

**Learning from each other's struggles:
Social movements / activist research workshop
Dublin / Maynooth, June 18th - 20th**

Social movements like community development, anti-capitalism, the women's movement, union organising, majority world solidarity, GLBT activism, anarchism and socialism, community education and community arts, migrant rights and anti-racism all produce knowledge for change.

Sometimes this knowledge is a radical understanding of how the status quo works and how it can be changed; sometimes it is expert knowledge of a particular issue that can be used in media and legal battles; sometimes it is research on movements themselves that can be used to get better at what we do; sometimes it is popular education work and radical teaching.

This weekend workshop is for people researching social movements, activist researchers, adult and community educators and movement organisers thinking about the next step in a period of crisis. It is not a place for delivering conventional academic papers, but rather a workshop space for sharing skills, learning from each other's struggles and developing our practice.

The workshop is a joint initiative of the participatory action research programme in social movements at NUIM Sociology and the Political Ethnography group at the Centre for the Study of Social and Global Justice, Nottingham.

With apologies for the delay, here is a provisional programme for this event. Further details and updates will be posted at <http://actionresearchireland.blogspot.com/> where you can find travel details etc. You can book online or register on the day.

Friday 18th

Seomra Spraoi, Belvedere Court, off Gardiner Street, Dublin 1
(Map on http://www.seomraspraoi.org:8080/Plone/copy_of_contact-us)

7.30 - 10.00: Introduction to weekend and activist film night.
Provisional showings: *A place in the city*; *Exodus*

Saturday morning and afternoon

Auxilia Building, north campus, National University of Ireland Maynooth
(Travel details and maps at <http://www.nuim.ie/location/>):

9.30 - 10.00: Registration

10.00 - 11.00: *Energy, power and politics:*

Amanda Slevin (Donegal MAOR / TCD Sociology), Hegemony and hydrocarbons

Hilary Darcy (Seomra Spraoi Better Questions / NUIM Sociology), Consent to coercion: policing protest in the Republic of Ireland

- OR -

Theorising social movements:

Benoit Dutilleul (University of the West of England), Deploying actor-network theory to conceptualise movements' dynamics

11.00 - 11.30: Break

11.30 - 1.00: *Workplace organising as militant / action research*

Ziggy (Kolinko collective), Organising call-centre workers as militant research

1.00 - 2.00: Lunch

2.00 - 3.30: *Social movements and strategy: law as battleground*

Jenny Boylan (NUI Galway), Grassroots activism and the development of abortion law in the Republic of Ireland

Deborah Magill (Transitional Justice Institute, University of Ulster), Social movements' use of litigation

- OR –

Art and archaeology as action research:

Thomas Kador (UCD Archaeology), Archaeology as action research

Martina Carroll (ARCAMosaic / UCD Psychology), Community art, action research and anti-racism

3.30 - 4.00: Break

4.00 - 6.00: *Practicing political ethnography*

Nottingham Political Ethnography Group, What role for subjectivities and "politica afectiva" in the theory and practice of social justice?

(Deirdre Duffy, Jennifer Martinez, Jon Mansell, Sara Motta, Maria Urbina, Heather Watkins)

Saturday night

Seomra Spraoi, Dublin

7.30 - 10.00: Activist film night

Provisional showing: *Porto Marghera: the last firebrands*

Sunday morning and afternoon

Auxilia Building, north campus, National University of Ireland Maynooth

10.30 - 12.30: *Social movements making media*

Mimi Doran (UCD Social Justice), Media literacy and social activism: using mainstream and new media as a site for social movements

Yuvi Basanth (RootsReelFilms), Activist documentary making

Barra Hamilton (Dublin Community TV), Activists and the media

12.30 - 1.30: Lunch

1.30 - 3.00: *Who owns social movements?*

David Landy (Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Committee / TCD Sociology), Solidarity, splits and panic stations: reflections on an interesting year for the Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Committee

Francisco Arquerros (NUIM Anthropology), The politics of migrant worker organising

- OR -

Personal, political, praxis: participatory action research and movements

Jean Bridgeman (Women of Insight / NUIM Sociology), Notes from a journal: methods and strengths in action research

Asia Rutkowska (NUIM Sociology), Ethics and politics in participatory action research

3.00 - 3.15: Break

3.15 - 5.00: *Social movements and knowledge: who owns the intellectual means of production?*

Andre Pusey and Elsa Noterman (Really Open University / Leeds Geography / Activism and Social Change MA), Developing the Really Open University: problems and experiences

Laurence Cox (NUIM Sociology), Why do movements want to know things, and how do they go about it?

An incomplete list of descriptions of presentations and events:

Francisco Arqueros (The politics of migrant worker organising):

My presentation is about my work in a migrant workers group that was supposed to be migrant led. In practice it was far from it, and I would like to show why it was the case. I was an active member in the group.

My presentation is based on the last chapter of my PhD dissertation in the Department of Anthropology at NUIM.

Jean Bridgeman (Notes from a journal: methods and strengths in action research)

This workshop explores some methods and strengths in keeping a reflexive journal in the process of doing action research. It draws from my own experiences in the field of research and brings attention to the inner strengths to be found in the role as researcher. Some issues discussed will be:

- self doubt in research practice
- Isolation in forms of community organising and
- finding inner strengths: why it's ok when things fall apart

The workshop will give a brief overhead presentation and then engage participants in interactive discussion on key issues presented.

Martina Carroll (Community art, action research and anti-racism)

As a working class Irish woman, who had returned to education as a mature student, I became involved in teaching adult and community education. I pursued a PhD entitled "Working Through the Arts in Antiracism education", currently in the final stages before submission. I created an antiracism community arts project called ARCAMosaic which became a context for a collaborative action research project. My research interests are in lived experience and meaning making processes especially the use of art in meaning making. I collaborated with local people in the area where I live in Dublin 12 as we explored the issues of racism, culture and identity through a combination of image and dialogue within the community arts project. For my presentation I would like to talk about the mixed method approach I used that combined Action Research with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and Art. I would also like to talk about the emancipatory aims of the project and the research, and to show how art was used to make sense of many confusing and often contradictory experiences.

Laurence Cox (Why do movements want to know things, and how do they go about it?)

A lot of what thinks of itself as radical theory, writing, teaching, journalism, research etc. doesn't think about its own "conditions of existence" in the same way that it thinks about other kinds of thought, knowledge and culture. The relatively small number of self-aware modes of movement thought tend to be limited to their own movement, or to particular organising traditions. The net result is that not only do we know relatively little about ourselves and our work, but we also unconsciously reproduce many ways of producing

knowledge which are inherited, either from our own (often not very successful) past, or from our socialisation into mainstream skills and forms of knowledge.

This workshop / part-workshop session starts from what participants know about the different movements they're involved in e.g. environmental, community, women's, LGBTQ, socialist, anarchist, trade union, popular education, anti-war, etc. etc. and the different kinds of knowledge those movements produce: political theory and strategy, information about "issues", activist tactics, alternative technology, organising tools, ways of being with each other, educational and consciousness-raising practice, "how-to" information, movement history, research on social structure, etc. etc.

We will try to find out together what these different kinds of knowledge are for, how they are produced now, and what the history of these different kinds of "Really Useful Knowledge" (as they were called in the late 19th century) is. In particular, we want to see how they are given shape and structure, transmitted to other activists and newer generations, how they become stale and rhetorical or how they remain connected to practice. One particular interest is in the way some of these kinds of movement knowledge have either forced their way into academia (and other mainstream institutions) or been coopted and commodified by such institutions, and what the political implications of this are.

Mimi Doran (Media literacy and social activism: using mainstream and new media as a site for social movements)

This talk will look closely at the Participatory Research Action case study of St Michaels Estate, Regeneration Team, Dublin, Ireland. It tells the story of a working class community's journey to become media literate with the aim of getting the community's perspective on regeneration heard in the public domain. It documents their attempt to use the media as a communications tool to get their voice heard and their story of being regenerated or listened to. It charts their journey from being a relatively unknown community group to becoming recognised nationally as expert sources of information on regeneration.

The talk outlines the media literacy programme the group followed and highlights the impact media coverage had on how the regeneration story of St Michaels unfolds. St Michaels Estate has been involved in the regeneration of their housing estate for 10 years. The PPP Regeneration project collapsed in May 2008 (along with many more) and residents have been left living in the most appalling conditions with little hope for the future. However this community has a long history of grass roots activism and have mobilised to get their community socially and physically regenerated. They are using mainstream and new media to tell their story, raise public awareness, instigate debate, influence policy and legislation.

The ideas discussed in this presentation outline the impact media literacy (skills and knowledge of how to work with media) is having on how the regeneration story of St Michaels Estate, unfolds. This work originates from my background as a media practitioner and work with postgraduate students in the Equality Studies Centre UCD (students are also activists for equality issues in Ireland and internationally) who wanted to develop greater levels of media literacy and empowerment. They described a sense of mystification about how the media operate and were highly sceptical about its possible contribution to greater equality in society in the light of the ever-expanding global reach of commercial media. In response, we developed the *Equality and the Media* module in consultation with students. The module attempts to develop critical thinking about media

literacy, alongside practical workshops about how to access and perform on different media platforms.

From this I developed a media literacy programme for social activists with the aim of getting their voice heard in the public domain. There is growing evidence that media is easier to access, audiences easier to get information to and the cost of accessing the media has decreased dramatically. Citizen journalism is on the increase and the distribution of information, ideas and opinions through blogging, podcasts, videos and social networking sites has never been easier. For activists, this opens up important spaces to create media content and communicate with a wider audience. With knowledge, know how and technology anyone can become a citizen journalist and this has huge impact on power relations within the media. The successful use of new media by the Zapatista movement in Mexico showcases how grass roots activism can reach a global audience (Castells 1997). Successful campaigns such as the Battle for Seattle against the World Trade Organisation and the anti-war against Iraq protests have shown how activists can mobilise successfully by fostering new media (Kahn and Douglas 2004). Media as a site for social action is where minorities and rights based groups can congregate and mobilize in a non hierarchal environment. The shift in power relations of new media is where emancipatory potential lies creating possibilities for revitalizing the public sphere.

Benoit Dutilleul (Using actor-network theory to conceptualise movements' dynamics)

Following an initial presentation of actor network theory's (ant) metaphysics, theoretical commitments, concepts and methodological doctrine, the paper then deploys ant to conceptualise social movements dynamics and growth. Social movements are thought as phenomena coalescing within relational emergence, constructed and performed by humans and non-humans altogether. Social movements dynamics are rendered as struggles between actor networks and three possible processes whereby their performances may grow and bring about change are identified: organizational development, growth in participation, and transformation and/or erosion of adversary actor networks. The third part of the paper analyses a performance of clown-activists to stress that, and to show how, individually and collectively, humans compose the performance with non-humans. It then reveals how heterogeneous relational patterns linking clowns with other actors organize the performance and how the action might have produced change and movement growth. As a whole, ant might provide the theoretical space and the conceptual tools for addressing some theoretical limitations in existing social movement scholarship. Through a shift in focus from theories to performances, ant research might help ordering, articulating and enriching existing theories, while producing knowledge that might also be more relevant and accessible to activists.

Barra Hamilton (Activists and the media)

Manipulation techniques applied by the media and ways to avoid falling into to "mass media trap" when being interviewed and how to subvert the mass media (propaganda model), from advertisements to the news.

Look at creating a sustainable activist / community media sector, benefits to activists. Analysis of successfully Irish media campaigns/ tricks launched by under resources activists.

Thomas Kador (Archaeology as action research)

The public perception of archaeology is that it is a discipline that investigates the past. The logical corollary of this view is that the subject matter of archaeology is dead and gone and bears little significance to socioeconomic and political relations in the present.

I disagree strongly with both of these notions. Although, most archaeological research indeed centres on investigating the lives of people in the past, the research itself is of course always carried out within a contemporary social, political and cultural context. Consequently archaeological interpretations can tell us at least as much, if not more, about contemporary society than about communities of the past.

That archaeology can be used and even abused as a powerful political tool has been widely acknowledged and there are many examples of this, ranging from the early colonial exploits of British (and other) explorers, the use of archaeology in NAZI Germany (as famously portrayed in *Indiana Jones*) and Communist Eastern Europe to Zionist archaeology in the Middle East and the archaeology of land rights in the Americas and Australasia.

If archaeology has this power to legitimise political causes then on the flipside it must also have the potential to subvert existing power relations and consequently act as tool for social change.

In this paper I wish to make the case for, and outline the principles of an action archaeology. That is an archaeology that does not pretend to be a neutral bystander reporting on past events, but an archaeology that acknowledges its power for social transformation and actively pursues its aims to contribute towards social change in contemporary society.

David Landy (Solidarity, splits and panic stations: reflections on an interesting year for the Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Committee)

One day after the IPSC AGM, it seems like a good idea to reflect on the past year of solidarity activism. As a central activist in the IPSC, I have a particular interest in discussing what the group has been through in the past year a year which has involved dealing with the aftermath of Gaza, coping with the previous leadership group splintering off and forming a micro-group in conjunction with the Palestinian Delegation, refocusing our campaign around Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions, and the ongoing rhythm of crises and panics that every Palestinian solidarity movement in Europe works with.

The purpose of the workshop is not social movement journalism (or gossip) however. I want to make the experiences of the IPSC relevant to others and intend to reflect on the IPSC based around the following questions:

1. Groups face the ongoing dynamic of co-optation and making nice to power on the one hand; the necessity of professionalization and reaching out to the mainstream on the other. How do we, and how do we fail to bridge this gap?
2. Movements try to whip up peoples enthusiasms, and to get political parties interested and involved in their campaigns. How do we do so, yet maintain our independence from political parties and from internal factions trying to capture the group for their own enthusiasms and interests?
3. The problematics all distant issue movements (including Irish-led migrants rights groups, solidarity groups etc) face. Who do we represent?
4. Social movement activism is frequently one damn crisis after another. These immediate issues are what matters to movement participants. Does social movement

theory offer anything besides platitudes to help activists deal with these crises that drive movements?

While I might not get to all these questions, I've a particular interest in questions 1 and 4.

Deborah Magill (Social movements' use of litigation)

I am a researcher at the Transitional Justice Institute/School of Law at the University of Ulster. My current research examines social movements use of litigation as a strategy. I would be very interested in giving a presentation at the above weekend workshop. My presentation will firstly look at how different social movements view the law and how this determines where litigation fits within their overall strategy. It will then examine the positive and negative impact litigation can have on a campaign. Finally I will consider how movements have responded to case outcomes and in particular how negative rulings have been utilised to boost a campaign.

Nottingham Political Ethnography Group (What role for subjectivities and "politica afectiva" in the theory and practice of social justice?)

The Nottingham Political Ethnography Group began in November 2008 as a collective space for PhD students working with Sara Motta to discuss the research process in its intellectual, political, subjective, and effective elements.

We have since refined the focus of our work and found that giving ourselves a name helps to distinguish this focus. Collectively, our research questions ask who are the agents of politics and social change? What are the mechanisms and forms of domination and their contradictions? How can researchers study forms of resistance as a way of contributing to social justice and political transformation? As such, we are concerned with:

- i) The relevance of our research, not merely for policy but for the opening up of public space for dissent and the discussion of alternatives; and
- ii) The relevance of our research to the communities with whom we are working.

We believe this requires us to overcome some of the problematic divisions between public/private, academic/political, fact/value, and empirical/theoretical that are over-emphasized in the university space. In addition to debating the theoretical implications of these divisions, we also discuss using methodologies that place these questions at the centre of our research. In particular, what it means to practice 'political ethnography' as a way to rupture traditionally assumed dichotomies and grounding critical theories in the present-day practices of various communities in Europe and Latin America. In part these interests stem from our previous and on-going experiences in non-governmental organizations, political parties, and social movements. Ultimately, we hope to make a contribution to a wider audience through a collective research project in the future.

Our workshop will focus on the role of subjectivities and politica efectiva (the politics of effect) in our research and practices both in and outside of the university. This is a theme that has become of increasing interest to the group, particularly as traditional conceptions of knowledge production and social emancipation seem to either ignore or make secondary these elements of social transformation.

Each of us will approach the topic of the workshop from a slightly different perspective. These include the politics of effect in the construction of academic-activist subjectivity; the construction of new subjects of social transformation in Venezuela, the attempt to

hegemonise commodified subjectivities in local government initiatives and the tensions between good sense and common sense in subaltern subjectivities and political cultures.

We hope that the questions raised from our reflections about these elements of subjectivity and politica efectiva in our work and lives will stimulate a collective space of discussion and the development of what De Sousa Santos calls an ecology of knowledges; a space of openness and dialogue in which we can explore the relevance of the subject and political afectiva in our work as critical educators and researchers.

Andre Pusey and Elsa Noterman (Developing the Really Open University: problems and experiences)

Andre Pusey is a PhD candidate in the Geography department at the University of Leeds. His research is around ways in which activists (re)produce the common(s) and I am experimenting with militant ethnography and other forms of participatory method. He has a long involvement in social movements, such as Earth First! and the anti-roads movement of the 1990s and more recently groups such as Climate Camp.

Elsa is currently enrolled on the 'Activism and Social Change' Masters program, also here in the Geography department at Leeds. She intends to pursue PhD research in the near future and has a strong interest in participatory action research.

We are both involved with a group called the 'Really Open University'. The ROU was established in part to resist the massive financial cuts the University of Leeds is facing, through supporting lecturers strike action, building awareness in the student body and countering Leeds Student Union's anti-strike and scaremongering campaign. However, the larger and more important emphasis of the ROU has been critiquing the neoliberal university and the further enclosure and commodification of knowledge, whilst arguing for the use of radical pedagogical methods and establishment of 'knowledge commons'.

We are interested in presenting something on our involvement with the ROU as activist-researchers and reflect on some of the problems and obstacles we feel the group has faced, especially when moving from the 'visualisation' to 'actualisation' stage of the groups goals.

We look forward to engaging participants in a discussion about the enclosure of knowledge, as well as explore examples of resistance and the creation of alternatives. We see this as an opportunity to extend the sorts of discussions we have been having as well as gaining valuable feedback.

The groups websites are www.reallyopenunion.org/ and www.reallyopenuniversity.org/

Amanda Slevin (Hegemony and hydrocarbons)

This presentation will provide an insight into my research on the Irish states management of its gas and oil. Beginning with an overview of the Shell to Sea campaign, I will highlight some of the main issues raised by this social movement and outline its influences on my research as an activist. I will then focus on my research topic, problematising the states management of Irish gas and oil and interrelated processes of consent formation and coercion.

Films (provisional only)

A place in the city (South Africa, 2008)

Nearly 15 years since apartheid ended, millions of black South Africans still live in self-built shacks without sanitation, adequate water supplies, or electricity.

But *A Place in the City* will overturn all your assumptions about slums and the people who live in them.

In this film, shot in the vast shack settlements in and around Durban, members of [Abahlali baseMjondolo](#), the grassroots shackdwellers movement, lay out their case against forcible eviction; for decent services with passion, eloquence, and sweet reason. The film captures the horrible conditions in which shackdwellers live but it also captures Abahlalis bravery and resilience, in a political climate where grassroots campaigners like them are more likely to be met with rubber bullets than with offers to talk.

For the first time now, says Sbu Zikode, Abahlalis elected leader, poor people have started to speak for themselves. Now, that challenges those who are paid to think for us who are paid to speak for us.

At the heart of Abahlalis struggle is the struggle for meaningful citizenship rights for South Africa's poor majority. Or does freedom in South Africa, asks Abahlali volunteer organiser Louisa Motha, only belong to the rich?

Exodus: movement of Jah people (Britain, 1996)

Exodus is a unique urban phenomenon which does not simply confront but intelligently challenges society's assumptions and values. They offer working, viable solutions to many of society's stated ills, poverty, crime, drugs, unemployment and the break down of community. Exodus blend a volatile mixture of rastafarianism, new-age punk and street smart politics. 'We are not drop outs but force outs.'

"This remarkable film is an antidote to the dereliction and paranoia on Britain's streets. Squatting and renovating decayed buildings, Exodus pursue a mutually agreed quest to regenerate their disaffected community. Their regular free raves bring ex-army, ex-estate agents, ex-shop assistants and ex-criminals together as Exodus, a dance with new direction. For anyone interested in a street-relevant discussion on drugs, criminality, spirituality and community, this film is a must-see". *Squall*

Porto Marghera: the last firebrands (Italy, 2004)

A film about petrochemical workers who took matters into their own hands in the giant industrial zone engulfing Venice. The mass refusal of literally toxic work forced hours on the job down at the same time as driving wages up. The labour hierarchy that sets white collar against blue, permanent against casual, was attacked by workers insisting on the maximum for everyone. The battle in the factory was linked to working-class life outside through direct appropriation of basic social needs (electricity, housing, food).

More clearly than any before them, the Porto Marghera workers identified the factory as the trigger of fatal diseases and destroyer of life. They remained on the offensive against the concerted hostility of unions, multinational employers and state from the late 1960s until well into the '70s. As part of an international wave of struggle, their actions

contributed to a global accumulation crisis, provoking the capitalist counter-attack which has never ceased since then.

Unlike most more or less academic accounts of Italian Operaismo, which tend to focus on high-profile groups and individual leaders, Porto Marghera gli ultimi fuochi (Manuela Pellarin, Italy, 2004) documents autonomous worker organization from the point of view of the worker-activists themselves, who talk about their experiences in the film. Many aspects and problems of this phase of class struggle are of immediate relevance today.

The Porto Marghera workers fought for better conditions within their work and at the same time against the damaging impact the chemical industry and of work itself. They defended their health-damaging jobs, yet did so from a deeply critical perspective, at a time when a middle-class moralizing green movement did not exist.

They developed independent organizational forms within the existing struggles of the time. This meant reassessing the relationships between the workers' mobilizations and their own role as active workers; the factory and the wider social terrain; workers' struggles, new forms of union representation and 'professional' political groups like Potere Operaio; and between mass movement, armed insurrectionist groups and state repression.