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# THE POLICING DIALOGUES REVIEW

Reflections on an Exploration of Neighbourhood Power Relations at The LAB by **WHAT'S THE STORY? COLLECTIVE**



TRIANGLE TALK – A MEETING BETWEEN MEMBERS OF WHAT'S THE STORY? COLLECTIVE, RIALTO YOUTH PROJECT AND GARDAÍ IN THE LAB PHOTO: FIONA WHELAN

## POLICING DIALOGUES WAS A SIX-WEEK RESIDENCY AT THE LAB BY WHAT'S THE STORY? COLLECTIVE, FROM SEPTEMBER 14th TO OCTOBER 23rd, 2010.



**JOHN WHYTE** CHAIRPERSON OF THE RIALTO YOUTH PROJECT, INTRODUCES THIS REVIEW OF A UNIQUE ARTS RESIDENCY THAT FOCUSED ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES OF POWER AND POLICING IN DUBLIN SOUTH CENTRAL DISTRICT. THE RESIDENCY, WHICH TOOK PLACE IN AUTUMN 2010, COMPRISED AN EXHIBITION OF FILM AND INSTALLATION, TOGETHER WITH A PROGRAMME OF WORKSHOPS, DIALOGUES AND MEETINGS.

I am delighted to introduce this review of the work of What's the Story? Collective. The six-week residency represents the culmination of three years of hard and often personally challenging work by a group comprising young people, youth workers and an artist as they sought to reflect on, identify and work through issues of power and powerlessness, particularly as reflected in the relationship between young people and the forces of law and order in this society.

The personal contribution of members of An Garda Síochána to

this process has been particularly important and I would like to commend their involvement and acknowledge the support and commitment of Chief Superintendent John Twomey and his successor Michael O'Sullivan to this process.

The exhibition generated interest from a broad cross-section of society, including critical thinkers, criminologists, policy makers, young people, youth workers and the general public. It moved far beyond the neighbourhood where the process started to take on issues of national importance. It sparked an important

debate and made young people's voices heard in places where they too often fall silent: on television, radio and in the press.

This newspaper, published by What's the Story? Collective, gathers some of the opinions, experiences and artistic reflections that both fed into the residency and flowed from it. There are deeply personal stories and detached critiques. Hopefully you will find something which resonates for you and which may inspire new interrogations of power in other corners of our society ■

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The Policing Dialogues Review is brought to you by Rialto Youth Project. Established in 2008 in Rialto Youth Project, What's the Story? Collective is an interdisciplinary group of young adults, volunteer youth leaders, community youth workers and an artist. Previously a group of 13 people including Gillian O'Connor, Jessica Kavanagh, Stacey Whelan, Kelly Burke and Graham Dunphy, in more recent times the collective has consisted of a core group of eight people: Jamie Hendrick, Jonathan Myers, Vanessa Kenny, Nichola Mooney, Nicola Whelan, Garrett Kenny, Michael Byrne and Fiona Whelan, whose collaborative effort led to the Policing Dialogues exhibition and residency in The LAB.

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# CREATIVE DIALOGUES

OUR REVIEW OPENS WITH A CREATIVE EYE ON WHAT HAS BEEN A FUNDAMENTALLY CREATIVE ENDEAVOUR. THE COLLECTIVE CREATES ART — ART THAT ENCOURAGES CHANGE. ITS SOCIALLY ENGAGED PRACTICE HAS TO BE CONSIDERED WITHIN THE FRAME OF ART HISTORY: WHAT WERE THE PRECEDENTS FOR WHAT THE COLLECTIVE SET ABOUT DOING? HOW DID THE COLLECTIVE PUSH THINGS FORWARD? THE COLLECTIVE MEMBERS THEMSELVES HAVE TO BE ABLE TO PLACE THEIR WORK IN THIS CONTEXT; TO DESCRIBE THEIR CREATIVE EVOLUTION AND TO ASSERT THE ARTISTRY OF WHAT THEY DO. THIS IS A SECTION FOR SUCH IDEAS AS THESE.



Anytime I see a Guard, I know I'm not going to win, whatever happens.

THE DAY IN QUESTION FILM, PART OF POLICING DIALOGUES EXHIBITION, THE LAB PHOTO: MICHAEL DURAND

# A LIFE OF ITS OWN

MEMBER OF WHAT'S THE STORY? COLLECTIVE



Fiona Whelan's practice is motivated by relationships of difference across sector, culture and background. A committed practitioner in the field of socially-engaged art practice, Fiona has positioned her practice since 2004 in Rialto where she was instrumental in the development of *What's the Story? Collective*, intending to push the boundaries of engagement between young people, Youth Workers and Artists. In 2009 Fiona completed an MA Art in Public at Interface in the University of Ulster and continues to teach on the Postgraduate Diploma in Community Arts Education at NCAD.

BACK IN THE FIRST DAYS OF *WHAT'S THE STORY? COLLECTIVE*, ARTIST **FIONA WHELAN** RAISED THE BROAD QUESTION OF POWER. SHE CAN'T HAVE IMAGINED THAT THIS INQUIRY WOULD UNFOLD INTO A THREE-YEAR-LONG PROCESS AND PRACTICE WITH AN EMOTIONAL LIFE OF ITS OWN, A BOLD ARTISTIC IDENTITY AND AN INFLUENCE ON CIVIC SOCIETY THAT REACHED RIGHT INTO THE CORRIDORS OF POWER. HERE, FIONA WRITES OF HOW ABSORBING THE PROJECT HAS BEEN FOR HERSELF AND FOR ALL INVOLVED.

**H**aving worked with most members of the collective in different ways over the previous few years, I had built a strong, trusting relationship with most young people and youth workers involved and so put myself forward to be the one

who would collect stories about power. I created a safe space where each person entered alone to respond to this question, which was captured on an audio recorder.

Each account was then transcribed, removing the author's identity and the accounts were separated into many smaller

contained 'stories'. Each person was given back their stories to read and given time to remove or change any content.

The process would result in a collection of 60 anonymous stories. So engulfed was I in the process of capturing stories and encouraging an edit of them that would

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protect each author's identity, that I had underestimated the impact one's own personal story could have when seen in print.

As I handed them back out to individuals to proof read, many people became visibly upset and talked of how overwhelming it was to see their own story, a generally untold story, in print for the first time.

Although this part of the process was done outside of the collective space, it was perhaps the beginning of unifying the group, as people committed to the same personal process and risk-taking and without having to talk about the detail of their anonymous story, began to share with each other their experience of telling it for the first time.

### AN INTIMATE EXPERIENCE

This part of the process was followed by the most powerful and intimate experience I had ever had with a group. In mid-October, there was a cathartic session in which all the anonymous stories were placed in the middle of the group face-down and we began to negotiate how we would share our personal stories with each other. After much panic, emotional turmoil, and complex negotiation with conditions established, each story was lifted in turn and read aloud, taking many hours. Although the stories were full of individual experiences, we had just had our first truly meaningful collective experience. Although the majority of the stories spoke of powerlessness, degradation, shame and anger, the act of reading them aloud together seemed to temporarily create a moment of powerfulness. We had previously spoken about the possibilities of sharing power in unequal situations and giving power to those with less, which all in hindsight seems quite naïve. What happened in that experience I believe to be a moment of growing power – a far more useful act.

This project had been my main focus for over a year at this point. I had initiated it and had an investment in it. It felt personal to me. However it was now the collective that would take the project forward so the personal investment was crucial from all involved. By contributing stories, now everybody seemed to have something at stake. But I was ethically challenged once again, for although I also had contributed personal stories of powerlessness (recorded by another member of the collective) as well as much time and energy, the personal investment from others was quite different. Although anonymous, if identified some of the stories left people vulnerable in their families, their communities, their friendship group and with the systems of power that they intersected. They had far more at risk than me. Some people's personal safety was on the line. I realised by going so personal we were unlocking something that had to be minded. I wanted this project to have an audience beyond the local, not to solely be a development project for those involved but to target and effect the systems that create oppression leading to such stories, to inhabit spaces that were not usually

occupied by young people and to exert power. But I was also deeply aware of how these topics can be easily misread and misrepresented in certain arenas and I felt the weight of responsibility on my shoulders. We had to carefully find away to achieve these aims without exploiting any individual or further marginalising a sector of society so used to being stereotyped.

### A EUREKA MOMENT

Concurrent to this process, I was doing an MA Art in Public at Interface in Belfast. I was so excited with the process of engagement I had experienced in Rialto to date but I had become frustrated with the form in which the work generally entered the public domain. We were having rich, challenging discussions; creating moments of real learning across-sector and yet so often producing objects that seemed so removed from the geneology of our work. I was determined to find methods of allowing the collective, the work and the context to engage with audiences in a way that was as dialogic as our process, as an extension of our practice.

As an artist, that was quite a challenge as I had a particular art education and set of skills that I had relied on that were no longer sufficient. I was pushing myself now to think beyond my assumed capabilities and to let the process and needs of the work dictate the form it would take. Eureka.

The most significant moment of the project to date had been that intimate reading of personal stories as a collective. The tension of knowing the author of the story being read aloud is in the room coupled with the safety of knowing that no-one will ask whose story is whose. The respect that was given by the reader to the story they had picked up to read, more respect than they may have given if reading their own story aloud. In that moment, we had unwittingly developed a form that would let the project create moments to

engage a variety of publics – a form we called 'a participatory reading event'.

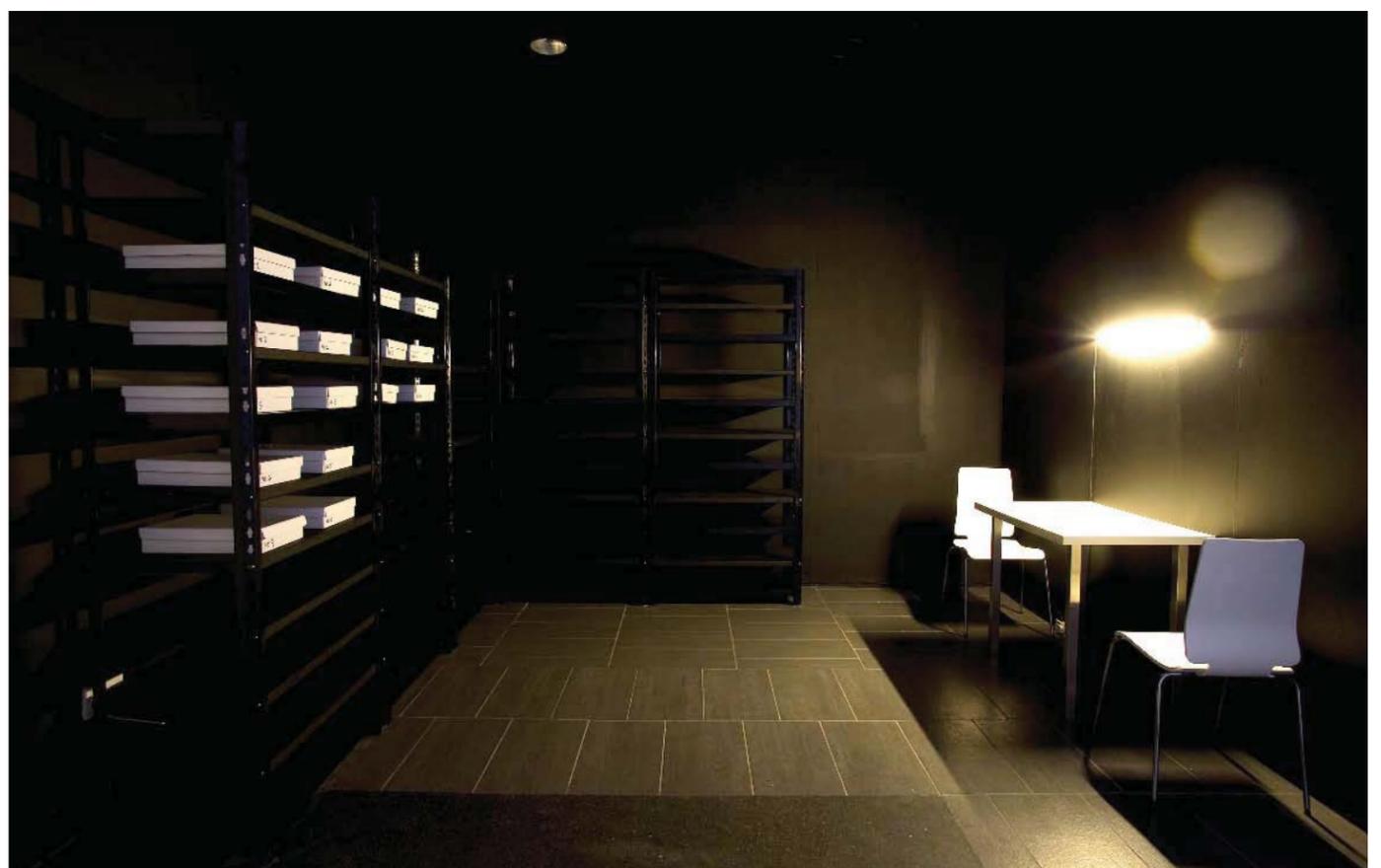
Over time, the mechanics of our first reading event were honed, guests carefully chosen, the stories re-edited for this new public. Readers were picked from the invited audience and given the stories to rehearse. The room was set up in a triangular format. All the time a tension existed between the ethics of positioning these stories in 'public' and the need to create a powerful aesthetic experience for the collective and participating audience. We carefully tried to avoid a display of victimhood or a request for pity using tools like re-enactment centrally. The re-authoring of stories by a variety of different readers would have a different effect on the listeners. We wanted the representation of these stories in this way to invoke meaning for all present and lead to a discussion on their content. And it did. A key question emerged from this first semi-public engagement: Who was this work for? Personal transformations were occurring for people involved having told their story in a safe way and now having experienced another person read it aloud in an event. The participating audience were also personally affected by the experience. But the question remained: Who was this work for? The collective ownership of the project and our developing methodology gave the potential for this project to look beyond personal transformation and consider social or political transformation as an aim.

### TRAVEL INTO PUBLIC SPACE

The journey into more public engagement began through film, the creation of a mobile space and significantly the development of a second reading event in IMMA with members of An Garda Síochána. At every juncture stories were re-edited, some removed, some pushed forward, some new ones added. New challenges came with each engagement.

# THE QUESTION REMAINED. WHO WAS THIS WORK FOR?

For example with the second reading event, there was a fear of retaliation from gardaí who might identify themselves in the stories or worry for family members or community who might misunderstand the nature of the contact with gardaí as well as concerns about the media interpretation of the project. Key decisions were made to protect the group. No media would be told of the event. No photographs of young people with gardaí would be produced. Only new gardaí would be invited to participate who couldn't be those who feature in the stories. No young people would read stories, in fact the gardaí would be asked to read the stories back to the collective. The collective had identified a primary aim for the event: to be heard by gardaí, and would engage in a process to ensure this was possible. Everyone would practice speaking in the first person so during the event, feelings of 'You did' were replaced with the less antagonistic 'I feel'. The triangle would once again form the structure for engagement – not just two sides, not 'us and them' but a third side to create another dimension. The decisions ►



THE EVIDENCE ROOM, PART OF POLICING DIALOGUES EXHIBITION, THE LAB PHOTO: MICHAEL DURAND

## 1. CREATIVE DIALOGUES

on ethics and aesthetics were intertwined and unseparable.

Over one year, the collective had slowly and carefully engaged with a range of selected and controlled publics. The decision was made to position the work in The LAB, a 'public' gallery space. This seemed possible only now and the collective were ready to inhabit such a space but it carried with it a new set of risks and challenges. What would we do in the gallery to engage the audience? How can we avoid an experience of voyeurism? How does an exhibition avoid appearing like the end of a project but instead become another public moment on a longer journey? Could we use this opportunity to highlight and open debate on a particular issue?

Over many months and with great support we developed a six-week residency plan for the gallery that included workshops with young people and meetings and facilitated dialogues with gardaí with a view to developing new training at a local level, as well as seminars, public talks and tours.

The gallery would have a dual function as an active learning space for a range of invited publics but also present work to engage the drop in visitor. We set about creating a shared space for dialogue and exchange. We were not aiming to create consensus but rather had the ambition of creating a space that allowed all opinions, views and experiences to be aired and taken seriously, multiple meanings to be possible for different audiences and new collaborative knowledge to be produced.

### A NEW PHASE

Mid-way through the residency a member of the collective shared that our exhibition and residency in The LAB was not personal to him. Unlike the other work we had done, he did not feel personally attached to it. I wondered had we lost something important in this transition into a more public arena, but then he began to explain. Although his personal stories featured in the exhibition, that was no longer exciting to him. What was really motivating him was the meetings we were having with the gardaí that may instigate training for other gardaí with far-reaching consequences. He was also really stimulated by the interactions with artists and art students and the conversations emerging. Another member of the collective spoke about her passion for the workshops she was facilitating with young people. Another member hugely committed to engaging with the broader random audiences that were approaching us. I realised the project had developed from an intensely personal journey for many in the collective to one that had broader intentions now and each person appeared to have found a particular point of interest or connection with the project. I'm personally excited that this phase of work has opened up a range of interests for different members of the collective, which will no doubt pose another set of challenging questions for our collective relationship and developing practice ■

# THE ARTIST IN ME

ART HAS BEEN OF HUGE IMPORTANCE IN **JAMIE HENDRICK'S** LIFE FOR ALMOST AS LONG AS HE CAN REMEMBER. HERE HE LOOKS BACK IN WONDER AT THE EXPERIENCES ART AND CREATIVITY HAVE AFFORDED HIM OVER THE YEARS, RIGHT UP TO HIS PARTICIPATION IN WHAT'S THE STORY? COLLECTIVE. AND HE LOOKS FORWARD THIRSTILY TO WHAT ART MIGHT MEAN TO HIS FUTURE.

### Beginnings

**I**n 1998 when I was eight years of age I joined my first art group. The group was known as the Mapping Group. It was here that I learned of all the different types of art. When I was young painting, colouring and drawing was the only art I knew. But through this group I learned how to make a 3D sculpture of my head using chicken mesh and clay. I also made pieces of art out of plaster. My favourite part of the group was going to the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) every Wednesday. I remember going into the museum, seeing all the artwork and thinking "That's just mad". There was the Ann Hamilton exhibition, which was just hundreds of pieces of paper coming from the ceiling. I remember having to dig for five minutes to finally see the ground. I also remember the spinning curtain and running in and out of it time, after time, after time until I was falling of dizziness. In 2002 the Mapping Group ended. At that time I never understood the meaning or the story behind the Ann Hamilton exhibition and

still to this day I don't. I suppose, when I was younger I just liked the look of it – and if it did something cool, I was sucked right in.

In 2004 the artist Fiona Whelan took up her residency in studio 468. As part of Fiona's residency she chose to work with Rialto Youth Project. So through the youth project and working with youth worker Irene O'Donahue, they both set up The Dolphin Art Group later known as "D'Art Group". I was a member of the group and all of a sudden I started to realise the meaning and the story of the art I was working on.

The first project we did in 2004 was a 3D model of the Dolphin House flats where I live in Rialto. We made the model by drawing a map onto a big piece of wood and then we started to slot in the blocks, the roads, the community centre, the old folks, the football pitch and the old rent office and many other main features of the flats. We added a bit of paint and completed our first art project as D'Art Group. We decided to make an exhibition of the work we had just completed and as it was coming up to Christmas we wanted to present Dolphin House as a Christmas Wonderland. We put really small LED lights in the lamp posts of the model and had it wired up so that by the flick of a switch the model was lit up. We presented the model in the community centre of Dolphin House and invited residents to come and see the model and talk about the future of Dolphin. We revealed our model by turning on the LED lights and sprinkling snow all over it.

Our next project in 2005 was to complete the first ever mural in Dolphin House. We discussed as a group what we wanted the theme of the mural to be and after a long, in-depth discussion we decided on the theme of Dare to Dream. We chose this because some members of the group did not believe that their dreams could come true because of where they came from; they felt people judged them because of where they came from – and other people in the group felt they

could achieve any of their ambitions by just working hard and believing. The image of the mural included a young person trying to reach for a dream bubble to accomplish his dream and another part included two young people pushing back a wall to make room for them to accomplish their dreams by pushing back the barrier that stops them. We unveiled this mural at a big community festival in the summer of 2005.

### America

We also did many small art projects in the group but our biggest project was travelling to America to paint a 200ft mural on to the side of a school. In 2007 the group linked in with a group of young people in Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Mural arts programme. Through a lot of emails we created a mural made up of both the Irish and American group's ideas. Then in 2007 D'art Group travelled to America to paint our mural. We built a major relationship with the American group over the 10 days and we were sad to say goodbye because we didn't think we would see them again, but we were wrong!

Only a couple of months later we were working on a local summer festival and Jim Lawlor (the manager of Rialto Youth Project) pulled me and a couple of other group members aside and told us that we had been invited back to America. If I remember correctly, I jumped out of the chair I was sitting in and hugged Jim, as did the rest of the group and I just screamed the place down. We were going back to America and I was living my dream for the second time.

So we went back to the US and rebuilt our friendships with our art collaborators, finished painting the mural and also did some TV, radio and newspaper interviews. I was 'Almost Famous'. After being to the States twice we felt like it was time for our American friends to come to visit us. During this time the group I had been part of for almost five years was slowly but surely coming to an

MEMBER OF WHAT'S THE STORY? COLLECTIVE



**Jamie Hendrick** has been involved in Rialto Youth Project (RYP) since he was eight and has engaged in visual arts groups ever since, including Mapping, Dolphin Art Group and most recently What's the Story? He has engaged in many public talks and written articles about the significance of Art in his life. In 2008 he started volunteering with RYP and is also involved in the Hemispheres Project (European Youth Action training).

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end. We remained together for the duration of the Americans' visit to Rialto that summer – and we also invited a new group into the process. The Group was called the What's The Story? group. The D'Art group, the What's the Story? Group and the American Group all worked together and started a discussion on the theme of "Power". During that time we sourced over 50 Dublin City Council sign posts and painted what we felt symbolised power onto them. This project led to the start of something brand new.

**WHAT'S THE STORY?**

D'Art group merged with the What's the Story? group. It was sad to see the D'Art group finish after almost five years of working together and building what was more than a relationship, it was a friendship – but I was excited about the road the new What's the Story? group would take.

The What's the Story? group consisted of one artist, two youth workers and eight young people. The group was a rare kind of group, a power-sharing group and the first group where I experienced the young people, youth workers and the artist all sharing the same amount of power. Power was always the main issue in the group from the very start. At some stage I think almost everyone in the group struggled about the reality of sharing power while others were afraid to take their power. This power struggle was, in my opinion at the time, holding the group back. We spent most of the time arguing and others just couldn't be in that space and walked out and left.

I found I could not be myself in the group and wondered whether I could remain. I really struggled with speaking out in the group because I felt it was not a safe space to speak out in. After weeks of fighting and arguing and me saying nothing, I finally took my power to speak out and tell other group members how I felt. Finally, after taking my power I felt like the group was at last going somewhere. Some people left the group after a while, and in my opinion that was a good thing because I felt that maybe they weren't ready for that kind of a group. Finally I felt comfortable and after this rocky road start we did our first major project.

**ANONYMOUS**

We decided after all the power discussions that we would all tell stories of times we felt powerless. I don't think anyone expected the project would turn out the way it did. Well I didn't! The stories were so personal to the individual telling them. So personal that we decided we did not want anyone to know whose story was whose. After a lot of emotional discussion we decided we wanted to put our stories out there to the public and at the same time we wanted our stories to remain anonymous. We then created the first ever live reading event in Rialto called Anonymous and we invited a select audience that we trusted. These were youth workers, artists and young people who were from or worked in the Rialto area. As part of the event we also selected a number of artists, youth workers and young people to read our Anonymous stories aloud to the selected audience and our own What's the Story? group. At the end of the Anonymous readings we invited and received feedback from the audience. The feedback caused a lot of emotion for the group and for the audience. Some of the audience felt like they wanted to tell their own personal stories and one audience member pointed out that a lot of the stories were to do with the gardaí. Following the event we discussed this in the group and realised that a lot of the stories were actually to do with gardaí, and that we had just selected and found our next audience for Anonymous.

**THE DAY IN QUESTION**

**W**e then did some research and approached the Chief Superintendent of the South Dublin City District of the Garda Síochána. Straightaway he was up for the project, but he wanted to know why we wanted to do it. I suppose for me it was just for the gardaí to hear my side of the story. How I feel when they're stopping me on the street or pulling me over or even when they're kicking in my door. I just wanted to scream into their face and ask, "Why? Why did you do this? Why did you do that?" But I needed to change my attitude if I wanted my answers. We invited 24 trainee gardaí who had not been out on the beat yet, plus two sergeants, to an Anonymous

event held in IMMA in July 2009. As a collective we felt we now held a powerful role as we planned and managed the event.

When the gardaí entered the room they had to place their hats, asp (baton) and hand cuffs on a table and take their seats. We had a mixed bunch of witnesses with us – people of all backgrounds that we had invited separately to the gardaí. We invited 13 gardaí to read the stories aloud and after the live reading we held a discussion session. Some of the gardaí felt like we were attacking them but others felt that we were very fair within our stories. One said, "I am ashamed that Garda can do this to people." I was taken aback by this. It was like I couldn't believe how honest he was. After the discussion everyone went outside of the room for a cup of tea and for me that was the most memorable time of the event. I had conversations with the Garda that I never knew I could have with them. I then understood that they too were having their own personal and internal power struggles. Sometimes I felt like I was having a conversation with a friend as they were so open and honest, and I felt like within that hour of talking to them that perhaps I could trust them. If I was to ask myself what I got out of that session it would be that gardaí are only human, just like me. Some had very similar backgrounds to myself with similar struggles, some have too much power that they can't handle and others just like their job. If I see a guard now, I would say hello – that wouldn't be a problem for me and I wouldn't care what my peers would call me. I consider both reading events to be the most personal thing I have ever done in my life.

**POLICING DIALOGUES:**

Most of the work I did with the collective had a personal meaning for me, but I somewhat didn't feel personally attached to our latest piece of work, the exhibition and residency Policing Dialogues at The LAB. It just felt like the stories I had personally invested had run their course. I suppose one thing I realised was that although my story was not as personal to me anymore, it had grown a new meaning, a meaning for other young people to encourage them to share their own experiences. I feel the exhibition was a great success. The amount of stories contributed by young people from across the city was amazing – that was a big part of what made the exhibition. At the end of the day negative experiences with the police are not just experienced in Rialto. They are experienced nationwide and I think these new voices were a big part of Policing Dialogues. Another really important part for me were the meetings where we worked on developing new local training for gardaí. I would like to see this project go further and continue to build on the working relationship between young people and the gardaí. I would like to see myself as part of the team that carries it out. With the new Garda training looking possible, I am really excited to see the long term outcome of it and I also hope to be part of making the change.

**What am I?**

I have now being involved in the arts for eleven years – most of my childhood, in fact. It has become part of my everyday life. I love doing all these different projects and it never

**ALTHOUGH MY STORY WAS NOT AS PERSONAL TO ME ANYMORE, IT HAD GROWN A NEW MEANING, A MEANING FOR OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE, ENCOURAGING THEM TO SHARE THEIR FEELINGS.**

ceases to amaze me what we are capable of doing as a group. As you can maybe see from my story I have been a very lucky young person. I have lived my dream. A dream that some young people may not have the chance to achieve! I have had amazing experiences as a young person – to achieve all this before the age of 20 is just rare and I consider myself an extremely lucky person. Art has been and always will be a big part of my life and it's a big part of what and who I am today.

During the mapping art project, I was a kid and so the leaders decided what we did in the group. Then In Dolphin Art Group, we had more of a say. We were collaborating more with the artist and youth worker but I realised that although the young people had more say, the leaders were really focusing on us and what we wanted. Was that collaboration?

What's the Story? is really different. We are a collective and we are all making the decisions and creating the results. That feels good because we all have an equal say. But when we put the Policing Dialogues exhibition into the public, in the gallery, I got frustrated because some people called us 'subjects', 'contributors', or 'participants' because we are the young people in the collective. When the media got involved, they always asked me to speak personally as a young person and they would ask the artist or youth worker about the bigger project. I am now wondering was the project sold on us being young people? I have decided now that I want to change my title within the collective but I don't know what title I want yet. A while ago I thought that maybe I was an artist without the diploma/degree because of all my experience. Then during our public talk in The Lab, someone suggested we call ourselves a group of artists – which might change how the public saw our work. I'm not sure about this yet but I am sure that I am committed to the next phase of work where we will open up all these discussions that were raised during our time in The LAB ■



## 1. CREATIVE DIALOGUES

# “...BUT WHERE IS THE ART?”



**FOR SIX WEEKS, THE *WHAT'S THE STORY?* COLLECTIVE OCCUPIED AN ART GALLERY.**

**BUT WHAT KIND OF A HOME WAS THE WHITE CUBE TO ALL OF THE IDEAS THAT THE GROUP BROUGHT THERE? DID THE CONVENTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE ART WORLD HOLD THEM BACK, OR OFFER AN EFFECTIVE STRUCTURE FOR COMMUNICATING WHAT THE COLLECTIVE WANTED TO SAY? DR KERSTIN MEY LOOKS AT THE MEANINGS AND MESSAGES THAT CAME ACROSS THROUGH THE WAY THE WORK WAS SITUATED AND PRESENTED.**

**A** slick triangular structure dominates the space in The LAB's ground floor gallery. Its immaculate manufactured and illuminated appearance asserts itself against the high glass wall that gives sight to a line of utilitarian buildings nearby. The measurements of the triangle indicate a practical function as seating furniture, but its modernist aesthetic suggests otherwise and positions it as a sculptural object with all its conventions of 'look but don't touch'.

Beyond this spatial arrangement is a large screening wall, which sits deep within the space and dissects it. Young recruits of An Garda Síochána regularly appear on the screen, reciting texts that are accompanied by written subtitles. Short, intense stories – told from the point of view of young civilians – speak of difficult encounters with the police force. Three of the stories also spread captivatingly across the white gallery walls in large, narrow black lettering.

This narrative stock forms the core and *raison d'être* of Policing Dialogues, a six-week residency by Dublin-based eight-strong collective, *What's the Story?*. The project emerged as a 'public moment' from a multifaceted, layered and complex creative exploration of neighbourhood relations of power and their formative influence on young people's lives since 2008. It builds on and extends a longstanding interaction between an artist, young people and community youth workers in the Rialto area of Dublin since 2004.

The title *Policing Dialogues* is deliberately ambiguous. At surface level the work discusses how young people in an inner city district grapple and clash with State-sanctioned, often aggressive regimes of civil control and regulation. Yet the title also refers to the complex protocols that define the re/presentation of these narratives. The stories have been transcribed from recordings of oral accounts of personal

memories, stripped of information that could identify the storyteller, then returned to them to be read back in order to arrive at an agreed version for public display. Such an intricately choreographed process reflects the narrators' desire to remain anonymous – there is an ingrained lingering fear of recognition by friends, family and community or of retribution from gardaí. Engaging in such an elaborate procedure was necessary to keep the collective a safe place for the younger members, to protect the personal and 'social' investment into these communities by the youth workers and to expand the sampling of experience beyond the initial communities as part of the residency programme.

Past the single-screen installation there is a dark, eerie space that has the dual character of both archival repository and interrogation cell. Archival boxes sit on shelves on the back wall, each one numbered and waiting to be opened. Inside, a typed A4 page is arranged at a careful angle, the top part elevated to lend it the character of an artifact. The boxes aren't numbered continuously and many of them aren't even on their shelf, but piled haphazardly on a table to the left of this arrangement. These boxes are waiting to be filled with more narratives. The accounts on display were distilled from an initially broader spectrum of invited responses from the Rialto area to the request: 'Tell me a moment where you felt powerful or powerless'. It was the dominance of 'police issues' that shaped the particular materialization of the project and informed its aesthetic strategy and engagement. It provided the impetus for a more targeted story collection initiative during the residency, where youth workers right across the south inner city were encouraged to gather accounts of young people's personal experience with gardaí. By the end of the six-week residency 45

stories were contributed.

In the upstairs gallery a very different set-up greets the viewer. It has three distinct components. A black horizontal graph extends across the long white wall to the left of the entrance. It signifies the duration of the six-week project in situ. A constantly evolving display of notes around it demonstrates how different aspects of the work have unfolded through interactions with diverse participants over this period. To the right, three small, wall-mounted digital monitors show complementary aspects of the evolution and testing of the project parameters: the video on the left documents the first story reading event; the middle monitor contains 'actors' retelling the stories of young people; and the right-hand screen shows the collective re-enacting accounts of personal experience by young Lithuanians living in Dublin. On the other side of the room, a table carries press cuttings and a comments book.

**T**he divergent formal repertoire of *Policing Dialogues* has come into being through an intense exploratory process among the members of the collective. It alludes to a range of important 20th century art historical precedents that are concerned with the creation of repositories to illuminate traumatic experiences, foreground existential issues or the re/cognition of core incidents and values for collective identity formations. References include the abstract and symbolic modularity of sculptural interventions by Donald Judd or Sol LeWitt, the narrative monuments of Christian Boltanski or the more conceptual approach of Hanne Darboven. In the documentation and to-camera-performances, which constitute a significant part of the project, tensions are played out between individual identity, personal memory and 'recorded' history, between fictitious and authentic elements.

## 1. CREATIVE DIALOGUES



POLICING DIALOGUES EXHIBITION, THE LAB PHOTO: MICHAEL DURAND

## THE TRIANGULAR STRUCTURE EVOLVED FROM THE PARTICULAR CONSTITUTION OF THE COLLECTIVE: ARTIST, COMMUNITY YOUTH WORKERS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Such approach resonates with work by Sophie Calle, or closer to home, Irish artist Amanda Dunsmore.

The adopted conventional static gallery display for Policing Dialogues produces frictions and resistance to the rigorously interdisciplinary and participatory engagement of the What's the Story? Collective, and to the dynamic residency model that has actively involved many different partners and respondents, attracted contributions from a wide range of publics, who would not normally go to a gallery, and provoked intense national media interest and debate in Ireland. The discursive and exploratory interferences transform the gallery space momentarily into an experimental framework device and potential catalyst for encounter and exchange. Here, the collective meets regularly to carefully and, most importantly, jointly organize and negotiate the residency process. Here, the different workshops have started difficult conversations between young people and the representatives of the government force that is charged with protecting the safety, welfare and morals of civic communities, alongside members of the What's the Story? Collective and, where needed, two facilitators from CAN (Community Action Network). Such staged encounters bring to the fore, negotiate and mediate individual perceptions, collective values and institutionalized power configurations on all sides; scrutinizing notions of discrimination, oppression, victimization, victimhood and empowerment. These particular events were

motivated by the aim to offer a platform for mutual learning, 'rapprochement' and perhaps healing. Some of these meetings were open to the public, other more sensitive mediation workshops have taken place behind closed doors, yet remained still visible to the public through the large street-facing glass façade.

**T**he triangular structure, which is central to the conversations, initially evolved from the particular constitution of the Collective, where an artist, community youth workers and young people in the Rialto area came together at eye level to initiate and test new creative approaches that identify, articulate and address formative life experiences of everyone involved. However, as an object the triangle also symbolises the inherent contradictions and tensions of this significant aesthetic, ethical and political undertaking. It oscillates between hospitality and barrier, between a (forced) togetherness and intimacy of aggregate (antagonized) part(ie)s. Dialogue as a form/ at of exchange means movement, literally and metaphorically, as it involves a grappling with different perspectives that builds on the negotiation and ultimately trans/formation of values. The notion of dialogue entails a comparison of ordered models communicated in different codes and results in the building up and modification of patterns and standards of thinking by which one attempts to approximate relative truth and to influence thought and behaviour. In this way, dialogue takes the

shape of an open-ended, potentially multi-directional, sometimes fluid, sometimes rapturous, osmotic conversation. It requires openness, the art of listening, trust, patience and intellectual and emotional tolerance and mobility. However, within such a dialogic setting, issues of authority, control and authenticity, the intellectual and emotive persuasiveness of the argument, and the physical presence and empathy of the speakers are never far removed. In this particular instance, the exchange between youth, police, community youth workers and social and cultural activists revealed and dealt with ingrained social stereotyping, institutionalized power hierarchies and respective attitudinal formations that required intensive and extensive mediation.

**T**he social, cultural and geographic locatedness of the dialogic exchange (as much as of the audio-visual and spatial display) operates as a device to define the circuits of dissemination and the thresholds and protocols of participation. It marks the critical reception of the in(ter)vention, its (modus of) validation and scope of interpretation. The site of the gallery crystallizes the aesthetic dimension of Policing Dialogues in all its ambiguity. It raises and directs expectations about the exhibited ensemble of objects and documents and the concomitant mechanisms for the work of art. Critical media discourses that have emerged from this premise foreground the artistic intervention and tend to unduly collapse the complexity of the shared commitment of the collective to this public in(ter)ception into the single identity of the artist. The artist then becomes the officialised 'trade mark' and figurehead for a genuine

group endeavour that has attempted to operate on a level playing field for a diversity of expertises and experience. As with Suzanne Lacy's decade-long collaborative engagement with the Oakland communities in California, the affordances of an interventionist, relational art practice continue to stand in tension to the commodified value base of the post/modernist art establishment. The reception of Policing Dialogues within other domains of social and cultural practice may place emphasis on different aspects of this activist and dynamic engagement, for instance by highlighting ethical and tactical implications of working with older youths, the role of community and individual self-governance, social leadership, relationship building and socialization processes.

This durational in(ter)vention in the LAB had been consciously designed as a 'creative and learning residency ... aimed at all audiences but particularly at critical thinkers, policy makers, young people and those who work with them'. It has very much excited and exercised the public by raising awareness of power relations and perceptual perspectives at play in communities. A transferable outcome of this aesthetically motivated encounter and negotiation process may be the initiation of future professional development workshops for the gardaí to attune them to the needs of the communities they seek to protect as well as to their own positioning as both part of the State control apparatus and its structures and as members of civil communities. In doing so, the project operates as an effective communication piece that connects conflicted social practices and contested value systems in the space of art and through the means of sustained and committed creative engagement. ■

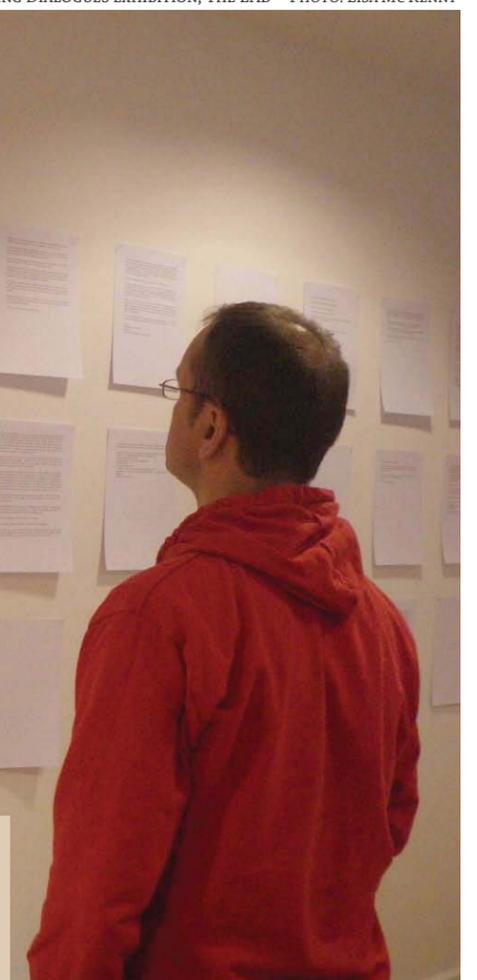
## 1. CREATIVE DIALOGUES

SIXTY ANONYMOUS STORIES OF POWER, POLICING DIALOGUES EXHIBITION, THE LAB PHOTO: LISA MC KENNY

# From little acorns mighty oaks



**SHEENA BARRETT** IS DUBLIN CITY COUNCIL'S ASSISTANT ARTS OFFICER AT THE LAB, WHICH HOSTED POLICING DIALOGUES FOR SIX WEEKS FROM SEPTEMBER 2010. HERE SHE WRITES OF THE FASCINATING CHANGES SHE HAS SEEN IN THE WAY THE COLLECTIVE PRESENTS ITSELF SINCE IT FIRST HELD A PUBLIC TALK IN THE SPACE IN JANUARY 2009.



**T**he LAB Gallery, part of the Dublin City Council arts service, aims to provide significant opportunities to further artists' careers at crucial points in the development of their arts practice. In particular, the LAB is committed to supporting emerging artists and providing opportunities for first solo shows. We also work with more established practitioners who are investigating new and diverse arts practices.

Due to the investigative and innovative nature of the exhibitions programme, we work with artists to engage in dialogue with a range of audiences through talks, seminars and commissioned critical writing. Many of our exhibitions and seminars have explored socially engaged practice, collaboration and authorship. In January 2009 we hosted Fiona Whelan and the Rialto Youth Project through our public talks programme.

### IN SEARCH OF NEW AUDIENCES

The idea for the talk came from a series of conversations with Fiona about how to share the experiences of the What's the Story? Collective with a broader audience than that within their locale or Fiona's MA course. We regularly host talks with artists who are interested in inviting peer critique during an ongoing project, the development of new ideas or in the lead up to or close of an exhibition.

In this context, the talk was

advertised in two different ways. Firstly to The LAB's usual arts audience with a focus being given to Fiona, as the artist in the group whose practice would have been familiar to many in our audience. The talk promised to "focus on the long term dialogical practice of Artist Fiona Whelan with the Rialto Youth Project, specifically exploring the collaborative relationships within their current project which is focused on young people's stories and a recent development which has involved the realisation of research into the form of a live event" with presentations from "the Artist as well as Jim Lawlor; Manager of the Rialto Youth Project, Gillian O' Connor; Youth Worker and Jamie Hendrick; young person." Secondly, the talk was advertised locally and within the youth and community sector as Rialto Youth Project's talk, promising the same event but with a different anchor. During the talk the group outlined their rationale for working together and their experience of collaboration.

At this early stage, conversations with Fiona about what might be exhibited considered their mobile unit and its place within the space, a publication post exhibition, the emphasis on a dialogical approach to the Collective's work and how that might be portrayed.

### EXCURSIONS AND EXPLORATIONS

Over the next year and a half, the group developed and toured the mobile unit, Section 8, but decided against its use at the LAB. Rather than present a static exhibition, the Collective chose

to engage in a six week residency at The LAB from September 2010. The residency included a public exhibition of film and an installation that evolved over the course of the six weeks to include documentation of the extensive programme of workshops and meetings.

The residency model has been adopted by previous exhibitors in the gallery. It is an interesting, though sometimes problematic approach, to the use of public exhibition space. By choosing to focus on directly engaging with audiences on a deeper level through workshops, this model can leave a drop-in visitor to the gallery feeling excluded. Policing Dialogues seemed to allow for a range of experiences for viewers. The work on show was engaging in its own right, the events were documented in real time to allow a visitor to follow their progress, and there was an opportunity to feed in to the work by contributing a personal story.

The visitor numbers to the exhibition were higher than many other shows and included great numbers of new audiences, many of whom had never visited a gallery before. Third level students from sociology and business courses, community groups and individuals who heard about the show through word of mouth or had watched the Vincent Browne show on TV3, all visited in great numbers in addition to our usual audiences.

### TAKING OWNERSHIP

To conclude the residency, the Collective engaged in a public conversation with Ailbhe Murphy and Ciaran Smyth of Vagabond Reviews, discussing their

practice and exhibition / residency Policing Dialogues at The LAB. In contrast to their previous public talk, this conversation was specifically advertised as the Collective's. This honest discussion around the changing dynamic within the group raised some interesting issues around the roles of the individuals within the Collective. Were they collaborators or participants? Kerstin Mey titles her essay '... but where is the art?' One of the key issues discussed at the talk was whether there was more than one artist in the group. If all of the participants were to call themselves artists would this change people's perception of the validity of the work? If the Collective were stripped of its triumvirate of Youth Worker, Artist and Young People, would the work function in the same way?

The exhibition and residency at the LAB revealed a sophisticated approach to collaborative arts practice. Good art takes risks. Through the process What's the Story? Collective have engaged in over the last couple of years they have taken a multitude of risks and asked difficult questions in relation to arts practice, definitions of art and the artist, ego and anonymity, and relationships within the community. The resulting art work has resonated beyond the locale and peer group in which it was created to a broad spectrum of audiences. With the discussions around roles and labels also come questions about expectations and measures of success. How important is media coverage? Do What's the Story want to become training providers? What would it mean to take this exhibition on tour? It's an interesting junction for Collective and we hope the aftermath of the exhibition and publication proves an energising experience for their next phase ■

# TRANSFORMING DIALOGUES

WHEN WE THINK BACK ON THIS BODY OF WORK BY WHAT'S THE STORY? COLLECTIVE, AT THE CENTRE OF IT ALL IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE AND GARDAÍ. OVER THE FOLLOWING PAGES ARE THE VOICES OF SOME PEOPLE WHO WERE CLOSEST TO THIS, WHOSE FOCUS WAS VERY MUCH ON WHAT THIS RELATIONSHIP MEANT OR COULD MEAN. THERE ARE THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN HURT BY TROUBLED INTERACTIONS IN THE PAST BUT WHO ARE OPEN TO ESTABLISHING A NEW TRUST. THERE ARE THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN AT THE CENTRE OF DELICATE NEGOTIATIONS, FACILITATING IMPROVED RELATIONSHIPS. AND THERE ARE THOSE WHO ARE ENDEAVOURING TO RECONCILE THEIR PROFESSIONAL TRAINING AND THE REQUIREMENTS OF A TOUGH JOB WITH THE CONCERNS, FEARS AND SENSE OF INJUSTICE EXPRESSED BY THOSE WHOSE COMMUNITIES THEY MUST POLICE.

# IT'S PERSONAL

**MICHAEL BYRNE** WRITES OF HIS PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AS A MEMBER OF *WHAT'S THE STORY? COLLECTIVE* – FROM THE DIFFICULTIES OF SETTLING AT FIRST AS A GROUP, TO THE PRIDE AND PASSION HE FELT IN BRINGING THE EXHIBITION AND RESIDENCY INTO BEING.



**Michael Byrne** has been part of Rialto Youth Project (RYP) since he was 13. All that time he has been involved in art projects including a Land Art Project in Fatima, public murals at the Fatima Luas stop and in Philadelphia and a number of plays. Since 2005 he has been volunteering in RYP and hopes to become a Youth Worker. In addition to volunteering, he still participates in many arts based projects including What's the Story?.

MEMBER OF WHAT'S THE STORY? COLLECTIVE

**I**t all started when I was sent out a letter about joining a group called What's the Story? You had to be interested in exploring the theme of power, in making art and telling a personal story. This, for me was really interesting because I was already part of an art group, and had good relationships with the youth project and people involved in this new project. To explore power and tell a personal story as well as being part of an art group, was a bonus to me. I felt that I had a lot of stories to tell – but I felt that I couldn't just tell them to anyone.

As the group went on, I kind of felt that I didn't belong there and I wanted to leave because I didn't have the confidence to find my voice within the group. It seemed that the other people in the group had more power than me – so for a couple of days I battled with myself to actually stay and find my voice in the group.

Then, I let out all of my frustration and anger at the people who didn't take the group seriously. As time went on I felt that the group was starting to gel and that there was a lot of trust built – but I was still trying to work in a group where everyone from youth worker, to artist and young people had an equal say.

Then, by the time the group started talking about personal stories, I felt that the trust was built enough that I could actually tell my stories and release the hurt, anger and frustration that I had felt holding them in. I wasn't just telling them to anyone. I was telling them to a group of people that I had trust in and was comfortable with. There was a time in the rent office (our studio in Dolphin House) where we first read out our stories. I felt really upset hearing my personal stories and other people's personal stories because they made me feel that I wasn't alone in the way I was feeling about certain things that happened to me in my life.

## A SUDDEN CHANGE

We then looked at all the stories and the ones about the guards stuck out for everyone in the group. We felt then that we could look at doing something about the way guards treat young people.

So we had an event in IMMA (the Irish Museum Of Modern

Art) where 26 guards and 14 witnesses and the What's the Story? group came together to read out and discuss the stories to do with gardaí.

At first I felt really angry because I thought that the guards were not going to take any of the stories seriously – but as the event went on I felt a sudden change in me. That happened when one of the guards spoke about a guard in a story and said he didn't like how that guard treated the young person and that he wouldn't like to have been that guard. So that for me slightly changed my view towards the gardaí. In the discussion we had afterwards I also felt that those guards were there to listen and that we were heard.

After the IMMA event we then spoke about what to do next with the stories and the idea came out about the exhibition/residency. Personally I felt this was a great idea. At the start, the idea of the public being able to read the stories made me feel very nervous because I didn't know what was going to come out of this. Also, after the IMMA event, there had been two newspaper articles written about the project – the first was written with great intentions to hear the group's view of the project and what was going to be carried out after the event.

But then a second article was written and it really put us on the back foot because it made us very aware of how the media works. We needed to be prepared for when the exhibition came up. These two articles made me very uptight and nervous about how my mates would see me because the second article got the project wrong.

After this scare we decided as a group that we would need some media training ahead of the exhibition. I found this really helpful because it prepared me and made me more aware of how to speak to someone from the media.

## WHERE THE PASSION COMES FROM

As time went on and the planning and the exhibition starting to come together, I felt more and more nervous because we were asked to speak at the opening event and no-one put themselves forward. I felt that if no-one was going to do it I would take it on. When the opening of the exhibition came upon me I got really nervous because I was giving an

## 2. TRANSFORMING DIALOGUES

opening speech and the thoughts of it gave me the shivers. I was nearly going to get sick – I was to speak to a lot of people that I didn't even know about how I felt personally towards the project.

I needed to have a conversation with Jim (from Rialto Youth Project) to go through my piece that I had typed up. But he wouldn't let me use it. He told me to speak from the heart – because that's where the passion would come from.

I then gave my speech and spoke from the heart and couldn't believe how emotionally attached to the people in the group and the project I actually was until I gave this opening speech. I felt very emotional and had to hold in my tears of emotion while speaking at the event.

There were many different parts to the residency and I felt part of the whole lot of it. Even if I didn't take part in doing the timeline for the gallery or putting the stories up in the back room, I felt that whatever the group was doing, we were doing it as a group.

And when I was involved, I was involved with the emotion and passion that I felt towards everything that was going on in the exhibition. I was involved in planning and running a number of workshops with young people. These workshops for me were very interesting, getting to listen to the impact the guards had on their lives – which was as much as they had had on mine.

Even listening to some of the stories and views that the young people had in these workshops related to me an awful lot – and I found it very difficult while in these workshops to actually stay positive about the police. But because of the IMMA event and the two-day dialogue with the guards as part of the residency, my views were changing slightly.

### A POINT OF HONEST DISCUSSION

In the two-day dialogue I was made aware that guards are normal people too. But when they had that uniform, it was so intimidating and I was always getting stopped. The dialogue made me aware to look past the uniform and see the person for who they really are and not judge them by the uniform they're wearing. But I can only do that for the 26 guards that I was in dialogue with, and I am still challenging myself to broaden it out to the guards who I had bad experiences with, because I do sometimes feel very emotional and angry when I get stopped so often by so many different guards. So I am trying to look at it positively rather than negatively.

Being at the exhibition made me feel a good sense of achievement, for me and also for the group because we worked so hard to bring an amazing piece of work together and we worked so well as a group. The negotiations we had with the Chief Superintendent in the beginning of this process were very challenging – but now I feel we've reached a point of honest discussion. I would like to say as an overall experience that this project has given me a great understanding of what it's like from both sides. I know what it means to feel powerful and powerless ■

**I KNOW  
WHAT IT  
MEANS  
TO FEEL  
POWERFUL  
AND  
POWERLESS.**



**It's crap, being a young person.  
There is nothing to do,**



**CECILIA FORRESTAL** OF COMMUNITY ACTION NETWORK (CAN) WAS INVOLVED IN FACILITATING AN EXPLORATIVE PROCESS OF DIALOGUE BETWEEN WHAT'S THE STORY? COLLECTIVE AND GARDAÍ. HAVING FOUND THE EXPERIENCE BOTH MOVING AND INSPIRING, HERE CECILIA DESCRIBES HOW THIS IMPORTANT CONVERSATION HAPPENED AND WHAT EMERGED FROM IT.

**I** happened to be in the Rialto Youth Project on the day the What's The Story? Collective were gathered to go to IMMA for their reading event. The air was thick with tension, excitement and apprehension. What was going on, I wondered? I could feel the shake-up of power even as the collective described to me what was about to happen. Whatever the outcome, this was to be an event to remember for all its participants.

I went on about the business of my meeting there – making plans for a dialogue event to include some of the same young people, youth workers, artists and community organisations. Little did I know that the two events would come together one year later when the young people suggested we should use dialogue to inquire into the impact of the IMMA reading event on those who took part.

Dialogue, as the young collective members so aptly put it, would be “a way of really hearing what people think and feel – in a space that is based on equality, and that allows for different experiences of the same thing to be shared”. The young people acknowledged that while they'd often felt powerless in their lived experiences with gardaí, they had taken huge power in the way the IMMA event was conducted and now were ready and willing to share power in the proposed joint reflection and learning. When challenged, they considered how they might feel about letting go of the way in which they had controlled events to date within the collective. They explored the idea that they would be required to participate as individuals rather than as a group presenting and defending a position. They also began to think about how they might react if they were to disagree with each other. They then made a conscious decision to engage in and promote dialogue. From that moment on, I felt very privileged to be part of this work.

### AWE, ADMIRATION AND HOPE

My growing sense of privilege became awe, admiration and hope when Garda representatives agreed to join the planning meetings, the dialogue and the Inquiry into Training that all formed part of the Policing Dialogues.

I was awed by the leadership and courage exercised by the collective and gardaí in engaging in a process so outside everyone's comfort zone and yet so important for the way in which we all strive to live in this society.

I admired the creativity of the initiative, in terms of its process and methods of engagement, and also for the way it grasped the strategic opportunities within the local Division and community to make it happen.

I now feel a huge hope for the future of active citizenship, having reflected on the capacity of all involved to share experiences of power at such a deep level. The young people exposed their very personal experiences to such scrutiny and the gardaí did the same in terms of the challenge they face with regard to power internally and in the exercise of their duties.

The whole question of power, respect and dignity in community policing is a critical one and what emerged in the conversations that followed has certainly challenged and exercised my mind and heart in many ways. Before I share my personal reflections, let me say a word or two about the key features of dialogue.

**It is underpinned by four practices:**

- **Speaking one's true voice and encouraging others to do the same**
- **Deep, mindful listening both within oneself and to others. Listening not just to what is said but to what is not said**
- **Respecting others by listening to what they are saying, whether we agree with them or not. Acknowledging**

## 2. TRANSFORMING DIALOGUES

# Shaking up power

THE DAY IN QUESTION FILM, PART OF POLICING DIALOGUES EXHIBITION, THE LAB PHOTO: MICHAEL DURAND

that each person has a legitimate reason for holding his or her point of view.

- **Suspending our own reactions, opinions and the certainties that lie behind them, so that we can listen without judgment to others. Being mindful of the limiting assumptions we make in relation to others**

This is very different to the usual conversations that take place in discussion, debate or negotiation. It is a lot about asking why; being as curious about one's own experience as that of the other, and in so doing accepting realities that might be very different to your own. Creating the space for equality of participation and asking why requires a lot of listening, especially in a large group. This in turn can often generate as much frustration and impatience as it does insight and understanding. It is not called a 'practice' for nothing.

The purpose of this dialogue was to share and deepen the learning from the IMMA event; to understand more fully its impact on all involved; to develop more effective relationships between young people and gardaí; and to identify core issues to be worked on in the future. The dialogue happened midway through of a series of meetings that explored how gardaí could be trained to work in a more mindful way – making respect and dignity a central part of the way power is exercised in their relations with young people. So this played a key role in shaping the outcome of the inquiry.

## REFLECTIONS AND INSIGHTS

It's often said that dialogue has the capacity to touch the dangerous, as people use the energy of their differences to enhance the collective wisdom. My experience of this dialogue was that it did just that. The dangerous emerged frequently, and nearly always highlighted the complexity

of what it was we were trying to talk about and understand. Giving voice to different perspectives allowed assumptions to be challenged and new meaning to be co-created.

A good example of this was the emergence within all the conversations – the pre-dialogue, dialogue and inquiry – of a stuck pattern of interaction between young people and gardaí in relation to community policing. On the one hand, young people living in many communities that experience poverty and disadvantage often feel they are not respected in their dealings with gardaí, which provokes anger and frustration. They feel guilty until proven innocent and fail to understand why they are regularly stopped and questioned as if they are up to no good. Gardai, on the other hand, face many challenges in policing such communities – and they struggle to know how to do this in a manner that meets conflicting needs, investigates possible crime and builds relationships. As the conversations progressed, the factors keeping this pattern in place were probed in more detail and once again many assumptions were checked and discarded in favour of a more shared understanding.

Young people talked about how the impact of legacies from the past, peer pressure, fear and stereotyping operate at a local level. Families and communities have had negative experiences of policing, often for very complex reasons. This can build up into a culture of non-engagement; reinforced by unmet expectations of what the police should be doing. Young people can grow up never questioning the practice of non-engagement and accepting the stereotyping of all gardaí as intrinsically 'not on our side'; always seeing the uniform and never the person.

## DEEP-SEATED FEARS

Those who work with young people shared that fear. Often real intimidation and threat of attack from gangs exists in

certain areas. As a result, young people devise strategies for survival – they mustn't be seen talking to gardaí; they must do nothing that could provoke further trouble from gangs. Indeed, gardaí coming from similar areas have to be very mindful of exactly the same fear and intimidation. As the conversations deepened, the realities of poverty, unemployment, income and social class emerged as key concerns. So too did the shortcomings of the court system and the lack of effective, targeted services. Not everyone agreed on the way in which these realities impact – and talking about them brought even more differences to the surface in terms of attitudes and stereotyping.

As the complexity unfolded, so too did the feeling of stuckness. What could be done to change this reality? Dialogue is not about agreeing outcomes – but it does provide the opportunity to look at how relationships and behaviour can become more effective. When we did this, we began to get a sense of a possible direction and it was then very helpful to bring this conversation into the inquiry. The inquiry translated the insights into conversations of possibility, grounded in an open and honest reality that acknowledged the potential and the constraints.

## SEEDS OF CHANGE

The way forward is not at all clear and I believe we have just begun to scratch the surface on some of these issues. However, they have exposed the need for new and creative thinking about the role of community policing within the gardaí, within communities and between both.

The seeds for change have been sown in this process. They will need to be nurtured and cultivated within the existing relationships where courage and leadership have demonstrated the capacity to dare to envision a different way ■

## 2. TRANSFORMING DIALOGUES



TRIANGLE TALK – A MEETING BETWEEN MEMBERS OF WHAT'S THE STORY? COLLECTIVE, RIALTO YOUTH PROJECT AND GARDAÍ IN THE LAB PHOTO: FIONA WHELAN

**GARDA SARAH KEOGH OF KEVIN STREET AND GARDA WES KENNY OF KILMAINHAM HAVE BEEN INVOLVED WITH THE WHAT'S THE STORY? COLLECTIVE SINCE THE IMMA EVENT IN 2009. AND THOUGH ANOTHER CHAPTER HAS CLOSED WITH THE COMPLETION OF THE POLICING DIALOGUES RESIDENCY, THE RELATIONSHIP IS ONE THAT IS SET TO LAST WELL INTO THE FUTURE AS TRAINING IDEAS ARE PUT FORWARD BASED ON THE BREAKTHROUGHS AND UNDERSTANDINGS THAT HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED. AS THE TWO YOUNG OFFICERS TAKE THEIR PLACE IN THE DUBLIN 8 COMMUNITY, THEY REPORT ON HOW POSITIVE IT HAS BEEN TO REALLY GET TO KNOW SOME OF THE PEOPLE IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD, WITH ALL OF THEIR FEELINGS AND CONCERNS.**

In May 2009 a group of gardaí were attested in Templemore and allocated Garda Stations throughout the Dublin Metropolitan Region. This group of gardaí then got involved in the 'What's the Story? Project. The group of gardaí met a group of young people in the Irish Museum of Modern Arts. This group of young people were known as What's the Story? Collective. The gardaí read out anonymous stories written by young people. The stories described times in their lives when they sensed a feeling of powerlessness when interacting with gardaí.

On the day in question the gardaí sat on one side of the room, the collective sat on the other side and there was a group of independent witnesses. The day went well and everyone involved felt there was a proactive outcome, giving both gardaí and the young people involved an opportunity to see the other side of the story.



Garda Wes Kenny

A year later Garda Wes Kenny, Garda Sarah Keogh and Sergeant Colm Russell met with the collective under the instruction of the Chief Superintendent of the South Central Division, Michael O'Sullivan. The gardaí were informed that What's the Story? Collective was holding a six-week event in the LAB in Foley Street during September/October 2010. This event was a policing dialogue event and it was a follow-up to the day in the Irish Museum of Modern Art.



Garda Sarah Keogh

Wes Kenny, Sarah Keogh and Colm Russell met Fiona Whelan, Jamie Hendrick and Vanessa Kenny in the Chief

Superintendent's office in Pearse Street Garda Station. In this informal meeting we discussed what would happen over the six-week period and decided if possible a mediator would be brought on board. It was decided that when the project started that Wes, Sarah and Colm would meet the What's the Story? Collective every Monday night in the LAB. It was also decided that incorporated in the event would be two full days where the original group of gardaí who had participated on the first occasion would meet the collective and discuss the stories involved.

### AN EXCITING STEP

The next step was Wes, Sarah and Colm meeting Fiona, Jamie and Vanessa in the CAN mediator building on Gardiner Street. We met a woman called Cecilia who was a mediator and facilitator. Cecilia was going to mediate the two day event with the gardaí and the collective. After this meeting in CAN Colm, Wes and Sarah felt at this early stage barriers were breaking down between the gardaí and the young people.

### LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER

The next meeting would be the following Monday night in Foley Street, which Colm, Wes and Sarah were really looking forward to. The first Monday we discussed the project and also discussed times when the young people felt powerless. We felt the young people spoke extremely honestly and openly. A lot of their stories were times when they were stopped and searched by gardaí on the streets or when gardaí searched their homes. We took on board their points and tried to explain Garda procedures and practices and how they should be followed.

Garda Wes Kenny explained that in Templemore we were taught that when dealing with people on the street gardaí should deal with them in the same way we would like our family members

to be dealt with. Garda Sarah Keogh spoke about times when she searched people and was also courteous and polite when carrying out her duties. The youths then began to tell us bad experiences that they had with gardaí. At the end of the first Monday night already we could feel a relationship starting to form.

The following Monday night Chief Superintendent Michael O'Sullivan accompanied Wes, Sarah and Colm to the LAB. Michael gave a PowerPoint presentation on Garda training and the structure of the organisation. Again a discussion was held and the young people asked questions regarding the organisation. Wes and Sarah spoke about their training in Templemore and their experiences since starting in their stations.

The next Monday Wes, Colm and Sarah gave the 'What's the Story Collective' a PowerPoint presentation on the different phases involved in becoming a member of An Garda Síochána both in Templemore and in the stations. The different subjects were explained in great detail and the Garda members were able to answer any questions regarding student probationer training. Again we discussed issues and at this stage we were excited about the whole group of gardaí meeting the complete What's The Story? Collective for the two-day discussion.

### ANXIETY AND UNCERTAINTY

The two-day event was held on Wednesday September 29th and Thursday September 30th. On the morning gardaí started to arrive and there was a feeling of anxiousness in the room. We all took our seats and there was a check-in procedure where you introduced yourself to the group and gave your expectations of the next two days. Many gardaí expressed a feeling of unknown as they were unaware exactly of what was the purpose of the two days. It was explained to them that it was a follow-up from the event held in the Irish Museum of Modern Art.

On the first day there were certain exercises that enabled gardaí to interact with the collective. Discussions were held all day, mediated by the CAN facilitator Cecilia. The day ended by checking out and everyone in the room had to express how they felt the day went. Both gardaí and the collective had a positive outlook on the day. Colm, Wes and Sarah were happy the day went well and were looking forward to the following day.

### BEGINNING TO RELAX

On the Thursday, everyone again had to check-in and then the discussions started. We felt that the interaction on the second day was excellent. The group as a whole began to relax in each other's

2. TRANSFORMING DIALOGUES



TRIANGLE TALK – A MEETING BETWEEN MEMBERS OF WHAT’S THE STORY? COLLECTIVE, RIALTO YOUTH PROJECT AND GARDAÍ IN THE LAB  
PHOTO: FIONA WHELAN

company. Everyone was open and honest when they spoke, enabling us to have heated discussions. By the end of the second day everyone was able to understand where the opposite party was coming from.

At the end of the second day everyone had to check-out and we felt everyone took something positive from the two-day discussion. At this stage Wes and Sarah felt that a strong relationship was forming with the What’s the Story? Collective. Wes and Sarah were happy that they were able to partake in this event as everyone involved in the collective is from the Dublin 8 area therefore Wes and Sarah may interact with these people for years to come in the communities they serve as gardaí at Kilmainham and Kevin Street.

The following Monday Wes, Sarah and Chief Superintendent Michael O’ Sullivan met the group in the LAB Foley Street. We spoke about the event and how well it had gone. Also, we spoke about possible Continuous Professional Development classes and solutions to problems that we were made aware of over the last few weeks. On the final meeting at the LAB, gardaí and the young people involved discussed the overall experience.

**A LEARNING CURVE**

Gardaí spoke of how they got a greater understanding of the lives of the youths they come in contact with on a regular basis, during the process. All parties involved discussed how social issues such as drugs, alcohol, unemployment and social disadvantage all play a part in criminality in the Dublin 8 area, but with more interaction between gardaí, parents and youth workers, it may have a greater effect on the youth of today. All parties involved again reflected on the whole process and spoke of the possibility of a learning objective put forward for gardaí of the South Central Division to take part in. From the perspectives of Gardaí Kenny and Keogh, they feel it has been a learning curve and an extremely innovative project to take part in ■

# My experience went like this.



**SITTING FACE-TO-FACE WITH GARDAÍ FOR A TWO-DAY DIALOGUE, TONY MAY ALMOST HAD TO PINCH HIMSELF TO BE SURE IT WASN’T A DREAM. THE CHANCE TO AIR ANY GRIEVANCES SAFELY; TO HEAR THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY; AND TO TALK THROUGH SOME MAJOR ISSUES WAS NOT ONE THAT COULD BE SQUANDERED.**

**T**he start of day one, in my eyes didn’t go too well. We were all asked if pictures could be taken to document the day. There was the option to stand away if we didn’t want to be photographed – and with that a majority of the guards got up and walked off. At that moment I knew that it was going to be very difficult to get the guards to open up. To me it seemed the guards were going to be just pure professional – as if they still had to act like police officers the whole way through. I was hoping that they would loosen up; let us see past the badge and beyond the uniform.

Slowly but surely the conversation began flowing. Lots of subjects came up and were addressed, but getting STUCK became a big part of being in that room. In almost everything we came across we got stuck, due to a difference of opinion, or in some cases, stubbornness. But we achieved a lot. The biggest thing we achieved was an understanding of what both sides were about. We were still stuck though and there were some major issues that just could not be solved in that day-and-a-half. It was out of our hands and out of the guards’ hands.

The idea was brought up that people shouldn’t tar all the guards with the one brush. But that works both ways. We shouldn’t be tarred by the guards with the one brush either.

However, I think you’re judged by the guards straight away by where you’re from and what you wear. If you come from an area with a high drug problem, you’re not wearing a suit and tie and don’t look respectful, you can be automatically labeled as a drug dealer or someone dodgy. Why is it that people get stopped left right and centre if they are from a particular area? We did touch on this in the day-and-a-half dialogue. However, I feel it needs more debate and conversation.

**TAKING IT TO THE TOP**

It was put to the guards that in some cases we feel angry at them in the way they handle some situations and the way they approach some people. It was also said that the system is a big part of the problem, such as the Justice System, the courts and a lack of resources within the guards. I realised over the two days that the guards are just small fish in a big pond – and we need to go to the top if things are to change. However, for the moment we could only talk to the guards



TWO-DAY DIALOGUE BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE AND GARDAÍ, DURING POLICING DIALOGUES AT THE LAB  
PHOTO: CHRIS MAGUIRE

in the room that day so they got the full force of it, which isn’t fair to them, as there is a lot they cannot change.

At the end of it I understood that some of the guards aren’t like what everyone thinks. There are some who just want to do their job and at the end of the day go home and leave it all, just get away from it.

One guard said that he had seen one incident where it played on his mind for days after. I got a real understanding from that. I got that they are human too and are all not what they’re made out to be. I felt they understood from our point of view that it can’t be nice being stopped all the time or having your house raided at all hours or being searched for whatever reason. I think some of them got that.

**FEELING THE FEAR**

But I didn’t like when some questions were put to them that they looked at the Sergeant for the nod – as if they were waiting for permission to answer. I think some of the answers we got weren’t as truthful as they could have been. Maybe they were afraid of what might be said back at the station. That’s just my opinion.

I said during the dialogue that it was a fantasy of mine to sit with a group of guards and tell them exactly how I felt without having any fear of anything bad coming of it. I was saying what a lot of people I know wanted to say to guards but can’t, because they are afraid of what might happen – and you can’t just stop a guard on the street and tell them how you feel. Over all I think it was very positive. I definitely have a different and more positive view on the gardaí now – but there are a lot of big problems that still need ironing out ■



TWO-DAY DIALOGUE BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE AND GARDAÍ, DURING POLICING DIALOGUES AT THE LAB  
PHOTO: CHRIS MAGUIRE

## 2. TRANSFORMING DIALOGUES



POLICING DIALOGUES EXHIBITION, THE LAB PHOTO: MICHAEL DURAND

FOR COMMUNITY YOUTH WORKER **NICHOLA MOONEY**, BEING A PART OF THE *WHAT'S THE STORY?* COLLECTIVE HAS BEEN NOTHING SHORT OF A REVELATION. EVERY STEP THAT THE GROUP TAKES PRESENTS A NEW SURPRISE, A DEEPER INSIGHT OR A MORE COMPLEX QUESTION. NICHOLA KNEW FROM THE START THAT THIS PROJECT WAS GOING TO BE DIFFERENT – AND AS SHE WRITES HERE, THE SOUL-SEARCHING THAT IT DEMANDED WAS ALWAYS TOUGH BUT NEVER UNWELCOME



**Nichola Mooney** completed her degree in Youth and Community Work in NUI Maynooth in 2003 after which she became a full time Community Youth Worker in Rialto Youth Project (RYP). From a young age Nichola has been involved in drama and dance, which she now uses in her work with young people in Rialto. In 2008 she engaged in training with Augusto Boal in Berlin. Nichola believes in the importance of collaboration in her work and in the added value of working with people from other disciplines.

MEMBER OF WHAT'S THE STORY? COLLECTIVE

**I** remember the very first night that What's The Story? Collective met in St Andrews Centre in Rialto. We all sat in a circle trying to figure out where to start. People had questions. Some of these could be answered; some couldn't. It felt to me that there was something different about this group.

At that time at least 15 people had signed up to be part of the collective. We began by exploring power. We looked at power among ourselves. For example, there was the fact that youth workers held the keys to the centre, which was a powerful position to be in. As a youth worker myself, I had never thought of that before. It was just something I did. It was part of my job. We explored power, within the group, outside and inside ourselves. As a Youth Worker I explored my power within the group and as part of the group. To some young people within the group the power sharing to them meant that Youth Workers in the group had no power and no say. We entered at that time into delicate negotiations around this. Also age, experience, and understanding of the world all impacted on the power struggles within the group and how each of us held ourselves in the early stages.

This led us on a three-year process. Unfortunately during this time some people left the collective for different reasons. The particular nature of the group was difficult for some to adapt to.

Working on this project has taught me a huge amount, both personally and professionally. Engaging with young people at this level and watching them grow, develop and be part of the project, which I believe is about social change, has been mind-blowing. Reflecting on the experience has left me with many questions that I am slowly trying to answer.

The main questions have been: Do we as youth workers truly engage with young people in a real way? Is the work we do empowering young people or trying to fix them?

These are complex questions. One thing I have realised is that no matter who you are, you can be brought on a journey such as the one we have gone on in the collective as long as you are ready and willing. If you are willing to take responsibility; to be challenged, scrutinized and criticised around your own values and belief system; then anything is possible.

### WHAT DOESN'T KILL YOU...

Instead of the collective crumbling under this weight, we found we were able to hold our ground. We looked deep inside ourselves and held on to the values and beliefs that were close to our hearts. We felt that the oppressive nature of the relationship young people had with gardaí was something that people had to hear about. There was a need to raise awareness and to engage in dialogue. When I heard the stories I felt a deep sense of injustice at the way young people were being treated.

For me the engagement between gardaí and the young people from Rialto Youth Project and other Dublin South Central District projects was one of the most important elements of our residency, Policing Dialogues.

We gathered stories from numerous areas across the city – and from those it was clear that many young people did not feel safe around the gardaí and did not feel heard or understood by them. So many young people felt unsafe, unheard and afraid. Participating youth workers I spoke to during this process spoke of young people being reluctant to

**FOR ME THE ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN GARDAÍ AND YOUNG PEOPLE WAS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF OUR RESIDENCY.**

tell their story and engage in this project:

“There was huge fear around voicing their stories. They were genuinely scared at the thought of certain members of the gardaí finding out they had given a story – and if their names were found out they feared there would be consequences.”

“I am a youth support worker in the South Inner City. I work with a lot of the older teenagers and young men within this area. While going out to encourage these men to give their experience of the gardaí I found huge reluctance and nervousness to give any details. Even after I told them it was anonymous they still would not give a story. They did not give many details on why but some felt that there was no point and that people would still know who they were. Most refused because they didn’t want to get involved in anything to do with the guards. No amount of explanations or assurances could change their minds. It was obvious that this boiled down to a fear of the guards even if it wasn’t directly expressed.”

It became glaringly obvious to me that these negative interactions young people had with gardaí didn’t just happen in Rialto. It was city-wide. In the workshops and tours that we facilitated during the residency, this was confirmed by the young people’s descriptions of how powerless, frustrated and angry they felt about the issue. They would state on one hand that the gardaí were needed in their areas and that they were entitled to be there because they have a job to do. On the flipside, young people found that they were being stopped constantly by gardaí while walking around their own area. Worse, they felt that they were presumed guilty because of where they lived.

This project aimed to address this imbalance and work with the gardaí in the hope that young people would be treated fairly and with dignity and respect. As one young workshop participant said, “The guards should learn how to speak to young people and learn about the behaviour of teenagers so they can understand us better.”

Another important part of the residency for me was the weekly meeting with a small number of gardaí including the Chief Superintendent and a Sergeant, the aim of which was to develop a new pilot training scheme at local level for gardaí. We also had a two-day dialogue with the same 26 guards who first came in to this process a little over a year ago. Community Action Network facilitated all of these events.

### HEMMED IN BY HIERARCHIES

Throughout the meetings and dialogue with gardaí, something that really surprised me was the institutional framework of An Garda Síochána. The organisation operates under a military structure that is authoritarian in its design. I began to see that it wasn’t regular practice for guards to question those who ranked above them. One Sergeant said to me that he was a little taken aback that I addressed the Chief Superintendent informally, by his first name. He said that just wouldn’t be done within the force.

The fact that gardaí took part in this process – and that they continue to engage with us – is a testament to them, and something that offers real hope. The interactions we had during the two-day dialogue were powerful and honest.

However, I was left with a sense that many gardaí on the ground feel powerless in their positions. The majority of them wanted to change their relationship with young people and suggested very real and practical ways for building relationships with them. However, many believed that they were not in a position to implement their ideas due to lack of resources and the top-down approach of the organisation. These relatively new gardaí, it seemed, were almost as powerless within their structure as young people are in society. I was left wondering whether gardaí in certain instances try to substitute this feeling of powerlessness by exerting what power they have over working class young people in their daily interactions on the street.

At present the gardaí are open to continuously engaging with us on this piece of work and a proposal for training has been co-developed and put forward for consideration. We hope the local training will develop over the next few years and become part of Continuous Professional Development for all members of the Garda Síochána ■

# THOUGHTS ON AN

# EXPERIENCE WITH BRITTON

**A YOUNG VISITOR TO POLICING DIALOGUES AT THE LAB SENT THESE THOUGHTS, ANONYMOUSLY, FOR THE COLLECTIVE TO THINK ABOUT. THE FEELINGS THAT ARE DESCRIBED HAVE ECHOES IN WHAT OTHERS HAVE DESCRIBED AS THE ‘STUCKNESS’ OF THE SITUATION – BUT ALSO IN THE GLIMMER OF HOPE THAT THE WORK SEEMED TO OFFER FOR MANY**

From growing up in a complex of flats on the south side of Dublin I have experienced the way the police treat young people.

The way I see things is that any young person that wears tracksuits or caps is a scumbag to the police – so when young people get pulled over I feel they get treated like scumbags.

Just because young people wear tracksuits and caps doesn’t mean they are scumbags.

Now, in saying all that, there are also very nice police officers around – but I think they are the community officers. I believe that the reason they are so nice is that they are around young people more and they have a better understanding of young people and are willing to engage with them on a different level – which is good.

Our youth service got an invitation to take part in the What’s the Story? programme in The LAB. We went over to the exhibition and met up with four other lovely workers who showed us around the exhibition and explained things. We also got to watch films and got to read other young people’s stories and points of view on the police. It was very interesting – but what I did notice was that most of the stories read the same.

The feeling was that young people were not respected by the police. I myself have written an anonymous story on what my experiences are with the Garda and what needs to be changed between young people and the police. I gave this to What’s the Story? Collective and it was put in a box in the back room of the exhibition.

Since I have grown up and become more mature I have a different point of view on the gardaí. The older I have gotten I feel the police do not hassle me as much, but I still see the young people getting pulled all the time.

I think the What’s the Story? project is a very good piece of work and was well laid out. It was presented well to the young people and it allowed for them to have their voice heard. I do feel it is not going to change much – but I will be hoping that down the line, with more programmes like this, that it will change. Thank you ■

*Anonymous young person  
South Area Youth Service*

# DISCURSIVE DIALOGUES

THE POLICING DIALOGUES RESIDENCY WAS MORE THAN A STATIC ART EXHIBITION IN A GALLERY. IT WAS DISCUSSION AND DEBATE. IT WAS NEWS. IT WAS IDEAS THAT COULD SHAPE THE WAY SOCIETY THINKS, ACTS AND LEGISLATES. PEOPLE HAD PLENTY TO SAY ABOUT IT. THESE WERE STORIES THAT MATTERED. THE BREADTH OF COMMENT AND ANALYSIS THAT THE EXHIBITION INCITED IS TESTAMENT TO THE CLARITY AND URGENCY WITH WHICH THE ARTWORK SPOKE. THIS SECTION GIVES ROOM TO SOME OF THE VARIED AND EXPERT OPINIONS THAT THE WORK INSPIRED.



DOLPHIN HOUSE, RIALTO PHOTO: JONATHAN MYERS



**AN IRISH SOCCER STAR. A POLLING BOOTH. A READY-TO-GO MOBILE. AN ARTS ENDEAVOUR THAT HAS MADE HUGE IMPACTS AND ENDURED... RIALTO YOUTH PROJECT SHOWED CONFIDENCE AND STRATEGIC**

**NOUS WHEN IT SECURED EXTERNAL EXPERTISE TO ASSIST ON TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF A COMPELLING NEW PIECE OF WORK INITIATED BY ITS RESIDENT ARTIST. WHEN YOU COMBINE LOCAL SKILL AND SUPPORTIVE EXTERNAL CAPACITY, IT CAN LEAD TO FANTASTIC AND SURPRISING OUTCOMES. CHARLIE O'NEILL OF PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS CENTRE LOOKS BACK ON WHAT THIS APPROACH MEANT FOR THE INITIAL GENESIS OF WHAT'S THE STORY? COLLECTIVE.**

The story starts in 2007 when Fiona Whelan came to us with a problem. Fiona is resident artist at the Rialto Youth Project. Based on chats and meetings with young people in Rialto they had devised a fascinating creative project called What's the Story?. Fiona and the project laid down a challenge. Or made a request. I'm still not sure which.

One of the indicators of a mature and learning community or youth project is the ability and willingness to ask for help. We're all experts at something but by definition we all know very little about many other crucial things that shape or hinder our lives. One of the shortcomings of the community

development ethos, in some cases at least, is its theoretical obsession that communities or groups should do everything themselves. I believe that's a formula for failure or at least lower standards than communities or young people deserve.

Particularly in disadvantaged communities, the knowledge gaps and skills deficits can be significant. Yes, people are experts in their own lives and have huge talents and potentials but they've been suppressed by accident of birth, state neglect or chaotic home lives. The reality is, when expertise is begged, borrowed, bartered or bought in, if the relationship is fostered as a positive, respectful one, people can be regenerated through the process. Everyone benefits.

Living in Rialto and working with Public Communications Centre I've been lucky enough to work closely with many community groups and campaigns through the years. One thing that marks out these initiatives and people as special is their confidence to seek out advice and expertise. So back to Fiona and Rialto Youth Project.

Fiona had been hearing this expression "What's the story?" time and time again in everyday conversation and it sparked a curiosity in her – when you get beyond the surface expression 'What's the story?', were young people in the area really interested in stories and did they want to tell their own stories?

The response she got was an emphatic yes. So the youth project was offering them the opportunity to tell their stories on audio, in writing, art-making, photography, mural work, film, dance, parade and other forms. But Youth Workers will testify, in areas of disadvantage it's a challenge to convert ideas into motivation and action. Fiona wanted to send a different signal to them. She wanted everyone as animated, involved and enthusiastic as possible.

Fiona asked us to help her promote the idea and get participation from a wider group of young people.

We brainstormed the project with some young people and the youth workers. We went away and thought about it. We came back with a few suggestions. We talked through issues beyond the project itself like 'who would be the most interesting and persuasive person to ask the young people to get involved?; how would we ask them?; how would we get them to take the first step and so on?

At the time Andy Reid played international soccer for Ireland and Sunderland. He is from Fatima Mansions in Rialto. We recruited him as a champion of the project. We bought a ready-to-go mobile in Andy's name. 'Andy' then texted every young person in Rialto whose details the Youth Project had. He told them that he had always wanted to speak out and express himself as a young man; that he was proud now to champion this amazing project where others could tell their stories, and that he would be posting them a pack in a few days. Word spread like wildfire. Texting. Social networking. Parents too were talking.

Days later an information pack with Andy Reid's photo dropped through hundreds of letterboxes in Rialto. The pack caused a stir. In it Andy explained the project. It asked anyone who had any desire to tell a story through any medium to come to the community centre and start the process. It was a time of local elections. The community centre housed the youth project but the building also doubled as the local polling station. People were having their democratic say so we thought it would be appropriate for young people to have their say in another way in the same building.

The team organised 'Andy Reid/What's the Story?' branded polling boxes. We got Dublin City Council to be the returning officers. All the young people had to do was fill out their simple polling card and the first few words/lines of their story/film/description of their artwork. The turnout for the local elections was weak but the youth project was heaving. Young people vindicated their civic, democratic mandate and registered their creative preference. They, in effect, elected themselves.

Today many of those stories have found form and audiences and new story tellers and new settings. They most recently blossomed into Policing Dialogues, the major exhibition and residency at the LAB that has drawn such widespread attention and in turn is driving the formulation of new Garda training at a local level. The young people of Rialto have begun to make themselves heard on a national stage.

This 'story' demonstrates why it's sometimes important to move beyond the communications and arts products and the 'normal' events of youth projects and to involve youth workers and young people and external expertise to together look at how our collective diversity of skills can be harnessed so that they work harder and produce better outcomes for young people.

And also to explore creatively if the services and products that we so-called 'external experts' offer can in themselves become tools for participation, capacity-building, empowerment and regeneration.

What's the story? That's the story ■



# CONFRONTING



THROUGHOUT EVERY FACET OF SOCIETY, UNEQUAL POWER RELATIONSHIPS ARE AT WORK – KEEPING

CERTAIN PEOPLE IN THEIR PLACE AND ALLOWING OTHERS TO ABUSE THEIR POSITIONS OF PRIVILEGE. IT IS ONLY BY CHALLENGING THE ASSUMPTIONS OF POWER THAT WE CAN GO ABOUT CREATING A FAIRER SOCIETY. AND, WRITES BROADCASTER **VINCENT BROWNE**, THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT POLICING DIALOGUES BRAVELY SET OUT TO DO

# POWER



VINCENT BROWNE OFFICIALLY OPENS THE POLICING DIALOGUES EXHIBITION AT THE LAB PHOTO: CHRIS MAGUIRE

The exploration of power relations in society is perhaps *the* issue, for it relates to people's status, esteem, influence, control over their own lives and the distribution of wealth and income. It gets to the heart of the equality question and uncovers the depth of inequality.

The exhibition in Foley Street in September of how young people in the south inner city of Dublin related to gardaí was a vivid insight into unequal power relations: the power of gardaí and the sense of powerlessness young people experience in dealing with gardaí.

Police forces everywhere are endowed with considerable powers in relation to the citizen: the powers of arrest, of questioning, of ordering citizens around and of public spaces. And in spite of all the recent protections of the citizens against such power, the exercise of police power remains largely unaccountable. Inevitably, given the areas of unaccountable police power vis-a-vis the citizen and the scale of that power, there are abuses. Not because our police force is more abusive than police forces elsewhere, or that police men and women are more prone to abusing power, but simply because human beings invested with power that is unaccountable will abuse power. That young gardaí took part in the exploration of power relations between themselves and young working class people was a credit to the gardaí involved and to the Garda Síochána, for it marked perhaps the beginning of an appreciation of how troublesome such power

relations can be.

Abusive power relations happened in the Catholic Church, it happens in schools, it happens in workplaces, it happens in sports clubs, in all kinds of human interactions where there is power and where there is little accountability. And, invariably, it is the weaker in society that suffer. Not weaker in terms of physical strength (although there are abuses of power in that arena also) but weaker in terms of status, in terms of connections, in terms of wealth.

## MANY GUISES

Power is exercised in different guises. For instance, in the use of language. Take the legal system. That has a language all of its own and rituals all its own that largely exclude the non-lawyer, ie lay people, and especially lay people who are further disadvantaged by poor education. Such lay people are intimidated by the legal system and are made to feel inadequate by its language and rituals. That is an exercise of insidious power relations, through the use of the devices of language and ritual. And it is done and maintained deliberately!

Power relations in the workplace often cause great harms too. The very fact that managers and/or owners have the power of hiring and firing, the power of ordering and punishing, albeit mitigated a bit by the fragile legal protections enacted over the years, is also insidious. For it gives people in power control over other people's lives and livelihoods.

## THE INSIDIOUSNESS OF POWER

We learn from our own experience the insidiousness of power relations in classrooms. The almost total power of teachers versus students, the power to punish – no longer by corporal punishments but by other punishments: belittlement, scorn, ridicule. Punishments often far more wounding than physical punishment. The very fact that there is a person in "control" of a class, that can dictate how a class is to be run, without regard to the preferences of the students, is itself an exercise of power. The fact that students cannot call teachers by their first names underlines the power relationship. How are people to learn we are all equal when, in their earliest years in schools, they are taught we are not equal?

There are power relations within families too. Often the father is the 'head' of the family, the one who must be 'obeyed'. Very often power relations within families do terrible harm to the self-regard of women. And terrible harm to children. There would be no physical or sexual abuse within families unless there were unequal power relations.

And the power relations between the classes: how the upper middle classes exercise power over 'underlings': the cleaners, the baby-minders, the Filipino nannies, the gardeners, the tradesmen and women. Often with condescension, sometimes with scorn or indifference, hardly ever with equality. Our society is built around unequal power relations and until we understand power relations we will never be able to confront that or undo that. The exploration in the south inner city of power relations is a great initiative, from which I received an insight and I suspect others did too ■

## 3. DISCURSIVE DIALOGUES

# The Soci- ology of Power



A PRESENTATION  
BY THE  
SOCIOLOGIST  
**DR AOGÁN  
MULCAHY**,  
MADE DURING

THE POLICING DIALOGUES  
RESIDENCY TO AN AUDIENCE  
OF INTERESTED ARTISTS,  
YOUTH WORKERS AND THE  
COLLECTIVE. DR MULCAHY  
SPOKE OF THE IMPORTANCE  
OF POLICING DIALOGUES  
IN CREATING 'AN AWKWARD  
MOMENT FOR POWER' BY  
DEMANDING A PLACE WHERE  
NEW VOICES CAN BE HEARD.

**I**t's an honour to be here. I use that word deliberately because in many ways I think this work is about honour. It is about recognition, visibility and presence.

The criminologist Mike Brogden tells the story of an English schoolboy who is asked by his teacher to write an essay about policing. So the boy writes a one-liner – “All police is bastards.” The teacher is concerned by this, so a police officer is invited to visit the school to talk about community policing, road safety and so on. The teacher then asks the pupils to write another essay about the police. The boy writes another one-liner – “All police is conning bastards.” This story illustrates the manner in which power tries to justify and legitimise itself. That is where the tensions inherent in policing reveal themselves: on the one hand it involves coercion; on the other it involves care, welfare and service.

When we think of power, we typically think about it in terms of the classical notions of government: power resides in the parliament, in ministries, in public policy, the power to enact laws, and so on. Sociological approaches to the study of power highlight the age-old struggle to put food on the table, and how material resources are distributed across society. But in addition, we are also faced with the issue of recognition: the struggle over how we are seen. This of course is the issue of legitimacy because power is not just about achieving

things, it's also about the story it tells about itself and the manner in which it presents itself as legitimate. But this is a difficult and uncertain process. It involves not only the performance of power, but also the reception of power – how the public or any other audience judges what has happened, how it evaluates whether actions are justifiable or not.

## AN AWKWARD MOMENT FOR POWER

The Italian writer Gramsci said that any political movement tries to exist in a state of hegemony. By this he meant that in addition to seeking to dominate economically and politically, it also tries to dominate ideologically: it seeks to have its position accepted as part of the natural order, simply the way things are. In many ways



### 3. DISCURSIVE DIALOGUES

the greatest expression of power is when it goes without saying because it comes without saying. You don't even talk about it because you don't even notice it, because it doesn't register as a problem. So if power seeks to work invisibly, as background rather than foreground, how do you see power at work? One of its clearest expressions is through the issue of voice – being heard. Who has elbow room at the table? Who is given space to speak? Whose voice counts? Whose stories are heard? When disputes arise over whose voice counts, the smooth performance of power is disrupted – and through the stories at the heart of this exhibition, what we have is, literally, an awkward moment for power.

Young people, of course, are repeatedly seen as a source of trouble – they are too loud, they are up to no good, they are always 'hanging out' and so on and so on. Each time period reinvents the 'problem' of young people. Why is this? First of all young people aren't necessarily integrated into the adult world of responsibility and paid employment. Culture for young people does many of the same things that employment does for adults – it conveys a sense of self, an identity, a status, a presence. Whether and how such a presence is recognised is often resolved through interactions between young people and the police.

Although police have the power to enforce the laws of the land, in many ways the surprising thing is that the police don't enforce the law more. The fact of the matter is that policing is really not so much about law enforcement, it's really about maintaining particular kinds of order. Some of this involves arresting people, but often it involves the use of discretion. Much policing occurs, not in high profile settings but in low visibility locations – in alley ways; in people's homes where there aren't lots of witnesses – and it often occurs not by the formal measure of arrest but through informal measures like being told to move on. And it's often of course directed at the usual suspects, those the police regard as their responsibility to monitor.

#### CITIZENS OR SUSPECTS

The relationship between police and young people is also about the nature of public space and the issue of visibility. Police officers tend not to patrol corporate offices. They tend not to hang around the corridors of power. They do tend to patrol public areas – areas where young people socialise, and

over which the police claim jurisdiction. And what emerges is a familiar relationship: on the one hand young people feel over policed, and subjected disproportionately to police action; on the other hand, young people are often relatively underprotected, and their victimisation is not a high priority. Overall, young people often find themselves being regarded less as citizens to be protected than as suspects to be questioned and monitored.

To date, this exhibition has attracted significant media coverage, and it is worth noting a report that Paddy O'Gorman did for the Pat Kenny show on RTÉ Radio. On the basis of his visit to the exhibition, O'Gorman described it in terms of a number of "anti-Garda statements, anti-Garda accounts". When Kenny asked: "Is this exhibition an anti-Garda rant?", O'Gorman replied: "I'm sure those involved would not describe it as such, but it is an anti-Garda exhibition. In terms of moral authority I think it's no better than the back of a lavatory door. I'd say there is a lot of truth there but that is not the whole truth." His report then described a situation in which a crowd of people gathered in response to police attempting to arrest someone in the area. In scenes O'Gorman described as reminiscent of policing in West Belfast, he noted the crowd's hostility to the police. Then, as people present claimed that the police were kicking the man on the ground, O'Gorman himself added: "I saw the foot going in." Perhaps such events make the stories included in this exhibition a little less surprising.

So what about the stories themselves? Instead of a policing 'rant', one thing I would like to highlight is that the views of policing in the stories are actually quite nuanced and evaluative. Some people begrudgingly recognise the police role. "We have got concerns but we still need them." Another young person considers a police career – "No other job would be suitable for me." There also are distinctions drawn between the reputations of different Garda stations, as well as between the actions of individual gardaí: "Some guards are alright but other guards are just dirt," and "Some Guards can be sound, others can be wankers. There was one who let me off with a lot." In effect, while the stories make no claims to sainthood on the part of gardaí or on the part of the young people themselves, the nuance evident in them suggests a perspective that draws largely on actual experiences of policing.

#### LOW DOWN THE LADDER

We know that our identity is partly created through our interactions with others. Interactions with representatives of state authority are therefore all the more significant.

Clearly in these stories there is a continual theme that people feel themselves relatively low down the hierarchy of power, in other words the police don't consider the concerns of these people a matter of priority. One story describes the reluctance of the young person's mother to call the police for help: "She said they probably wouldn't come down. I said Ma they have to come, we shouldn't treat them like everyone else. She's too afraid. It's fucking terrible."

Interestingly these stories do not depict the young people themselves as 'tough'; in fact the stories repeatedly talk about the embarrassment of being subject to police action. They note that being stopped and searched by the police will actually diminish their standing in the area. As one story relates: "I live here. My neighbours will get the wrong impression and all the old people will start talking about me". Another story expressed a similar feeling: "It's so embarrassing emptying out your pockets and getting searched in your own area".

These stories also demonstrate that the relations depicted between young people and the police are starkly oppositional and antagonistic. Some of this is reflected in the sheer emotional tone of the stories. There is "anger", "fear", "hatred" and there is "shame". People talk about being angry, "just wanting to scream" – but also that interactions are being characterised as being "horrible", "surreal", "terrible", "It was something to be avoided". Power relations are seen not just as oppositional and antagonistic but as absolutely asymmetrical in that the stories reveal a view that the police control all the power. "They have absolute power and I have none"; "I can't win with them"; and "When you are dealing with the guards, they have all the power". They can treat you any way they wish but if you try and respond they will not be able to bring the resources to bear. They will be able to arrest you. You may be subject to other kinds of behaviour that you are not terribly pleased with.

Added to this there is also a sense of antagonism young people expect in their interactions with the police. Young people feel themselves to be stereotyped from the outset and they view the police as deliberately provocative towards them: "It's like they want to get you into trouble. They hassle you and they try to agitate you so much that you get mad and get yourself arrested," and "They know what they are doing."

#### FEELING SMALL

In terms of the power dynamics and the interactions themselves there are troubling incidents described, ▶

**CULTURE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE DOES MANY OF THE SAME THINGS THAT EMPLOYMENT DOES FOR ADULTS – IT CONVEYS A SENSE OF SELF, AN IDENTITY, A STATUS, A PRESENCE.**



### 3. DISCURSIVE DIALOGUES

including use of elbows and bruises received through creative use of a telephone book. But by and large one of the striking things is not so much physical action, physical coercion, but rather words and feelings – in particular the concept of recognition. What we are really talking about is the perceived lack of respect: “I feel so small, not even good enough for the dirt underneath their feet,” and “We are not shite. They treated us like we were nothing”. This notion of policing as humiliating ordeal is also tied in with the routine activities that comprise policing at street-level. The police have the power to do something that is rather unique. They have the power to arrest you, to stop your movement. And while they can use reasonable force to take you into custody if you choose to resist arrest, the most significant experience of policing evident in these stories is not the use of force, but rather the issue of challenging someone’s ability to be in particular places and doing particular things. While this includes the mundane activities of ‘going down to the shop’, it also involves a fundamental of bodily integrity – the searching of one’s person or one’s home. There is no recognition here that young people have a right to exist in public spaces; rather time and time again what is striking in these stories is the normality of coming to the attention of the police. This really is what confirms people’s marginal status, that they expect to be considered a problem for the police.

What’s missing in these stories? So Paddy O’Gorman says, this is not the whole truth. Absolutely, but then again it doesn’t claim to be. In fact just as this exhibition offers us these stories to reflect on, so too it raises the question of what is missing? The truth is that many people, young people in particular, are reluctant to express themselves, particularly when it involves revealing details of troubling, emotional, and often embarrassing events. And of course concerns that to express stories of police misconduct would leave them vulnerable to police action (and here I mean revenge rather than arrest) also accounts for some absences here. And one story simply notes, “There was a situation recently which I couldn’t control as much as I tried. I can’t tell you about it.” So as we look at these stories, we also have to consider what can’t be captured, what’s too distressing to express.

This exhibition also involves dialogue between police and young people – and the possibility of new training inputs. This ongoing process will best be served by the kind of honest and open engagement reflected in this exhibition. And part of having a place at the table involves the simple act of saying, “Wait a minute. The story you have of young people and policing, well I’ve got a different story.” In many ways, the most important aspect of this exhibition isn’t the content of these stories, but the very fact of their expression. And in providing us with an opportunity to consider these stories, to listen and to reflect, all those involved deserve our gratitude. Thank you ■



SOCIOLOGISTS DR AOGAN MULCAHY AND DR JOHN BISSETT PRESENTING AT POLICING DIALOGUES SEMINAR, THE LAB PHOTO: FIONA WHELAN



MEMBERS OF WHAT’S THE STORY? COLLECTIVE IN CONVERSATION WITH VAGABOND REVIEWS, DURING POLICING DIALOGUES AT THE LAB PHOTO: IRENE O’DONOGHUE

**VAGABOND REVIEWS ARE AN INTERDISCIPLINARY ARTS INITIATIVE ESTABLISHED IN 2007 BY AILBHE MURPHY AND CIARAN SMYTH. HERE THEY CONSIDER THE MEDIA RESPONSE TO POLICING DIALOGUES, PAYING PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO HOW THE COLLECTIVE HAS DEVELOPED AN AUDIENCE FOR ITS WORK AS IT MADE THE JOURNEY FROM LOCALLY STAGED REPRESENTATION TO ENGAGEMENT WITH MAINSTREAM MEDIA VIA THEIR EXHIBITION AT THE LAB.**

*When the company goes public/You’ve got to learn to love what you want*

The New Pornographers, *Hey Snow White (Destroyer)* from **Dark Was the Night** (2009)

**T**he exhibition title *Policing Dialogues* has two distinct meanings. In the first instance it draws our attention to an important objective feature of the work of the *What’s the Story? Collective*: that their three-year exploration of neighbourhood relations of power has brought them into direct dialogue with the police. There is however a second, more subtle reading implied. *Policing Dialogues* can also be read as the work of policing the dialogues that the collective itself has generated. This positive form of critical attention has been extended by the collective to an ongoing series of conversations that they have generated not only with the police, but also among themselves in relation to the power relations that arise between the figure of the youth worker, the figure of the young person and the figure of the artist.

In doing so the collective has joined a wider debate about the relation between art and society. As the work of the collective over the last three years has gradually and self-consciously shifted from the private to the public, the policing of the various modes of media representation has become an important strategic concern. In its current, most public phase, the media has become an important arena for mediating the connectivity between the work of the *What’s the Story? Collective* and those broader questions of art and civil society. Clearly control has been a major issue as the collective entered ever further into the precarious world of media representation.



Ailbhe Murphy

In this review we will briefly assess those most recent excursions through an examination of the newsprint, radio and television response to *Policing Dialogues* at The LAB. Before doing so it is necessary to understand more precisely how the collective has moved from the private to the public as a defining feature of the

narrative strategies employed by the collective in developing an audience.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF AUDIENCE

Since the *What’s the Story? Collective* started out on the theme of exploring neighbourhood relations of power, it has been grappling with a movement from the disclosure of personal experience to the domain of public expression. That process can be traced along certain graduated modes of expression, starting with the highly protected conditions of narrative production that surrounded the initial invitation to young people to engage. Once the storytelling process was initiated among participants the principle of anonymity has been retained. In that sense the first audience for this accumulation of unknown authors is the collective itself. In journalistic terms the principle of protecting your sources has applied from the outset.

The question arose then of how to represent those anonymous stories to an audience outside the immediate circle of the collective. This was achieved via a structured reading event staged at the St Andrew’s Community Centre, Rialto. There an invited audience was given both reading and witnessing roles in a highly choreographed sequence of group and individual readings that borrowed from modes of theatrical performance while at the same time staying true to

the content of the stories.

In this form of ‘hearing yourself out loud’ in a semi-public performance it was powerfully evident that alienation and humiliation were recurrent themes in relation to young people’s experience of the police. And so the formation of a more defined question: could those



Ciaran Smyth

# SPEAKING THE TRUTH TO POWER: THE CASE OF THE WHAT'S THE STORY? COLLECTIVE

stories form a context for entering into direct dialogue with the police on those issues of power?

It was precisely this question that gave rise to a second reading event. Staged at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the collective built on the performative structure of the first reading event, also distributing reading and participative roles to an invited audience. Most significantly, reader-participants at IMMA included a cohort of 26 uniformed gardaí just graduated from training at Templemore who read a selection of the *What's the Story? Collective* stories that dealt explicitly with a range of encounters with the police, all of them negative.

In terms of spatial and audience situations the collective has inhabited the familiar local site with a selected participant-audience and the more public site of IMMA, also with a selected audience. Most recently the residency at The LAB has placed the work of the collective under the gaze of public scrutiny combined with participative invitations to selected groups of interest. It is in the context of that graduated move from the private to the public that we will briefly examine how the media has responded to *Policing Dialogues*.

## MEDIA RESPONSES TO POLICING DIALOGUES

We need not dwell in any great detail on the newsprint media since the coverage was descriptive and for the most part served the function of spreading the news about the exhibition. Under the banner of *voices we need to hear* the **Irish Independent's** Day & Night section recommended *Policing Dialogues* as their choice for up-and-coming arts and cultural events in the city. Similarly, the **RialtoNetworkNews** stayed within the parameters of the descriptive, providing a solid informative orientation towards the subject of the exhibition.

The **Irish Examiner** also published a largely descriptive piece entitled *Young people's tales of Garda harassment in new exhibition* giving a context for the show, outlining the rationale for Garda involvement and focusing on collective member Michael Byrne's account of changes in his attitude arising from his experience with the project. Perhaps the most dramatic element of the feature was the inclusion of three of the collective's anonymous stories side by side. Placed in the context of newsprint media they had all the force of a leakage of another kind of private reality into a medium where the coupling of 'young people' and 'police' has only ever been one kind of story.

The radio was a different matter. The **Pat Kenny show** delivered a movement in three parts. In the first, following a visit to the exhibition at The LAB roving correspondent Paddy O'Gorman reported in to studio with what seemed like an almost willful mis-reading of the exhibition as an 'anti-garda

rant' combined with a series of factually incorrect assertions: '*they interviewed a lot of young people with negative experiences with the gardaí*'; '*what City Council and the Arts Council have done is they've taken those statements, they've printed them up, mounted them in boxes*' and later: '*... it's going to Bristol now next month where they're going to be meeting other artists*'.

Next, introduced as signs of 'mixed feelings' locally, a *vox pop* was aired, featuring two negative commentaries on the exhibition followed by a sustained and wholly negative series of individual commentaries on the behaviour of the gardaí in the area. Back in studio the results are summarily coded as 'mixed reactions to the show'. It would have been more accurate to observe that while the *vox pop* yielded no positive responses in relation to *Policing Dialogues* it did produce some surprisingly frank and disturbing views about local relations with the gardaí which were highly resonant with themes explored in the exhibition itself.

An audio piece followed featuring a disturbance at Sherriff St where everyone, including the gardaí are seen to play out their prescribed roles to the point of pastiche. Leaving aside the extent of factually incorrect reportage, there was within this treatment a familiar ideological underbelly along the lines of 'they don't stop a fellow for no reason' which underscored the civic value of *Policing Dialogues* as a counter narrative.

In contrast to that spectacle of misrepresentation, TV3's **Tonight with Vincent Browne** demonstrated how, by extending a degree of authorial control, the media itself can deliver a sophisticated counter-narrative. Using pre-recorded, gallery-based interviews with members of the collective, the news and current affairs programme afforded an unusual chance to express and frame precisely the origins, *modus operandi* and thematic preoccupations encompassed by the work at The LAB. A studio discussion allowed, affording a further opportunity to critically review the exhibition and place its examination of relations of power within a broader discussion on the experience of powerlessness in society more generally.

## FEARLESS SPEAKING

We have seen then within the process of the *What's The Story? Collective* a strategically self-aware movement from a situation of narrative disclosure of personal experience into acts of public expression. And in relation to representation we have seen a transition from the earlier, 'high control' semi-public manifestations into the comparatively 'low control' arena of media (re)presentations. The precarity of that transition is even more amplified when it is made in the service of speaking the truth to power. The French philosopher Michel Foucault reminded us that this kind of speech activity, the work of

speaking the truth to power, was given a specific status and form in ancient Greece called *parrhesia*.

The one who uses *parrhesia* as a form of speaking in the first instance is supposed to give a complete and exact account of what he has in mind so that his audience is able to understand exactly what he thinks. In short, he has the characteristic of frankness. The second characteristic of the user of *parrhesia* is that he says what is true because he knows it is really true: there is always then an exact coincidence between belief and truth. Thirdly, someone is said to use *parrhesia* only when there is a risk or personal danger in telling the truth:

...when a philosopher addresses himself to a sovereign, to a tyrant, and tells him that this tyranny is disturbing and unpleasant because tyranny is incompatible with justice, then the philosopher speaks the truth, believes he is speaking the truth, and more than that, also takes a risk ... (Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, Semiotext(e), 2001).

Finally, *parrhesia* is a form of criticism where the speaker is always less powerful than the one to whom he speaks: *The parrhesia comes from 'below', as it were, and is directed towards 'above'* (Foucault 2001).

We suggest that there is an interesting correspondence between *parrhesia* as a form of speaking and the truth-telling activities of the *What's The Story? Collective*. Certainly in the style and form of storytelling there is a tone of frankness along with a direct correspondence between truth and belief: these narratives are not offered as fictionalised accounts. They are forms of testimony with the moral authority of truth. Equally there is risk taking in the truth-telling practices developed by the collective in the face of the objective relations of power between young people and the police. Certainly 'an address from below' in Foucault's terms.

On the question of media representation there's no doubt the *What's The Story? Collective* are not alone or unique in their struggles to control the message. However, if through the lens of *parrhesia* we contrast the storytelling practices of the media with those of the collective two very different games of truth come into focus. Where the collective have insisted on a correspondence between personal belief and truth, the media insists on a relation between truth and evidence. In the case of the collective, risk is personal, staked on the protection of anonymity. In the case of the media, risk is juridical, staked on the legal constraints to truth-telling. And finally, if the media has enjoyed a relation of 'power over' the means of representation, the *What's The Story? Collective* have been refining their strategies for a different form of address, a form of speaking truth to power that comes from below and therefore derives its authority from its relation to truth ■

## 3. DISCURSIVE DIALOGUES

# AN EM-POWERING EXPERIENCE

DOLPHIN HOUSE, RIALTO PHOTO: JONATHAN MYERS

**FOR WHAT'S THE STORY? MEMBER JONATHAN MYERS, THE PROJECT HAS BEEN AN EMPOWERING EXPERIENCE THAT HAS STEELED HIS DETERMINATION TO CONTINUE TO DRIVE FOR SOCIETAL CHANGE THROUGH CREATIVE AND COLLECTIVE ACTION. HERE HE TELLS US JUST WHAT THE PROCESS REVEALED FOR HIM AND WHY IT WAS SO WORTHWHILE.**

*Jonathan, when you spoke on Tonight With Vincent Browne you said that you believe that many systems in Irish society fail young people. Can you say a bit more about this?*

I'm interested in the structures of power in Irish society, how everything works. I think many institutions – such as the education system, the justice system and gardaí – fail young people. What is the job of these institutions? Take the education system for example – its job is to teach young people by using the curriculum to reach a certain standard of education and an understanding. So if a child doesn't

understand or reach a certain standard, is it a failure on behalf of the child or the failure of that institution? In my opinion and experience, it is the failure of the institution. It has not got the resources or capability within its structure to accommodate children from our unequal society. Many

young people have financial and emotional difficulties at home and at school, college and so on. I do not believe our education system can facilitate for all children from all backgrounds equally, but it can facilitate better for those from more affluent backgrounds. Schools do not know how big a part they play in the lives of many and I do believe they need to be personally connected because by doing this they can then get an understanding of a young person's life.

I believe the same of the gardaí as I do of our education system. Like any institution in a capitalist (democratic) society, it operates on an unequal level. This happens through stereotyping and marginalization of a local area, which then creates hostile relations within communities, which then leads people to feel an inequality, unfair treatment and discrimination. If you see gardaí constantly raiding the wrong flats or fighting with locals, you will get these feelings of anger and rebellion.

***In the beginning, lots of young people spoke about feeling powerless and the gardaí having all the power. Through the project we have got to look deeper into the structures at play. What are your thoughts on that now?***

On legal grounds the gardaí do have more power but the collective through our residency/exhibition and dialogue have shown that they really aren't so powerful. It takes great power to tell a story and challenge the relations between gardaí and communities. We have used our power to do this. As a young person I do live within those structures. I have gained an insight into the structures. I have found similarities between young people and gardaí. For example, the gardaí on the ground cannot talk directly to the high-ups (chief, commissioner) or implement ideas. The same goes for young people; they cannot talk to the higher-ups on their ladder or implement ideas, perhaps in thought but not practice. Saying that, through this process together we have managed to challenge that silencing and have found a way of communicating the experience of young people and gardaí on the ground to the senior gardaí who have power to develop training and make change. The residency shows what can be achieved through creative thinking and practice on both sides.

***What was the most important moment of the residency for you?***

There wasn't a moment as such – it was the support from Rialto Youth Project, many other organisations and many friends and families of those involved. Also there was an

acknowledgment of the issue and we the collective took it on with support and hopefully kick-started something new. The issue has been acknowledged by those involved as well as by gardaí and youth projects from Dublin and beyond. Vincent Browne and other media personnel also took notice. That's important.

***What was your worst moment of the residency?***

The worst moment for me was during the two-day dialogue between the collective and a group of gardaí, when a member of An Garda Síochána said, 'You outta be lucky – Dublin has all of the wealth.' It was something you'd expect a politician to say – totally out of touch with what happens on the ground. The distribution of wealth in Ireland is so unequal and clearly obvious to see. The top 1pc of the Irish population enjoys around €1 billion worth of assets and owns 20pc of the nation's wealth. (See CSO survey from 2008 on tascnet.ie.)

***Did anything change for you through this project?***

I went in with an understanding of all sides, and I have come out with a better understanding of all sides. I have a determination, which I have always had, and this gives me the opportunity to do this work. I am determined to continue this work and help work towards a more equal society, no matter how big or small my contributions.

***What's your view of this type of collaborative practice and the impact it can have?***

One might say that to ask 'Do you believe it's worth doing?' suggests there isn't anything to do or that the issue is unseen. Yes! I believe it's worth doing and bringing change to these systems is possible, we cannot wait for some other time or some other person to bring change. We have started to knock down dominos and create the great effect that follows. Projects like this, built from the grass-roots with determined people behind the wheel, they have more investment than any government or any initiative could hope to have. It has personal investment. Many months ago I would have disagreed with this because I thought the way in which we went about it was not going to work. Thankfully, it did.

***What would you like to do next?***

I'll continue to work in a collective way, using creative methods to address such issues. I believe in bringing together all sides so they understand one another's perspective – whether that's communities, professionals or institutions and those who run them ■

MEMBER OF WHAT'S THE STORY? COLLECTIVE



**Jonathan Myers** has been involved with Rialto Youth Project (RYP) since he was eight. He had his first involvement in an art group through the Mapping project with IMMA and then through a local visual art group that engaged in sculpture and mural projects including a public mural in Philadelphia. He has had a nine-year engagement with visual arts in total. Jonathan's primary interest is in history and politics and the systems within Irish society. He is also interested in creative writing.

# Art & Liberation



**JIM LAWLOR, AS MANAGER OF RIALTO YOUTH PROJECT, HAS BEEN IN A UNIQUE POSITION TO OBSERVE THE PRE-HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF WHAT'S**

**THE STORY? COLLECTIVE AND ITS WORK. AND, HE SAYS, IT HAS BEEN AN ABSOLUTE PLEASURE TO WITNESS. HERE, JIM PAYS TRIBUTE TO THE COLLECTIVE'S ACHIEVEMENTS AND MARVELS AT THE CHANGES AND BREAKTHROUGHS THAT THE COLLABORATION HAS EFFECTED FOR ALL WHO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED.**

I am pleased and proud of the work that has gone on for the past three years in the *What's the Story? Collective*. It is the essence of what good Youth Work Practice means to me: voluntary participation; learning by doing; ownership of programmes and processes; collective action; and participative democracy. I am very pleased indeed.

This group began as a result of work that Fiona Whelan, an artist, had been doing with Rialto Youth Project for a number of years previously. A lot of this work had been about finding voices, exploring neighbourhoods and relationships that go on in them, and finding creative expressions of these matters. It is work that has pushed the boundaries of what is possible when youth workers, young people and an artist collaborate. What's the Story? Collective is a development of these arts based programmes and was the foundation, a well-laid foundation, to what was to happen in the three years that followed. What's the Story? Collective is about sharing power, telling personal stories and making art. In my view this was achieved and much more. It was a true and meaningful coming together where issues were faced, where difference was recognised and enquired into and where joint decision-making was real and genuine.

The six week exhibition/residency in the Lab in Foley

Street was indeed a very proud time. Art and Youth Work sitting side by side in all its splendour. It looked beautiful, it held important stories and acted as a space for conversation, debate, critical thinking, relationship building, negotiation and laughter.

The symbolism of the triangle reflects dealing with more than one way of seeing and understanding the world we live in. It reflects how the group did their work, how they had to enquire of each other and others about that world and how they came to hear each other and get others to hear them. The triangle was impressive to look at and properly represented the depth of meaning it holds for the group and their work. The film *The Day in Question* was carefully edited and reflected the heartfelt and honest stories of the group and the bravery of An Garda Síochána to confront issues that clearly exist for young people in their relationships with gardaí. Chief Superintendents John Twomey and latterly Michael O'Sullivan cannot be praised enough for their leadership in how they engaged with the *What's the Story? Collective* and how seriously they took the group in all their dealings with them.

## TRUTH AND RISK

The exhibition existed because of the stories that the young people told and that took a long time to gather. They were respectfully laid out and available individually to be read and understood. The stories represent the rarely spoken truths about young people's experience of their dealings with An Garda Síochána. It was and is a risky business to tell the truth and the young people deserve great credit for taking that risk and we, as a society, need to take these experiences seriously. These stories were confirmed by other young people from across the South Inner City during the life of the exhibition.

Working with Fiona has been a great pleasure; painless and energising. Fiona is a mild-mannered artist with a core of steel who knows what she wants and is very reasonable in how she presents complex and challenging ideas. She builds her evidence, does her research and presents with a strong sense of mission and purpose. She has developed a very good understanding of Youth Work and the work of youth workers. At the same time, she holds her ground as an artist and has been able to achieve what she is interested in. From the beginning of her work with Rialto Youth Project, Fiona has demonstrated this range of skills and has real empowerment at the centre of her values and beliefs. She is genuinely interested in young people and their stories and has used this interest in developing this project, initially with me, and subsequently with young people and youth workers.

As a youth worker myself I got great delight from observing Youth Workers Nichola and Gillian who participated in this programme. It was a challenging piece of work and they were being asked to enter into it with a different frame of mind and to work through ideas of power and responsibility. It was, to use a local term, a 'real head wrecker' when in the early days understandings were hard to get and young people were playing hardball in their negotiations about what it meant to be part of the group, with themselves as young people and with Gillian and Nichola as youth workers and Fiona as an artist. The youth workers were challenged to their core about what youth work is and what was appropriate behaviour within this context. They were impressive in their professionalism, showed great skill, took on the challenges and I believe came out the other side with wisdom and integrity.

I felt very excited and hopeful about the group of young people who were being invited into this process. I wondered if they would be able to rise to the challenge of taking, sharing and working with power and responsibility. I certainly knew it was going to be lively as the young people are highly opinionated, full of passion and have an acute sense of justice. They were young people who were to grow and develop in all sorts of unexpected ways.

The young people were challenged to find their authentic voice and they faced many difficulties in finding that voice. Not all the young people could live with that challenge and dropped out, but those who stayed have grown in maturity, have dealt with some of their fears and have taken on power in a very powerful and innovative way. They are surer of themselves, they have learned to express themselves, build trust and negotiate with a whole range of other young people, adults and people in positions of power.

## WORK WELL DONE

The *What's the Story? Collective* has also in my opinion collectively learned a lot. The members have faced themselves in no uncertain terms – some bits they didn't like, some bits they were surprised at, some bits they were shocked by – but I think there is no doubt that this process has been liberating and has demanded stamina, fortitude and bravery, as well as commitment, humour and trust.

I have been privileged to witness the journey that this group of people have taken and as you can see I am very pleased indeed. It leaves me with a real sense of satisfaction that this was work well done and not in need of any external affirmation.

Well done. Be pleased and proud ■

**What's the Story?** is a project of artist Fiona Whelan and The Rialto Youth Project.

[www.section8.ie](http://www.section8.ie)

### Acknowledgements:

*What's the Story? Collective* would like to thank the following for their support with 'Policing Dialogues' exhibition/residency at the LAB:

**Advisory group:** Niall O'Baoill: Arts Manager of Fatima Groups United, Jim Lawlor: Manager of Rialto Youth Project, Annette Maloney: Curator and Ciaran Smyth and Ailbhe Murphy of Vagabond Reviews.

The teams at Rialto Youth Project and Dublin City Council Arts Office

**Media & Communications:** Public Communications Centre

**Facilitation:** Cecilia Forrester and Peter Dorman of Community Action Network

**Participating Youth Projects:** Rialto Youth Project, Dolphin House Homework Club, Fatima Homework Club, St. Andrews Talk About Youth Project, St. Michaels Youth Project, South Area Youth Service,

South West Inner City Network, Donore Avenue Youth Service, YMCA, Ringsend/Irishtown Youth Project, Focus Ireland Extension Project, Crumlin Lower Advancing Youth, The Base Ballyfermot and Blarney St Youth Project.

**Witnesses:** Sociologists Aogan Mulcahy, John Bissett and Maurice Devlin and Artists Susanne Bosch and Dan Shipsides.

**Triangular Seating:** James Ryan and Barry Archer  
**An Garda Síochána:** Our sincerest thanks to John Twomey, the outgoing Chief Superintendent of Dublin South Central District for committing to this project over two years, to the new Chief Superintendent Michael O'Sullivan, to Sergeant Colm Russell and to all participating Gardaí.

**Policing Dialogues at The LAB** was brought to you by Dublin City Council Arts Office, the Arts Council's Artist in the Community Scheme managed by Create, an Arts Council Visual Arts Bursary and The Atlantic Philanthropies.



# THE POLICING DIALOGUES RESIDENCY TIMELINE

## WEEK ONE

13.09.10

### **GARDA TRAINING ENQUIRY**

Weekly meeting between members of An Garda Síochána and members of What's the Story? Collective and Rialto Youth Project, facilitated by 'Community Action Network'. The aim of these meetings was to develop new training for Gardaí at a local level in Dublin's South Central District, leading to more constructive interactions with young people.

14.09.10

### **OPENING NIGHT**

What's the Story? Collective launched their six week residency and exhibition with guest Vincent Browne.

17.09.10

### **COLLECTIVE REFLECTION**

Weekly meeting of What's the Story? Collective exploring and reflecting upon all elements of the residency.

## WEEK TWO

20.09.10

### **GARDA TRAINING ENQUIRY**

Weekly meeting between members of An Garda Síochána and members of What's the Story? Collective and Rialto Youth Project, facilitated by 'Community Action Network'. The aim of these meetings was to develop new training for Gardaí at a local level in Dublin's South Central District, leading to more constructive interactions with young people.

21.09.10

### **WORKSHOP WITH YOUNG PEOPLE**

Young people from the South Area Youth Service explored their experience of policing with members of What's the Story? Collective.

22.09.10

### **DEMANDING CONVERSATIONS**

*Socially engaged arts practice in a changing political climate*  
Fiona Whelan and Jamie Hendrick from What's the Story? Collective facilitated a roundtable discussion as part of a 2 day conference in Knowle West Media Centre in Bristol, UK on the topic of: 'What's at stake in the current political climate for socially engaged practice and young people? Are there new opportunities on the horizon?'

23.09.10

### **DEMANDING CONVERSATIONS**

*Socially engaged arts practice in a changing political climate*  
Fiona Whelan and Jamie Hendrick from What's the Story? Collective facilitated a roundtable discussion as part of a 2 day conference in Knowle West Media Centre in Bristol, UK on the topic of: 'Partnerships: What's at stake and at what point is the artist compromised?'

24.09.10

### **CULTURE NIGHT**

What's the Story? Collective show people around the exhibition and answer questions.

24.09.10

### **COLLECTIVE REFLECTION**

Weekly meeting of What's the Story? Collective exploring and reflecting upon all elements of the residency.

## WEEK THREE

27.09.10

### **GARDA TRAINING ENQUIRY**

Weekly meeting between members of An Garda Síochána and members of What's the Story? Collective and Rialto Youth Project, facilitated by 'Community Action Network'. The aim of these meetings was to develop new training for Gardaí at a local level in Dublin's South Central District, leading to more constructive interactions with young people.

29.09.10

### **DIALOGUE BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE & GARDAI**

Day 1 of a Dialogue between What's the Story? Collective and the 24 members of An Garda Síochána who participated in last year's event and film 'The Day in Question'. Facilitated by 'Community Action Network'. Gallery closed to the public.

30.09.10

### **DIALOGUE BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE & GARDAI**

Day 2 of a Dialogue between What's the Story? Collective and the 24 members of An Garda Síochána who participated in last year's event and film 'The Day in Question'. Facilitated by 'Community Action Network'. Gallery closed to the public.

01.10.10

### **COLLECTIVE REFLECTION**

Weekly meeting of What's the Story? Collective exploring and reflecting upon all elements of the residency.

## WEEK FOUR

04.10.10

### **GARDA TRAINING ENQUIRY**

Weekly meeting between members of An Garda Síochána and members of What's the Story? Collective and Rialto Youth Project, facilitated by 'Community Action Network'. The aim of these meetings was to develop new training for Gardaí at a local level in Dublin's South Central District, leading to more constructive interactions with young people.

06.10.10

### **WORKSHOP WITH YOUNG PEOPLE**

Young people from the Rialto Youth Project explored their experience of policing with members of What's the Story? Collective.

07.10.10

### **WORKSHOP WITH YOUNG PEOPLE**

Young people from The Base in Ballyfermot explored their experience of policing with members of What's the Story? Collective.

08.10.10

### **COLLECTIVE REFLECTION**

Weekly meeting of What's the Story? Collective exploring and reflecting upon all elements of the residency.

## WEEK FIVE

7.10.10

### **WORKSHOP WITH YOUNG PEOPLE**

Young people from The Base in Ballyfermot explored their experience of policing with members of What's the Story? Collective.

11.10.10

### **GARDA TRAINING ENQUIRY**

Weekly meeting between members of An Garda Síochána and members of What's the Story? Collective and Rialto Youth Project, facilitated by 'Community Action Network'. The aim of these meetings was to develop new training for Gardaí at a local level in Dublin's South Central District, leading to more constructive interactions with young people.

12.10.10

### **YOUNG PEOPLE VISIT**

Young people from the Blarney St Youth Project in Cork city engaged with the exhibition and explored their experience of policing with members of What's the Story? Collective.

13.10.10

### **STUDENT VISIT**

What's the Story? Collective hosted students from 2nd year Fine Art & MA in Criminology at DIT for a tour of the exhibition and a conversation about practice.

13.10.10

### **STUDENT VISIT**

What's the Story? Collective hosted students from Creative Writing and Cultural Studies at Inchicore College for a tour of the exhibition and a conversation about practice.

14.10.10

### **COLLECTIVE REFLECTION**

Weekly meeting of What's the Story? Collective exploring and reflecting upon all elements of the residency.

15.10.10

### **POLICING DIALOGUES SEMINAR**

*Perspectives from Sociology, Public Art Practice and Youth Work.*  
Seminar with staff and students from MA Art in Public UU Belfast and MA Youth and Community Work NUI Maynooth, plus members of What's the Story? Collective and Rialto Youth Project.

## WEEK SIX

18.10.10

### **GARDA TRAINING ENQUIRY**

Weekly meeting between members of An Garda Síochána and members of What's the Story? Collective and Rialto Youth Project, facilitated by 'Community Action Network'. The aim of these meetings was to develop new training for Gardaí at a local level in Dublin's South Central District, leading to more constructive interactions with young people.

19.10.10

### **IN CONVERSATION**

What's the Story? Collective in conversation with Vagabond Reviews. A public conversation critically examined the work and practice of What's the Story? Collective with Ailbhe Murphy and Ciaran Smyth of Vagabond Reviews.

20.10.10

### **STUDENT VISIT**

What's the Story? Collective hosted students from the H-Dip in Community Arts Education at NCAD for a workshop and discussion on practice.

22.10.10

### **MUSIC EXCHANGE**

A performance event by young people from Rialto Youth Project's music programme, showcasing their talents to other young people, family and project workers.

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