

How *Aisteach* was born

Part transcript of interview recorded in 2018 at the Sonic Acts Academy, Amsterdam

Full interview available online here:

<https://www.somersetshouse.org.uk/blog/aisteach-historical-documents-irish-avant-garde-jennifer-walshe> Full interview 21.24 minutes. Transcription from 03.40 – 07.15

I started doing a lot of projects from 2007 on where I had this huge collective of alter-egos that were all members of a sound-art collective called *Grúpat*. I really enjoyed the space that that opened up and the way you could play because it wasn't about fooling people, that wasn't the purpose. The whole purpose was to open up this imaginative space where this could have happened and for me creatively it was also to allow myself to try and think in these different ways, to try and put myself into different positions and make work that way.

At the end of the commissioning period for this *Grúpat* project, I sort of thought I'm done with that now. But one thing that kept coming back to me was these historical ideas, because all my alter egos had been alive, they were all born within 5 years of my birth year. And so I was starting to think 'but what about history?' and really trying to come to terms with my history as an Irish person at a point in time when the crash had happened and for my generation in particular it was a really confusing period because you grew up in a country where there was no immigration into the country and everybody was White Irish as they say on the UK census, 'White Irish' versus White. and you now the country's poor and everybody's immigrating and everybody's getting out and then all of a sudden, very rapidly, you have this period when the country starts to make money and not only does unemployment start to decrease, it decreases to the point where people start to move to Ireland for work which was the first that ever happened in the history of the country, people started going back home, people who'd emigrated started going back home but also trying to rethink what it means to go back home when the country has completely shifted, you get a lot of immigration into the country so the social make up of the country shifts within a 10 year period – unbelievable rapidly. And that was, for a lot of Irish people, very strange. You have to think its one thing to say we're a very leftist country who support all nations, that's one thing to say when it's a country and made up of white people but all of a sudden when that's largely monocultural and made up of white people but all of a sudden when all these people start moving in how do you reposition or think where you are in space.

It was a change that would normally happen in 50 years, happening in 10. And at that point I'm looking back and I'm thinking well, it's all very well that we've got these sushi bars and people are drinking lattes and your seeing kids walking down the street with designer handbags which is something you never would have seen when I was growing up but how do we reckon with the past how do we look at what happened and try to move forward in a different way and looking Irish history and trying to see you know what was the experimental tradition. Of course, we have Flann O'Brien and Joyce and Beckett and of course they're very much held up but was there stuff going on in music? And as I started to poke around, I was realising no, there's no data in Ireland. Why wasn't there data? We don't have like a real Irish Fluxus movement. There would have been artists who would sort of done experimental things but not really large enough in a way that we would attach that to the broader Fluxus movement. And so that made me go back and do research to see are there things that I've missed - I have to be careful to make sure, what I was taught in school isn't necessarily the whole story - so you're trying to fill in these cracks that maybe were created by the educational system and sometimes you realise that there are no cracks to fill because things just didn't happen and so then you think what if I try and invoke a point of contact to a parallel universe where these things really did happen and that's how *Aisteach* was born.