning

This also sets the scene for Lady Gaga's critique of academic knowledge production, opening up deeper questions about theorising the theory-making process itself: 'and – When do we Start unPicking All of this  Making these  Fancy Theories?  It is a question called up by her own moving between the spaces of community and academia, experienced as 'just So Separate! this is Not our Lives! ... it was So unReal'.

Her questions are not anti-intellectual, or against academic knowledge production per se. Part of her point is the importance of 'making the Link    beTween acaDemia and These Women'. This link in turn is based on a pedagogical process which extends to women the invitation: 'you Don't need to bring Anything    Only yourSelf    /and a Willingness to Share your Stories'.

Lady Gaga's point here, then, is 'democratic access to the process of theory making' (hooks, 1994, p. 68). hooks writes that theory is not 'inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary', but only fulfils this function 'when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing towards this end' (p. 61). She describes her own childhood theorizing in a way which echoes the story of Alice:

> Living in childhood without a sense of home, I found a place of sanctuary in 'theorizing,' in making sense out of what was happening. I found a place where I could imagine possible futures, a place where life could be lived differently. This 'lived' experience of critical thinking, of reflection and analysis, because a place where I worked at explaining the hurt and making it go away. Fundamentally, I learned from this experience that theory could be a healing place. (p. 61)

hooks (1994) highlights how feminists of colour in particular have consistently worked 'to resist the construction of restrictive critical boundaries within feminist thought' (p. 63). To

create theory that can 'advance renewed feminist movements', she argues that we 'necessarily celebrate and value theory that can be and is shared in oral as well as written narrative' (p. 69). Lady Gaga's critique of contemporary feminist theory-making processes resonates with hooks' comment:

> Critical reflection on contemporary production of feminist theory makes it apparent that the shift from early conceptualizations of feminist theory (which insisted that it was most vital when it encouraged and enabled feminist practice) begins to occur or at least becomes more obvious with the segregation and institutionalization of the feminist theorizing process in the academy, with the privileging of written feminist thought/theory over oral narratives. (p. 62)

Lady Gaga's call is also that of Cavarero (2005), who critiques *theoria* based on the universal: 'it is not Woman who makes herself heard; rather, it is the embodied uniqueness of the speaker and his or her convocation of another voice' (p. 207). By the same token, it is not One in Five who makes herself heard. Of One in Five it cannot be asked, 'Who are you?', because One in Five has no story. Abstracted and detached in the logos of the universal, One in Five traps Woman in the binary logic of being either the unfortunate One or the lucky Four. Her wound fetishised, One in Five has been suspended in time for twenty years. This is the logos which Lady Gaga refuses: 'Course they think it's something Different cos it Is something Different it's Their's!'

Indeed, Nixon and Humphreys (2010) argue that there are now 'many challenges to this message' (p. 139). It risks essentialising and 'projecting standardized qualities and experiences onto all men and women' (p. 151). It therefore risks 'further excluding vulnerable women' (p. 130), and they 'fear that this sameness also poses a danger to the movement' (p. 151). Rather than sameness, 'attention to diversity speaks more directly to the experiences of a significant group of women who find themselves "on the margins"' (p. 150). Thus, they argue that 'the movement, its message and collective action frame must become more nuanced, local, and specific' (p. 151) in order to ensure that 'the movement makes room for the voices of marginalized women' (p. 153). Alice also challenges the One in Five message:

> y'know I Know that the    the staTistics are "One
> One in Five women will exPerience    domestic Violence"

That's certainly Not the statistic! with the Women that we're Working with
it's Much Much Higher than that

Similarly to Nixon and Humphreys (2010), Alice highlights that,

it's exAcerbated
for Women who have No Choice through Poverty

For Alice then too,

**A** In that in Trying to raise the Profile of domestic Violence
and Absolutely domestic violence can Happen to Anyone

**S** yeah

**A** there's a a Lack of conNect to the reAlity

The 'conNect to the reAlity' for Alice of course is through hearing and responding to women's stories. So when Alice says, 'i've Yet to be Not Shocked by Something i Hear' (see above), I ask her about this 'Shock':

S What What does that Speak to for You that just being that
that Sense of "Shock" of being "Shocked"?
\that you can Hold onto that Sense of being "Shocked"?
A \i Think it's a Positive thing yeah
i think
for for my Own sense of huManity
And my own and Their Their
Sense of
What was i talking about There a second ago? That sense of
Verifying for them

**S** Umm

**A** the fact that they've come Out with this story Somebody needs to say "no That was Wrong"
...
"That shouldn't have Happened"

Alice's response is also linked to the narratability of the self, to 'the Fact that they've come Out with this story'. For her, shock is a giving of herself, connected with her own sense of

her humanity. It opens the possibility of a re-engagement with the past through the ethical charge 'That shouldn't have Happened', disturbing the fixed historical status of 'That'.

In order not to essentialise or naturalise Alice's shock, I inquire about her own ability to be shocked, and how she has held on to shock:

**S** and How have You been able to
Hold On to that aBility to be "Shocked"?
do you think

Alice's initial response, 'because it Is Shocking,' speaks to the powerful presence for her of the wrongness expressed through shock, and the unthinkability of *not* being shocked. In our second conversation however, she spontaneously fills in a history of 'holding on to shock' as a refusal to be part of the status quo:

**A** **...**
d'you know it it
is Also a Part— of Me to to Minimise and whatEver d'you know and
and i think it's it's a deLiberate

**S** umm

**A** it Has to
it's it's Not Now as much a deliberate but it Had to at one point beCome a deliberate
Act to be shocked
or to reMind myself
"This is Shocking"

**S** yeah

**A** do you know what i Mean?\ that that
**S** \yeah

**A** Through Different Lens

**S** yes

yeah

**A** Through the lens of "a Fair and Just World" or whatever or or "an Equal world"
This is Shocking

**S** oKay

**A** do you Know what i Mean? so I can underStand the Struggle
Or the

the reAl— or the the reAlity of Dampening it down

**S** yeah

**A** do you know?

**S** and How did You
How did You Come to
y'know "reMind yourself" of Being Shocked?

**A** because i Realised i think that i was doing a disService
i was becoming Part of the Status Quo if i Wasn't shocked
**...**
Media stories are horRendous in the detail that they would go into

**S** yeah

**A** and So it becomes almost Normal to Hear\ about Very Graphic Details
**S** \yeah yeah yeah

**A** Of an eVent

And i suppose It was It was about Having a
a Knowledge to to Kind of Look beYond the Words of
a Very shocking eVent or a sad Story or or a—
—an exPerience of ill-Treatment

**S** yeah

**A** And say "no that's Not oKay"

**S** yeah

**A** and Look beHind it to say "well
What could this have Done?"

Shock is an explicitly political response to the world which interrupts the normative unfolding time of terrible-things-as-usual. Alice's refusal of the given world involves assuming the lens of another Fair and Just world, and it is from the perspective of this other world that it is possible to say 'no that's Not oKay'. For Alice, her Shock animates a particular kind of knowledge which involves looking 'beyond the Words' to the effects, and asking the question, 'What could this have Done?'

Alice speaks too of how the interruptions of normative time facilitated by shock are carried into the pedagogical space of women's community education:

**A** ...
and it's like and— and there's a Link then d'you know what i mean that When i'm Shocked
or When i i suppose Now

i Actively Stop —y'know in my Brain
if Something is shocking because

**S** you "Actively stop" how do you mean?

**A** Stop kind of the
Stop the—
whatEver my Thought Processes\ or whatever to alLow that shock
**S** \okay yeah

**A** because it's very Easy to get Caught Up in the or to Be in that say Mindset "Oh yeah that was Terrible"
And move On and be aWare of
y'know the Time and the Rest of the Class! and whatever And of Course you're aware of All those things

**S** ummm

**A** But

To i suppose Give Pause For that shock

**S** umm

**A** Now do you know what i Mean? that

**S** yeah

**A** that it's unComfortable d'you Know and
and Sometimes
there's a Bit of a Balance between—

Wanting to Hear what's being Said

**S** umm

**A** but Also being aware that maybe the other Person is Not prePared for a response

**S** yeah

**A** Y'know and it's not apPropriate

Alice opens up the different space-times of the story being told. There is the clock time of Moving On, and the shock time of Actively Stopping, and of giving Pause for the story and the response. This moment of giving pause holds its own tensions between the desire to hear the story, and the effect of a response for which the teller of the story may not be ready. This is the becoming in the molecular counter-formations of the 'dance between power and desire' (Tamboukou, 2008, p. 285). Edkins (2003) calls this 'trauma time', unsettling the linear time of standard political processes which depend on events happening as part of a well-known and widely-accepted story. She argues that events which upset or escape appear to occupy another form of time, producing something 'more lively, less dogmatic, less predictable'. This is 'the arena of innovation and revolution, a field of sudden, unexpected and abrupt change, a point at which the status quo is challenged. It is where what we might call "real politics" resurfaces, challenging the claims of the imposter that has taken its place' (p. xiii-xiv).

All of this provides for a new reading of Arendt's (1958), 'There seems to be no bridge from the most radical subjectivity, in which I am no longer "recognizable," to the outer world of life' (p. 51). In trauma knowledge is 'the most radical subjectivity'. This is the bridge of the Arendtian text which opens up the fragility and intangibility of action to the boundary conditions of human existence. While these conditions are marked by human vulnerability, they are also marked by the creative possibilities of plural uniqueness in relationality. This is the political time of 'wow moments', when 'anything can be available' (Lady Gaga). As Clare tells of women's voices:

> they're Not Speaking with it they're Singing with their voices
> and I see
> Such a Difference in Some of those Women
> beCause they're they're parTicipating
> in Something
> that is Joyful to them
> that alLows their Voices

to be

let Go from their Body almost! y'Know?

…
but That to Me is quite miRaculous Sort of I think
To— to to be
So disemPowered at Various Points in your Life
or maybe OverWhelmed with resPonsibilities
that Might seem UnFair

**S** yeah

**C** or Un-neGotiable

**S** ummm

**C** to Just proVide
a Space

you— fi— dePending on on the parTicular Woman's Circumstances
i have Seen Confidence SOaring

In the group In the group
—like of— of IndiViduals i have Seen
people like they're in Flight Almost

For Arendt (1958), 'the new ... always appears in the guise of a miracle' (p. 178). The polis is not a physical location, but is 'the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together,' and which 'can find its proper location almost any time and anywhere' (p. 206). This is 'the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely where I appear to others as others appear to me' (p. 206). Its possibilities spill beyond the territorialised boundaries of the state, to embrace the unbounded pelagic encounters of the Seven Seas. Lady Gaga, for example, elaborating on moving towards a new understanding of solidarity through encountering women from Tanzania as part of a feminist solidarity exchange, describes how:

**LG** —because
and Then you'd to OverCome because for Most People it was "Going Out and
god Help us! and were they Starving?" and That sort of Thing
and to to Realising just How
Even if it's just in Honour and reSpect of Those Women
that we Just Had to
—Guide our eduCation Different that they Had to See these Women in Action

that we Had to inVite these Women to Come
and— and faCilitate Sessions
and Show Videos Which we Did Afterwards
...
and how Women could just
feel such a Warmth! and such a – a Different reLationship with somebody when it
Wasn't That
you know "the Charity and we're Giving and we're going Over there to Show them
the Way and to Help"
and and the Openness to Wow y'know we can Learn So Much

**S** ummm

**LG** we can exPlore our iDeas toGether

**S** yeah

**LG** we can creAte something New y'know and deVelop new iDeas and that

All of this marks the neoliberal scene of a political struggle for women's story-telling spaces based on what people were born to be involved in:

and Then All Crazy neoliberal Language started coming In
and there was No Room AnyMore for what We wanted to Do
because All that Mattered Now
was that we got people Educated to get Jobs
to make More
Stuff that could be Traded
to cause More Inequality

and it just p- it's— we're reSisting as Best we Can
but it's Pushing In and Pushing In
and making it Smaller and Smaller
and Some days like Yesterday was a Gorgeous day here
we had a Crowd of women in it was Lovely the Chat
was Great the Talk was unReal what people were Talking about
and— you know Then you say
i was Sitting Listening to the Women some Women in the Kitchen having
converSations and it was Just so Lovely and i thought

"This is what we have to Fight for" you know "This is what's Really
This is what's Lovely!" People weren't Born to be Miserable! People
Certainly weren't Born to be apaThetic
you know People

their eMotions Guide them and they
they Want to be inVolved in anything that's Nice!

In this chapter, following Ní Dhomhnaill's poetic account of the mermaid's trauma of being dried out after her ejection from the sea, I have explored different kinds of turnings and transformations involved in trauma. Over the course of this chapter, Lady Gaga, Alice and Clare have renegotiated the political on Arendtian terms, with a particular focus on violence against women. On the one hand, I have discussed medicalised/therapeutic and state responses to trauma as getting rid of survivors' knowledge, in order to render survivors harmless to political institutions which produce trauma. I have linked this to the politics of forgetting produced by a linear script. On the other hand, I have discussed women's community education as a radical trauma praxis of women in action. I have located this action in the political conditions of oral knowledge and alternative space/times.

These understandings inform my analysis in Part III which discusses the Irish government's response to 'domestic, sexual and gender based violence' as drying out of the mermaids.

## Glossary

| | |
|---|---|
| BPfA | Beijing Platform for Action |
| FETAC | Further Education and Training Awards Council |
| HSE | Health Service Executive |
| IRIS | Integrated Reporting Information System |
| IRCHSS | Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences |
| LCDP | Local Community and Development Programme |
| MABS | Money Advice and Budgeting Service |
| NWS | National Women's Strategy |
| NCCWN | National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks |
| NESC | National Economic and Social Council |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| NWCI | National Women's Council of Ireland |
| VAW | Violence Against Women |
| WCE | Women's Community Education |