

## **Review of *TEN: Territory, Encounter & Negotiation***

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As researcher, student or artist it can be difficult to know how to engage with a group of people framed as being within a so-called 'community' context in a way that is genuinely collaborative and open. The framing of relationships in these arenas are often implicitly based upon asymmetrical relationships of power that presuppose that one person (artist/researcher/student) is the one 'who knows' or who is there to 'discover' and translate the knowledge that others have. It is perhaps unsurprising that many of those in contexts traditionally targeted for research or art interventions are suspicious of the motivations of researchers and feel alienated by a process that often expropriates their knowledge and experience. Yet, to not stage encounters between different people seems to be an unproductive response. How can we develop forms of research, co-production of knowledge and creative collaboration premised upon relationships that are as equal as possible, and that value the voice and ideas of all participants?

The importance of Fiona Whelan's critical memoir is that it speaks to those of us who work, teach, research, and collaborate with others (who are usually not initially identified as fellow academics or artists) across a range of settings. It can be so hard to know how to begin such a process, and even harder to know how to persist. Whether and how one manifests the learning, ideas and knowledge developed through engagement adds another level of complexity. Through an extraordinarily rich and reflective description of the process of engagement alongside philosophical reflection upon, and contextualization of, the projects she describes, Whelan helps us to understand *how*, methodologically, we might go about durational collaborative practice, *how* we must become attuned to complex dynamics and power relations attuned if we are to be ethical researchers or artists, the need for mediators, and the variety of ways in which ideas, stories and knowledge can be manifested. It will be of enormous interest to people working in a diverse range of fields such as collaborative research, participatory action research, adult education, ethnography, life history research, narrative enquiry, sociology, criminology, philosophy, socially engaged art practice, and education more broadly, as well as to youth workers, social workers, gardai, community activists, teachers, politicians, artists, policymakers, and finally, to people who may be reflecting upon engaging in a research project with an academic or artist.

This book tells an intimate story that helps us to understand the beautiful risks of developing a process and enquiry based approach to making (art)work. It reveals the ethic required to sustain this practice, the need to question one's own motivation, the practical complexities of negotiation, the value of sensitive and critical discussion, the importance of recognizing each participant as central to the practice of collaboration, the need for mediation in particular in respect of those in the media who may misrepresent the process, and the requirement for critical reflection of any researcher or artist. Perhaps more than anything, it communicates the vitality, wonder and practicalities of bringing together those different worlds of experience, stories and ideas that each of us inhabits. It shows how we might come to express a position, make a statement, and communicate an experience of shared encounters and dialogues through making artworks and staging encounters. And it shows those funders and policymakers who insist that outcomes for an art intervention or piece of research be prescribed in advance, and/or who value only short-term interventions, that such insistence may well damage the possibility of real collaboration, the likelihood of creative outputs or new kinds of (transferrable) knowledge, and the development of relationships founded upon an authentic ethical engagement that values all participants.