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Speak for Yourself: Considerations of Ethics and Aesthetics in the Performance of a Community Oral History Project

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Context

I was born in a place called Omagh, the county town of Tyrone in Northern Ireland. Situated almost seventy miles from Belfast in the foothills of the Sperrin Mountains, it is where my family has lived for generations and is the place I call home. In August 1998, the town was devastated by a terrorist car bomb that killed twenty-nine people, including a woman pregnant with twins as well as injuring and maiming hundreds of others. The bomb attack occurred just thirteen weeks after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement,¹ a political deal constructed to formulate a lasting settlement between all the main political parties in Northern Ireland following the 1994 paramilitary ceasefires. The bombing killed civilians from all denominations within the town, as well as tourists from Donegal and Spain. Admitted by the Real IRA² in the days afterwards, the bombing in Omagh was regarded throughout Northern Ireland as an attack on the fledgling peace process and it galvanized support for the new political settlement. The bomb prompted shock and outrage throughout a country preparing to accept the prospect of peace. It provoked national and international outrage and was described as the “single worst atrocity of the Troubles”—a traumatic moniker that has earned Omagh its place in the troubled history of Northern Ireland.

According to cultural geographer, Doreen Massey, the identity of a place is bound up not only with the histories that are told of them but “how these histories are told and which history turns out to be dominant.”³ Since the bombing, the town’s association with suffering has meant that the name of Omagh has come to stand for the terrible event that took place there, and it is not unusual to hear people from the town refer to it as “when Omagh happened.” This shorthand, given to the event by the media, succeeded in “writing” the place with a dominant narrative of trauma that effectively highlighted what David Lloyd has termed “deterritorialization,”⁴ a process he defines as “tearing identity from places.”⁵ In the years after the bomb, a major cross border investigation failed to secure any convictions for the attack, yet Omagh was called upon to articulate a specific identity that was required for a particular post-conflict Northern Ireland—that of a recovering society. The rebuilding of the town center accompanied the unveiling of a specially designed memorial, located on the site of the bomb, on the tenth anniversary of the attack. This comprised of a 4.5-meter glass obelisk containing a crystal glass heart sculpture; it

represents the outpouring of love and compassion demonstrated towards Omagh in the days after the attack and signifies how the town has (apparently) “healed” in subsequent years. Representative of the town’s symbolic place within the recovery of a post-conflict society, the newly built, uniformly beige shops and sparkling memorial have replaced the small multi-colored boutiques and family-run businesses that had previously formed the backdrop to my childhood memories. Omagh became required to represent a new image for the future of the province, and the material reconstruction of the town reflected the metaphorical rebuilding of Northern Ireland itself.

My doctoral research investigated how Omagh’s identity had been artistically and politically appropriated in the promotion of societal recovery. The redesigning of the town center around the glittering glass memorial had placed the community’s own memory work in fractious dialogue with the immediate needs of a developing post-conflict society. My practical enquiry endeavored to explore how the performance of personal stories about the place, and the ownership over the process involved in presenting them, could demonstrate a “taking back” of control over how this place might be identified. My practice placed my work in relation to community and grassroots organizations in Northern Ireland whose use of storytelling has promoted a “bottom up” effort at dealing with the legacy of the past.⁶ Specifically, my research aimed to interrogate a testimonial theatre concept called Theatre of Witness⁷ that was introduced to Northern Ireland in 2009. As a format that facilitated the performance of personal life stories within a dramatic framework, its placement of ordinary people telling their own stories into a theatrical environment offered a public forum for a renegotiation of Northern Ireland’s troubled history within the agenda of presenting marginalized narratives. The Theatre of Witness model promised a sharing of true life stories from the conflict and a trilogy of plays involving perpetrators and victims of violence was performed throughout the province from 2009 to 2013. The productions contained powerful individual recounts of past events; however, they were also slick theatrical performances which utilized sound, lighting and film imagery, and the obvious crafting of the participants’ script, constructed from numerous interviews with them. This resulted in a series of highly poeticized plays which ultimately undercut the “real” with the theatrically represented. The artistic choices made seemed to favor a communal theatrical experience over a personal ownership and that challenged me to explore how, in the

presentation of the lived experience of real people, the ownership of the performed narrative is affected by, or affects, the artistic process of performing it.

My PAR Project

My practice was conducted in the housing estate in Omagh, where I grew up. Shandon Park is situated less than half a mile from the town center and was one of four main council housing projects built in the town in the early 1970s to cope with the chronic shortage of suitable rentable accommodation in the area. In the cultural climate of the time, new housing estates in the early years of the Troubles were overwhelmingly segregated spaces: houses in Shandon Park were, and still are, occupied by residents who are mainly from the Catholic tradition.

My aunt and uncle moved into number 27 Shandon Park in 1970, followed a year later by my parents into number 37 and it was my home until I was 16 years old. For the duration of my research project many years later, I moved into number 27—where my aunt and uncle still live, alongside many original residents. Located within the community that held so many personal memories for me, I spent three months interviewing a variety of people whose connection to me varied from old neighbor, to new acquaintance. Living again within the place that geographically prompted so many of my own memories, the community spoke to me about their memories of life in Shandon Park.

My praxis was underpinned by Pierre Nora's hypothesis that "real environments of memory"⁸ are embedded in the experience of everyday life. In his seminal study on the relationship between history and memory, Nora explores how the modern compulsion to design deliberately constructed commemorations of cultural and national memory displace what he terms as "real environments of memory . . . borne by living societies."⁹ My practice presented a commemoration of the past within the grounded reality of everyday life as "counter" to the memorial situated in Omagh's town center, and explored how allowing people to speak for themselves equates to a yearning to hear the "real" story of the place. The use of oral history as a methodology which celebrates the ordinary or the marginalized past, served to explore how the narratives of ordinary people can articulate an alternative perspective on Omagh. This methodology enabled me to examine how stories about a place become woven into an individual's sense of self. The social historian Paul Thompson states

that “oral history [...] can give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place.”¹⁰ As a reflection rather than a record of events, the use of oral history techniques within my practice placed the celebration of the people who told their personal histories, alongside an appreciation of how they chose to tell them.

The project also confronted the creative and ethical processes involved in the methodology of oral history performance. The construction and presentation of personal narratives within a theatrical frame in a public arena called up issues of ownership throughout the creative and collaborative process of crafting a narrative. In exploring how the ownership of lived experience could exist within a dramatic structure, I had to acknowledge my own responsibility to honor the remembered stories of the residents involved, and reflect them back, both respectfully and with artistry. The methodology of oral history is inherently interactive. In discussing the conversion of an interview transcript into a theatrical one, Amanda Stuart Fisher has stated that “[f]or this to be a truly ethical transaction between playwright and host community, both parties must be perceived as artists contributing in different ways to the weaving of the tale.”¹¹ Michael Frisch’s concept of “shared authority”¹² was a guiding principle throughout the project, and was negotiated at different levels with each performing participant. The collaborative nature of the editing process in this project led me to tackle issues around the ownership of the material. Whose story was it? Who would have the final decision on which stories to make public? How far would these decisions affect the history that would be told within the final performance?

Estelle Barrett states that a methodology of practice as research is “often motivated by emotional, personal and subjective concerns.”¹³ Shandon Park was where I grew up, and in moving back in to the estate for the duration of the project, I lived again within the community that held so many personal memories for me. In attempting to remember Omagh and allow people to be agents in commemorating their own stories, my role as past resident and present artist presented a further complication regarding ethical and aesthetic responsibilities. My concern that the process would not be overly shaped through my own subjective or even artistic interpretation was an issue that governed the entire project. Throughout the process, the presentation of the home as the central location of memory and identity also recalled my own memories of the estate as my childhood home; essentially, this project also presented a relationship between my own shared history of the

past in Shandon Park with facilitation of the stories of others. Directly implicated in the past and present of Shandon Park in its narrative and physical environment, the balance between my duty to members of my own community and my responsibility as an artist was one that I had to constantly negotiate in my ongoing dialogue with my theoretical research.

The Performance

Shandon Park was a large-scale, site-specific community performance about place, memory and identity. Based on the oral testimony of residents who live there, it was performed by them for a local audience from Shandon Park, amidst the continuing “real” life of the estate. Performed on the 3rd October 2010, the piece comprised a series of monologues spoken by four main performer/residents at various sites throughout the estate. The performers were situated in their home domains and they told personal stories about what brought them to Shandon Park—and what made them stay. The audience was guided from place to place by various storytellers, encountering a number of installations¹⁴ representing some of the shared memories and experiences recalled by various residents. The work became a literal and storied journey through the estate and the audience of residents, some of whom continued to carry out their own everyday tasks while watching on, became co-creators in the overall performance of the place.

The project was divided into three stages. The first involved the collection of stories through a series of recorded oral history interviews with people who lived in the estate. The second phase, involving the transcriptions of these interviews, was based around re-reading and re-shaping the transcripts with the residents in preparation for their performance—which was the final stage of the project. The residents who agreed to take part were involved in every aspect of the project’s production and the final performance demonstrated a communal celebration of Shandon Park itself, as told by people who were active collaborators in how their memories would be articulated.

All the oral history interviews took place in the first few weeks of the project. The interviews were constructed around the subject of family and friendships, and centered on the participating residents’ relationships to the physical geography of their houses in Shandon Park and the surrounding area within the estate. Interviews were conducted in the participants’ houses, and the intimacy of the domestic setting allowed for the sharing of

experiential memories about the place where people had made their homes. Of the twelve interviews I carried out, four people agreed to take part in the final performance and I continued to work with these residents in the shaping of their stories into a script.¹⁵ Each interview was transcribed immediately after the interview, and when this was completed, another meeting with the interviewee was arranged where they had the opportunity to read their story in preparation for editing. Initial changes were made to the stories to clarify details, elaborate on events and to correct mistaken dates and times. The main cuts, however, were made in recognition that these stories would be retold within the public arena. Residents removed parts of their stories that they believed were insignificant for public performance, while others refused to let certain elements of their life experiences be made public. The sharing of this particular phase with the participants was a crucial aspect of the whole project. However, the usual ethical concerns that come with making the personal public, along with the aesthetic needs necessitated by the theatricality of the project itself, made the editing process a tricky one to negotiate.

The editing procedure was primarily built on an awareness by the participants themselves of the implications of certain stories being made public and that they would be retelling them. Some participants asked that their testimony be transformed into scripts that included headings and stage directions. One participant, Bidy, who was an occasional performer in local amateur dramatic productions, said this was because she wanted to approach the performance like she would do if she were “playing a character in a play” whereas Eugene (whose performance is discussed in more detail later) was concerned that he might “forget his lines.” The shaping of testimonies demonstrated participants’ awareness that, for them, *Shandon Park* was a play, and a script would make them feel “safe” within the performance. For Bidy, it also illustrated her need to protect herself in terms of how much of her “self” she would reveal if she just spoke to the audience without a structured text — it also demonstrated her desire to give a “good performance.”

Rebecca Jones, in discussing the role of the oral historian, has pointed out that “[w]e must acknowledge that although we have a clear responsibility to the narrator and to preserving the meaning of their story, our sphere of responsibility also extends to clear communication to the intended audience.”¹⁶ This impetus resulted in a reordering of many participants’ stories around a key theme that I identified in each participant’s testimony for

example, Biddy's stories focused on motherhood, while Mark's recalled his childhood experiences. Reconciling issues of artistic value and ownership in the performance of memory was further complicated by my role within the whole process as a past and, for the purposes of the project, a present resident in the estate. My situation within the project as both an insider and outsider could not help but channel and challenge my own past as I recalled my own experiential memories of the place in all my discussions with the participants. The process of making *Shandon Park* constantly revealed my own emotional attachment to the place where I grew up and often discussions during this part of the process called up my own identification with and relationship to the past of Shandon Park. These connections were most obviously realized in the staging of Eugene's narrative which is discussed later in this article.

Shandon Park explored how the ownership of lived experience could exist within an effective dramatic structure. Overlaid with an ethics of practice that was both "reciprocal and responsive,"¹⁷ I had to ensure that I would allow people to speak for themselves while also finding a way to develop and present an interpretation of their lives that would allow others to relate to it. The job of any artist in such work is to formulate aesthetic strategies that combine the work's content with a sensory impact. The obligation to re-create a representation of the "reality" of the people and their stories and the use of artistic techniques in interpreting that reality for an audience was one I confronted with all the narrators in regard to the staging of their performances. However, two participants made changes within the performance itself that may have altered the aesthetic qualities of performances that had been shaped and rehearsed, but which differently demonstrated how issues of ownership affected, or were affected by, the theatrical framework. Eugene, who had lived at number 23 since the estate was built in 1970, made changes to his stories throughout his performance. This had repercussions for the delivery of his narrative which veered away from the "script" that Eugene had constructed and timed meaning that he often "lost his place" in the stories he was telling. Also, Rosie, the oldest participant at eighty-three, whose story was being narrated by another resident performer, Cara, made a significant staging decision at the start of the performance of her narrative which placed her "on stage" with Cara. This act may have altered the aesthetic presentation of Rosie's story but it demonstrated Rosie's ownership over the process of bringing her story into the

public domain and her management of how the audience would see her which was that they *would* see her.

Eugene

Eugene, a widowed father of seven, had lived in number 23 since the estate was built and he moved in with his wife and new-born daughter. Well-known in Omagh as a DJ and for his involvement in several community events held in the town throughout the 1980s, Eugene's testimony involved memories of his deceased wife and his relationship to his children, many of whom still lived in and around the estate. During his interview, Eugene told me "you can use this as much as you want"¹⁸ and during the editing process we worked together in ordering and shaping his "script." The main editing tool used in Eugene's narrative came directly from his identification with specific songs to certain times in his life, and my own remembrance of him holding spontaneous outdoor discos in the area behind his house during the summer evenings for the children of the estate. Placing his record player and portable amp on the kitchen table that he moved out into his back yard, I had fond memories of dancing with my friends at these events, and this remembrance represented an articulation of the spirit of the place as I remembered it. Eugene's involvement in the project presented an opportunity to explore the history of a life that had an impact on my own, and presented the prospect of the re-presentation of my own past.

The editing process produced much discussion over what stories Eugene would retell in the public arena. Our past history as neighbors and developing relationship in the present through the project, meant that at certain times his candid ways prompted me to consider the ethical implications of retelling certain stories about his marriage. My concern centered around the fact that Eugene's testimony would be performed in the most public manner, complete with microphone and PA system, and in this way—with none of the intimacy of the other narrative performances—his stories would be in a fuller public glare, and that in turn would have implications for his family. Several stories about his wife were checked with his still-grieving children, and Eugene's daughter asked her father not to recall one particular story in public. In the end, the negotiated editing process with Eugene forced me to face up to a genuine responsibility that I had: to remove material that may

have been fascinating and relevant to my project, but which may have damaged the narrator. The need to protect the well-being of my participants became a primary concern.

Eugene and I worked together on shaping his stories to fit around records that he would play during the performance. His was the longest narrative that would be performed, and he requested that chairs be provided for the audience—these were supplied by the local community center (when he had held a disco in the past, people stood, sat on the ground or on chairs that they brought from their own houses). These staging decisions appealed to Eugene’s sense of the theatrical, but his creative decision to make himself a “set” had repercussions for him, as his confrontation with a seated audience became much more daunting within the reality of the performance. At certain points in his narration, Eugene veered from the script that we had jointly constructed in order to elaborate on details for members of his audience, while other sections of stories he left out altogether, creating a new text in a spontaneous response to the audience and in the moment. This was most notable when he spotted people he knew and embellished the story he was telling with extra details or even recalled another remembered event that he knew would be shared by a particular spectator. This resulted in Eugene “forgetting his lines” at various points and his subsequent addition of other records.

“I forgot my lines ... wait. I’m just going to let this play ‘til I get myself together.”¹⁹

Eugene’s changes were due in some part to nerves but there were slippages in his performance which seemed to occur because of the huge level of layering and remembering that had occurred in his efforts to construct a performance out of his own life story. Eugene’s participation in *Shandon Park* allowed him to revive a role he played in the estate in the past, using his DJ persona as a device to perform his memories, as well as re-establishing a past identity in the present. The “dressing” of his set, including the demarcation of his own stage area for his performance (with a gazebo that in effect became his stage), demonstrated Eugene’s own transformation of his everyday ritual into a theatrical event, illustrating what Eric Booth has termed “the everyday work of art,”²⁰ but overall, the aesthetic choices he made overwhelmed his performance and resulted in the omission of some details in the stories that he wanted to tell.

However, one of the most powerful moments of Eugene’s performance came when he removed a story altogether just before the moment of its retelling. The story was about

the day of the bomb in Omagh, and his description of travelling to the hospital to find his daughter who had been injured.²¹ This was a story which he had recounted to me in his interview and he wanted to narrate it over the playing of a particular record, *Broken Things*, a song that was performed by local singer, Juliet Turner, during the memorial service held in Omagh the week after the bomb. Over the years, this particular song has always evoked memories of the days following the bomb in the town, not just in Omagh but throughout Northern Ireland.²² Eugene's telling had been rehearsed to time with the song, but in the middle of the live performance, while he introduced the story by naming it "The Day of the Omagh Bomb," he cut the story short, sat down, and then remained silent throughout the rest of the music. The recollection of that event within the shared experience of the assembled crowd was transmitted through Eugene's silence and his obvious emotion. Alessandro Portelli has pointed out that it is often the silences and omissions in stories that are the most revealing, stating that "[t]he most precious information may lie in what the informants *hide* and in the fact they *do* hide it rather than in what they *tell*."²³ Eugene's in-the-moment decision to change how he communicated this particular story—his decision *not* to speak—was a powerful moment in the whole event. It represented the conflict between experience and the here and now of performance, and represented that—just as people had control over what they said—they also decided on what not to say.

Rosie

The presentation of Rosie's testimony within *Shandon Park* differed from others, in that she was the only resident who would not speak her own story. Rosie was the oldest resident involved in the project, and hers was significant in that she had actually lived on the site of Shandon Park during the 1960s before the estate was even built, as she told me in our first interview: "I was out here when there was no houses at all. I was the first here." Rosie recounted her life experience through times of great poverty when a housing crisis in Omagh meant that many people were living in substandard accommodation. Her testimony was therefore not only a recollection of her own personal experience, but a representation of society that led to the establishments of estates such as Shandon Park. Rosie spoke at length about her unhappy marriage, the births (and deaths) of her children and the various houses that she had lived in over the years, but she indicated from the start

that—while she wanted her story to be told—she did not want to speak in front of an audience. The role would be taken on by a seventeen-year old neighbor, Cara who became involved in the process of converting Rosie’s story into a performed script from the start. The transformation of Rosie’s life story into a script for another performer consequently meant that the balance between creative and ethical concerns was more delicate, but it was a process that Rosie herself controlled. Her command over how her story would be related in the public domain was instigated from the outset of the editing process when, presented with the transcript of her interview with me, she told me, “I can’t read too well.” I asked Cara to read Rosie’s transcript for her, and this “listening” allowed Rosie to have a clear understanding of how her story would be heard within the performance. This set the tone for the whole editing process as regards to Rosie’s story, which became a completely oral procedure. At every stage of the editing and rehearsal period, Rosie had a say in how her stories would be retold in performance, and at every listening, she chipped away some of the details that she had included.

Ethical concerns about the content of the final script that Cara would perform were raised by Rosie herself, based on the amount of detail about the hardship she had suffered in her life. She had included some of this in her recounting, and creative decisions were taken based on her certainty about the identity of the “self” that she wanted to be portrayed to the audience, which was that of a *survivor*. Rosie’s story also had to be shaped, and the restructuring of Rosie’s script, at times, was about making it easier for Cara to learn the lines, and providing her with some theatrical scaffolding as support. Rosie’s life experiences were placed into chronological order, and other additions were made based on Cara’s questions to Rosie for clarification throughout the rehearsal process.

I made the decision to begin the performance of *Shandon Park* with Rosie’s story performed in her back garden, in order to allow the piece to begin with a personal history of the area before the park was even built, as well as establish Rosie’s place in the history of Shandon Park. However, on the day of the performance, Rosie confirmed her ownership of that place by making a last-minute staging decision which demonstrated her decision to control how she would be viewed by an audience.

The performance was to begin with a recording of a section of the interview I had conducted with Rosie. I wanted to do this in order to contextualize the oral history interview

as a source, but also to ensure that Rosie's voice was heard within the project. Rosie had brought a chair from her house, so that she could sit with the audience for the performance. Just before the audience assembled she asked if she might move it closer to the staging area so that she could have a better view. The stage directions for this part of the performance were that Cara and Rosie would come out of the house together during the recording. Cara would take her place at the washing line, in reference to the first time I met Rosie, and then Rosie would sit among the audience. However, I noticed just before the performance began that the position where Rosie had located her chair placed her firmly within the performance arena and therefore "on stage." While Cara played her part, Rosie took center stage in her garden. Rosie's physical presence, her acknowledgement of the assembled audience, and the shared glances with Cara throughout the monologue were powerful demonstrations of Rosie's consent, possession and consistent involvement in the presentation of her identity. The staging decision that Rosie manipulated on the day of performance facilitated the "cycle of reciprocity"²⁴ in action that permeated the project; but, more importantly, Rosie's act and the powerful position which she occupied both physically and emotionally within the performance reflected the ownership she claimed over her own story, and over the process of bringing it into the public domain.

Conclusion

The documentation of experiences of ordinary people who lived in a housing estate in Omagh dug deeper into the narrative of a place to present the identity of the place as "home"—an identity that had been written over by subsequent political narratives. In an engagement with notions of ownership, empowerment and artistic value, *Shandon Park* also investigated the relationship between the "actuality" of people and place, and the aesthetics of art. The methodology inherent in community theatre practice—where the performance would be communally created—also presented opportunities for participants to create their own material at every stage of the process, and this affected the balance between the artistic realization of the dramatic narrative and the negotiation of participant empowerment. From the beginning, the main focus of the project was on the concept of oral history as a performance-orientated narrative, and not a content-orientated text. I did not want to simply observe and record people, but empower them in the retelling of their

experience as a demonstration of how those who make history are also able to analyze and present it. The process allowed narrators to shape and present a sense of their selves, in what was both a social, artistic and political process. The stories told within this part of my research provided information that went beyond historical fact. In a multi-layered communicative process, the reality that each narrator revealed was one that could not be reflected appropriately within the transcript. By placing responsibility on the narrators themselves for how the narratives might be presented, *Shandon Park* provided an investigation into issues of ownership in the performance of memory. As a community project based on the performance of oral history narratives, it offered insights into how history from below and personal testimonies can complement the official history of a place, by commemorating an alternative past which celebrates the details of everyday life and the place as *home*.

The location of my research within a place which also held my own memories also confronted my role as artist-outsider and resident-insider in an engagement with notions of ownership, empowerment and artistic value in memorial practice. The reflection of my position within the whole process channeled and challenged my own past and, in effect, commemorated my own life story. The impetus for this work—Frisch’s concept of “shared authority”—did not just inform my methodology, but it also became part of the story of the overall project itself. The central contentions about place, memory and identity reinforced my own recollections of community and continuity that I remembered from when I had lived there over twenty years ago. While living in the estate as a present resident, I and my project became part of the community’s day-to-day life. This position certainly allowed me an access to the people and the place, but even though I was from Shandon Park, my work was, in effect, an intervention —not least because it was proposed by research purposes. Tom Barone and Elliot Eisner state that “[w]hen it comes to projects of social enquiry, the arts-based researcher may be simultaneously specialist *and* layperson, participant *and* onlooker.”²⁵ The complex layers of personal engagement in *Shandon Park* were evident on the part of both myself and the performers, and the work in both content and process connected with issues pertaining to their and my own identity in regard to the place as “home.” Just as my emotional memories of the place made me a part of its past, my physical presence within the estate made me and what I was doing part of its present story, and the

performance of it an illustration of “the arts-based researcher-as-her-own-audience.”²⁶ Throughout the project, I encouraged maximum ownership over the stories told and the process of telling them, but essentially the project presented a relationship between my own shared history of the past in Shandon Park with the facilitation of the stories of others.

Shandon Park recovered stories of an identification with place that official memory had effectively erased, and challenged the static form of historical representation of the built memorial with the presentation of *living* experience. In Omagh, where the public commemoration of the place has submerged the identity of the town in a publicly memorialized narrative, the performed document of oral history in the community performance of *Shandon Park* presented the stories that people wanted to tell about themselves and to others in their community. Staged in the place that acted as a prompt for these narratives, the performance of these memories, framed within the sphere of everyday life, explored another identity of Omagh—one that was owned by the people who live there.

¹ Also known as the Belfast Agreement, the GFA was signed on 10 April 1998 and incorporated plans for a Northern Ireland power-sharing assembly along with the establishment of cross-border links across the UK and the Irish Republic. The agreement also included plans for decommissioning, the future reform of the police force and prisoner release initiatives. After referenda were held in May 1998 the Agreement was endorsed by 71% of the electorate in Northern Ireland and 94% in the Republic of Ireland.

² The Real IRA, also known as Óglaith na hÉireann (Volunteers of Ireland), was formed in 1997 following a split from the Provisional IRA over disagreements on the IRA’s ceasefire status. Vehemently against the terms of the Good Friday Agreement and refusing to take part in the peace process, the organisation holds fast to the idea of bringing about a united Ireland through a forceful ending of British sovereignty in the North. An illegal organisation in the Republic of Ireland, the group is considered a terrorist organisation in the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

³ Doreen Massey, “Places and Their Past,” *History Workshop Journal* 39, (1995) :186.

⁴ David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1993), 10.

⁵ Ibid., *Anomalous States*, 10.

⁶ The most influential local organisation engaged in storytelling work is Healing Through Remembering (HTR) which was established in 2001 to promote the understanding that facing the past is a necessary aspect of future peace and

reconciliation. HTR is a cross community project with members drawn from a wide range of political backgrounds and the organisation consists of five sub-groups which concentrate on past-related themes including storytelling, truth recovery and commemoration.

- ⁷ Theater of Witness is a form of testimonial performance created by the American counsellor and director, Teya Sepinuck, which aims to give a voice to those who have been marginalized in society. Described by her as “a new vision of performance where art and social justice meet,” it is a theatrical model where ordinary people recount their own real-life stories on stage for audiences to bear witness to societal issues of suffering, in order to promote understanding and healing. With scripts crafted from participants’ interviews and the use of music, movement and film imagery, the format has been used to work with prisoners, refugees, immigrants and people living in poverty in the USA and Poland. In 2009, the concept was introduced in Northern Ireland by Sepinuck where she worked with those affected by the Troubles including ex-combatants and victims of the conflict.
- ⁸ Pierre Nora “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire,” trans. by Marc Roudebush *Representations* 26, (1989): 7.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Second Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 9.
- ¹¹ Amanda Stuart Fisher “The Playwright in Residence. A Community’s Storyteller,” *The Drama Review* 48 vol 3, (2004): 137.
- ¹² Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 3.
- ¹³ Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry* (London and New York: I.B. Taurus, 2010), 4.
- ¹⁴ This included a childhood tradition from my own time in the park, a jumble sale which was held on the doorstep of one of the houses located on the performance route. These sales were used to sell and swap unwanted toys and books with other children in the park. While I lived in the estate for the duration of the project, I witnessed some of the children holding such sales, and they re-enacted this within the body of the performance as a representation of a past memory as well as a present occurrence in Shandon Park. Another shared memory was displayed through the installation of a “dancing couple” who were viewed through a living room window of another house on the performance route. Due to the circumstances of parenthood and financial pressures experienced by many of the residents during the 1980s, people recalled their experiences of socialising with others within the estate. The “dancing couple” represented how, for many residents, their homes became the centre of all aspects of their lives; and they directly reflected particular shared memories of life in Shandon Park.
- ¹⁵ Before I moved into Shandon Park to begin my research, I approached the Residents’ Committee with a description of my project and a request for volunteers was

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- printed in the estate's monthly newsletter. However, most of the residents who agreed to take part in the initial interview process came from personal recommendations and introductions in the day-to-day business of the life of the estate. Only four of the participants stated within their interview that they would be willing to perform within the public arena and these became the narratives that were taken forward.
- ¹⁶ Rebecca Jones "Blended Voices: Crafting a Narrative from Oral History Interviews," *The Oral History Review* 31.1 (2004): 40.
- ¹⁷ Amanda Stuart Fisher, "The Playwright in Residence. A Community's Storyteller," *The Drama Review* 48 vol 3, (2004): 137.
- ¹⁸ Taken from interview.
- ¹⁹ Taken from the performance of *Shandon Park*.
- ²⁰ Eric Booth, *The Everyday Work of Art: Awakening the Extraordinary in Your Daily Life* (Lincoln, NE: Sourcebooks, 1999).
- ²¹ The 15th August 1998, the day of the bombing in Omagh was also the last day of an annual summer carnival in the town. This was to be marked by a parade of floats through the main street representing various areas and businesses in the town. Shandon Park's float was participating in this celebration and Eugene, along with other residents and their children were travelling on it into the town when they were turned back by distressed people leaving the town centre and the site of the bomb. Eugene's vivid memories of this would have been shared by many residents in the estate.
- ²² *Broken Things* was written and originally performed by American singer-songwriter, Julie Miller. It was performed by local singer, Juliet Turner who was asked to perform as part of the memorial service that was held in Omagh the week after the bomb—a ceremony that was televised and internationally broadcast. The song, for many people, would be associated with the town and its events. Although Turner never released it as a single, she recorded it for a special benefit album, *Across The Bridge of Hope* which included local artists and choirs and was released to raise money for the Omagh fund that had been set up in the wake of the bombing.
- ²³ Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State of University of New York Press, 1991), 53.
- ²⁴ Della Pollock, "Telling the Told: Performing 'Like A Family' .," *The Oral History Review* 12, (1990): 15.
- ²⁵ Tom Barone and Elliot W. Eisner eds., *Arts Based Research* (Thousand Oaks CA and London, 2012), 65.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.