In-person Symposium:
Bodies, Vulnerabilities, Empowerment

HOSTS: **Centre for Creative Ethnography** in collaboration with **Seamus Heaney Centre**

VENUE: Wolfson Lecture Theatre, Seamus Heaney Centre, Belfast

DATE: Friday, 6 March 2026
TIME: 9:00 am – 6:30 pm

LIMITED PLACES, to register please email Amanda Lubit (amanda.lubit@dcu.ie), with the subject heading AUDIENCE REGISTRATION - BODIES, VULNERABILITIES, EMPOWERMENT, and indicating your name, affiliation, and whether you wish to participate in the morning, the afternoon, or the whole day. The symposium is free.

The objective of this symposium is to employ creative ethnography, poetry, and other modes of artistic exploration to explore how inequalities related to intersectionalities of gender, sexuality, race, religion, class, age, and/or disability are

- embodied and experienced
- embedded in wider societal structures
- politicised and resisted

Programme

INTRODUCTION

9:00-9:10	Maruška Svašek, Amanda Lubit, Milena Williamson

SESSION 1

9:10-9:25	Talk #1 – Ving Fai Chan *Salt in the Eye: Animating Care, Harm, and Children's Embodied Knowledge in Rural Tanzania*
9:25-9:40	Talk #2 – Joel Grimsley *What Remains Unseen: The Ethics and Process of a Collaborative Creative Ethnography*
9:40-9:55	Talk #3 – Alexandra Morris *Metamorphosis: Tutankhamun and Disability in Ancient Egypt*
9:55-10:05	Discussion

KEYNOTE #1

10:05-10:55	Bebe Ashley *Harbour Doubts: Bodies, Vulnerabilities and Empowerment* (40 min talk, 10 min discussion)

10:55-11:10	Break

SESSION 2

11:10-11:25	Talk #4 – Megan Blinn *"When I became a mother": Kachin women's experiences of pregnancy in conflict*
11:25-11:40	Talk #5 – Sara Conti

	Bodies in Suspension: Waiting, Vulnerability and Digital Presence in an Asylum Seeker's Life
11:40-11:55	Talk #6 – Amanda Lubit *Online fiber communities as sites of bodily transformation and expression*
11:55-12:10	Talk #7 – Petra Honkysova *Bridge: Leaping over the airy gap*
12:10-12:25	Discussion
12:25-1:00	Lunch

SESSION 3

1:00-1:15	Talk #8 – John D'Arcy *Mind Blown: Exploring experiences of Acquired Brain Injury in the collaborative music project 'It Flows with No Electrics'*
1:15-1:30	Talk #9 – Becky Higgins *Using creative, collaborative autoethnography with intimate others to re-contextualise the experience of coma unconsciousness outside of the hospital*
1:30-1:45	Talk #10 – Mhairi Claire *Bodies We Keep: Gender, Memory, and the Visual Politics of Aging*
1:45-1:55	Discussion

SESSION 4

1:55-2:10	Talk #11 – Milena Williamson *'My supposed body': the body in the Old English metrical charms, translated and remixed*
2:10-2:25	Talk #12 – Nat Jobbins & Hannah Bevan-Woolley *For a method of collaging (Disability politics in west Belfast)*
2:25-2:40	Talk #13 – Fiona Magowan *Musical Empowerment, Multiple Selves and Wellbeing in an Australian Choir of People with Disabilities*
2:40-2:50	Discussion
2:50-3:00	Break

SESSION 5

3:00-3:15	Talk #14 - Rina Schiller *Special Craft Gifts for Vulnerable Children in Need*
3:15-3:30	Talk #15 – Sophia Obermeyer *Performative Talk/ Querfeminist Philosophy, Contemporary Cance, Crip Theory*
3:30-3:45	Talk #16 – Anna Hollis *Caring Too Much, Caring Wrong: Dehumanisation, Anthropomorphism, and Discomforts of Ethnography*
3:45-3:55	Discussion

KEYNOTE #2

3:55-4:45	Karen Nakamura *My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together: Disabled humans and superhuman AI in the twenty-first century* (40 min talk, 10 min discussion)

4:45-4:55	Break

SESSION 6

4:55-5:10	Talk #17 – Linda McKenna '*Absolute want and utter despair*', the body and the community: writing women's experiences of the 1798 Rebellion.
5:10-5:25	Talk #18 - Maruška Svašek *Two Songs: Vision, Relational Ability and Empowerment*
5:25-5:40	Talk #19 – Kristina Jacobsen (Music) *Together at the Table: Crafting Cultural Curiosity & Connection Through Songs and Food*
5:40-5:5.50	Discussion
5:50-6:30	Drinks

Abstracts and Bios

Keynote Speakers:

Keynote 1: Bebe Ashley

Harbour Doubts: Bodies, Vulnerabilities and Empowerment

Primarily focusing on Bebe Ashley's latest poetry collection *Harbour Doubts*, this keynote will feature poems which chart a desire, and ultimate failure, to become a sign language interpreter. *Harbour Doubts* is a collection that tangles with the burning desire to communicate in the isolation of a late capitalist, post-pandemic world where the world feels bigger than the speaker can handle. It's also a love letter to the delights of linguistics and language, a three-dimensional exploration of words and the body. This presentation will also be used as an opportunity to demonstrate work in which access for multiple types of bodies is advocated for at the genesis of work, including poetry films with audio description and 3D-printed Braille poems.

Bebe Ashley lives in Northern Ireland. Her debut collection *Gold Light Shining* (Banshee Press) was selected for Read Mór in 2022. In 2023, Bebe received the Ivan Juritz Prize for Creative Experiment (Text) for work which was later published in her second poetry collection *Harbour Doubts*. In 2024, Bebe received a Creative Practitioner Bursary from Belfast City Council, and in 2025, received the British Council Fellowship for Bundanon, Australia. www.bebe-ashley.com

Keynote 2: Karen Nakamura

My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together: Disabled humans and superhuman AI in the twenty-first century

The title of this work draws from a quote from Desmond Tutu, but rather than envisioning a joint humanity, this piece looks at the future-now humanity in which the division between disabled people and artificial intelligences is being blurred. On one side we have AI protheses helping and/or coercing humans be more human, and on the other digital fleshsuits to help AI blend in amongst us. In Japan, robots powered not by AI but by disabled "pilots" serve customers in a café. Autistic children are learning from AI robots how to maintain eye gaze in order to appear more normal. AI are learning from human artists how to paint hands and evade detection as AI artists. More than 51% of the traffic on the internet is now AI driven – now that humans are the minority, what becomes of the human-non-human divide and what paths forward can disabled people show us.

Karen Nakamura is a disabled cultural and visual anthropologist at the University of California Berkeley, and Director of the Berkeley Disability Lab. Her first book was titled *Deaf in Japan: Signing and the Politics of Identity* (2006). Her next project resulted in two ethnographic films and a monograph titled, *A Disability of the Soul: An Ethnography of Schizophrenia and Mental Illness in Contemporary Japan* (2014). While finishing a book on the intersections of transsexuality and disability politics in postwar Japan, Nakamura is currently collaborating on research involving the impact of artificial intelligence / machine learning (AI/ML) on disability communities.

Papers/Performances

Megan Blinn - *"When I became a mother": Kachin women's experiences of pregnancy in conflict*

This presentation developed from a qualitative exploration of women's experiences of pregnancy during conflict in Myanmar conducted in 2023-2024. Restrictions on travel and ethical considerations prevented in-person interaction between the researcher and participants but enabled women to share their narratives with 'insider' interviewers before translation to English. Systematic text condensation, which includes the creation of a synthetic, syncretic narrative, was used as part of the analysis process for the English translations. These researcher-created narratives inform but are not presented in the final, academic communication of findings. However, this part of the analysis process amplified the participants' profound experiences the individual in a group, of vulnerability and empowerment. Health and ability are situated within wider social structures that may protect, ignore or exploit the individual in precarious situations.

The presentation consists of two parts. First, a brief background to the context of the research is described. Second, three pieces of writing, generated in response to the systematic text condensation and incorporating participant quotes, introduce the listener to women whose individual embodied, experiences during conflict illuminate the vulnerabilities and possibilities for physical and mental health.

Megan Blinn is a PhD student in Ulster University and a registered nurse supporting people with longterm and palliative conditions in their own homes. My academic life began with a BA in English and Medieval Studies at Seattle University. A "gap year" of living with adults with learning disabilities became a decade of support work with humans of varying ages and abilities. My current health research and nursing practice acknowledge the importance of context, personal narratives and community in supporting people and families.

Ving Fai Chan - *Salt in the Eye: Animating Care, Harm, and Children's Embodied Knowledge in Rural Tanzania*

This presentation screens a short animation developed through the African Creativity for Eyesight (ACE) project, using creative ethnography to examine how children's bodies become sites of both harm and resistance within everyday eye-care practices in rural Tanzania. The animation centres on a familiar but dangerous practice: the use of salt in children's eyes to treat redness or infection. Through a simple narrative, a young girl:

having previously accessed formal eye care, advises a mother that salt will not heal her child's eye, challenging intergenerational authority and entrenched beliefs.

The animation foregrounds embodiment and vulnerability by showing how care, pain, and responsibility are enacted on children's bodies, often in contexts of limited access to biomedical services and deeply held cultural knowledge. Rather than portraying adults as negligent, the work situates harmful practices within wider structures of poverty, distance to care, and historical mistrust, revealing how well-intentioned acts of care can produce injury. At the same time, the animation explores empowerment and transformation through the child's voice. The girl's embodied experience of treatment becomes a source of authority, enabling a reversal of knowledge flows from child to adult. This moment of resistance reframes children not as passive recipients of care, but as moral and pedagogical agents within their communities.

I will also reflect on the co-creation and validation of the animation, the presentation considers how creative practice renders collective experience visible while making the researcher-creator both vulnerable and accountable. The work argues that animation can function as a powerful ethnographic form, allowing audiences to encounter the politics of care, belief, and bodily harm in ways that are affective, relational, and deeply human.

Dr Ving Fai Chan is a Senior Lecturer in Global Eye Health at Queen's University Belfast and a clinically trained optometrist. His work sits at the intersection of public health, creative ethnography, and participatory arts. His research focuses on how children, women, and marginalised communities in low- and middle-income countries experience vision impairment, care, and exclusion in everyday life. He leads the *When the Arts Meet Health* initiative, including the African Creativity for Eyesight (ACE) programme, which uses animation and storytelling to co-produce culturally grounded eye-health narratives with communities in Tanzania and beyond. His work explores empowerment through creative practice and the development of culturally acceptable eye-health education strategies in resource-limited settings.

Mhairi Claire - *Bodies We Keep: Gender, Memory, and the Visual Politics of Aging*

This contribution explores the intersection of gender, aging, and disability through a creative ethnographic video work made from family archive footage following my father's death. Using the video as a reflective artefact rather than a narrative account, the presentation examines how memory is shaped through visual media, and how certain bodies are preserved, edited, or rendered absent within family and cultural archives.

Drawing on feminist and disability-informed approaches, I consider how dementia and disability are understood through gendered expectations of autonomy, rationality, and independence, particularly in relation to masculinity. These expectations shape not only lived experiences of care and dependency, but also how aging and disabled bodies are remembered and represented. The presentation further reflects on the aesthetics of grief, approaching creative practice as an ethical process involving restraint, distance, and care, rather than emotional exposure or spectacle.

The contribution takes the form of a reflective presentation followed by a short video screening. In doing so, it considers creative practice as a site of both vulnerability and empowerment, and as a means of resisting the quiet erasure of ageing and disabled bodies from cultural memory.

Mhairi Claire is a 1st year PhD researcher in International Studies, focusing on feminist peace studies, exploring how lived experiences of conflict, vulnerability, and everyday life are examined through creative and artistic practices. My research focuses on gendered experiences of conflict and post-conflict contexts, with particular attention to memory, embodiment, and care. Using feminist and participatory methodologies, I examine how art, visual media, and creative practice can help us imagine conflict differently, opening space for reflection, dialogue, and transformation beyond dominant political narratives.

Sara Conti - *Bodies in Suspension: Waiting, Vulnerability and Digital Presence in an Asylum Seeker's Life*

This contribution emerges from a long-standing WhatsApp chat with Amber (pseudonym), a Filipina woman who spent six years in Hong Kong as an asylum seeker. What began as an everyday exchange gradually became an ethnographic site through which vulnerability, waiting, and embodiment could be observed in real time and over the long durée. Amber's body is caught in suspension: legally present yet socially immobilised, unable to work, constantly exposed to the uncertainty of revocation. Waiting is not an abstract temporal condition but an embodied one, inscribed in fatigue, fear, repetition, and silence. Vulnerability here is not a personal trait but a structurally produced and gendered condition, lived through the management of time, space, and bodily inactivity. At the same time, the digital space of the chat allows for forms of presence and agency that complicate dominant understandings of empowerment. Through brief messages, prolonged silences, expressions of faith, and affective exchanges, Amber sustains herself relationally and narratively. Empowerment appears not as resistance or rupture, but as endurance, care, and the capacity to remain in relation. Methodologically, the paper reflects on the ethical and analytical implications of treating a longterm chat as ethnographic material, foregrounding co-presence,

asymmetry, and delayed interpretation. The contribution combines storytelling and analysis to engage the symposium's focus on bodies, vulnerabilities, and empowerment as lived, relational processes.

Sara Conti holds an MA in Education Sciences from the University of Verona, with a master's thesis in anthropology that combined reflexive approaches with ethnographic research on guanxi practices and the role of gender in shaping everyday relational dynamics. I later obtained a degree in Anthropology from EHESS, with a master's thesis on urban resocialisation through migrant networks in a neighbourhood of Verona. I spent two years in China at Henan University studying Chinese language and conducting ethnographic research on the Catholic Church in Kaifeng. I am currently completing an MA in Chinese Language and Culture at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, with an anthropological thesis on Filipina domestic workers and asylum seekers in Hong Kong, and the transnational activation of care and labour from the Philippines.

John D'Arcy - *Mind Blown: Exploring experiences of Acquired Brain Injury in the collaborative music project 'It Flows with No Electrics'*

'It Flows with No Electrics' is a musical composition and performance project created by artists participants of the Belfast-based disability charity Brain Injury Matters in collaboration with artist researchers based at the Sonic Arts Research Centre, Queen's University Belfast. This talk shares insights from the collaborative process of interviews, poetic and narrative writing, drawing graphic scores and musical improvisation. The talk also shares examples of the resulting 8 songs and two live concerts involving 10 live performers with acquired brain injury using voice and electronic instruments.

John D'Arcy is an artist-researcher based at the Sonic Arts Research Centre at Queen's University Belfast. John directs vocal ensemble HIVE Choir and curates sound art events and exhibitions at Sonorities Festival Belfast. He is a board member of Digital Arts Studios Belfast, the Belfast Region Music Board and was a member of the Steering Group for Belfast's successful bid for UNESCO City of Music status.

Joel Grimsley – *What Remains Unseen: The Ethics and Process of a Collaborative Creative Ethnography*

I offer to present the product and findings of a creative ethnography I conducted for my dissertation. This creative ethnography consisted of oil painting a still life that included an anonymised model/informant alongside a series of symbolic objects over multiple sessions. While presenting the final product, I will discuss what was a collaborative embodied experience, where my informant was a co-creator. Embodied research,

especially a cooperative one, challenges ethnographers to acknowledge power dynamics in the process. Exploring the relationship between the model, myself, and the product/painting I will share my analysis of the effectiveness of my methodology, but also the ethical consideration of the vulnerability of being interpreted and physical representation in the case of anonymity. While a common feature in traditional ethnographic research, there is a dissonance with the collaborative process of creating a partial, anonymous portrait. The model's role as collaborator makes them more than just a subject, but their anonymity creates ethical implications of credit and acknowledgment. Pair this with the power dynamics between the model/informant and ethnographer/painter. I discuss the model and their stake in the co-creation, and how this challenges traditional assumptions of research which creative ethnographers are required to ask themselves.

Joel Grimsley. Heading into my final semester, I am a Single-honours Anthropology student. I have a history of studying art, and I am proficiently skilled with both oil painting but also digital mediums. I also enjoy studying art history in my free time. These interests and skills made me interested in creative ethnography, and allowed me to create high quality visual products, alongside exploring the heuristic and relational opportunities that creative ethnography allows.

Becky Higgins - *Using creative, collaborative autoethnography with intimate others to re-contextualise the experience of coma unconsciousness outside of the hospital*

"The silence after a felled tree has fallen", John Berger stated, "is like the silence immediately after a death. The same sense of culmination". But what happens if death is grazed against but never fully actualised? For individuals who have experienced periods of prolonged unconsciousness due to coma, this culmination, this resolution, often never comes. Being unable to recall a period of their own life is a source of ongoing trauma. The physical scars that remain on the body following the events that lead to or occur during coma unconsciousness often tell a story that the inhabitant wasn't witness to. This discussion will focus on my in-progress PhD project, in which myself and my father, who has lived experience of coma unconsciousness, will use a creative, collaborative autoethnographic methodological approach to question who is given power and trust in carving narratives of unconscious experiences.

Becky Higgins is a current PhD candidate at the University of Sheffield, in the early stages of conducting fieldwork. Her research interests sit at the intersections of health, illness, narrative, trust and power. She is an interdisciplinary scholar with an academic background in visual and studio arts (specifically sculpture), visual sociology, the medical humanities, and anthropology. She has presented at conferences including the International Association of Autoethnography and Narrative Inquiry forum and at the

London Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies. She has a background in social justice work and currently also conducts consultancy research for mental health policy changes.

Anna Hollis - *Caring Too Much, Caring Wrong: Dehumanisation, Anthropomorphism, and Discomforts of Ethnography*

Drawing on ethnographic material from my doctoral research on autistic experiences of relationality, care, and emerging AI-mediated companionship, this contribution examines dehumanisation not as the absence of care, but as a logic through which care is frequently enacted. As a researcher working in close relational proximity to autistic participants and communities, the piece adopts a reflexive, proximate ethnographic stance, examining how care is negotiated, and resisted, across everyday interactions, institutional encounters, and ethical frameworks.

Combining ethnographic prose with poetic fragments, I trace moments in my interlocutors lives in which care became risk-oriented, procedural, or depersonalising, particularly within clinical and technological contexts. It further explores anthropomorphism—especially toward non-human or digital systems—as an adaptive survival strategy in environments where human care is experienced as conditional or precarious. I also situate my understanding of these systems, growing from the precarity of understanding of companionship and what it means to feel 'seen'. Rather than speaking for all autistic experience, the piece foregrounds relational witnessing, ethical discomfort, and the precarity of a researcher that is as both implicated and protected within these systems.

Anna Hollis is a 3rd year interdisciplinary PhD student at Queen's University Belfast based across Pyschology and Anthropology. Her research explores how autistic adults engage with chatbot companions, drawing on both ethnographic and psychological perspectives to examine the role of these technologies in experiences of loneliness and selfhood. From an ethnographic standpoint, she foregrounds the lived experiences of autistic individuals (both those who use digital companions and those who do not) to understand how normative social expectations can influence being drawn to technological companions. These accounts reveal the nuanced ways in which users are shaped by the relational dynamics in facets of their lives, including with chatbots - often negotiating feelings of connection, safety, and autonomy in contexts where human relationships may feel overwhelming or too demanding.

Petra Honkysova - *Bridge: Leaping over the airy gap*

After lifechanging surgery in 2023 while in my early forties, I started to write a story about my personal experience of going through a hysterectomy and medically induced menopause. The title *Bridge: Leaping over the airy gap,* came to me six months before I was able to put anything in writing. My story describes encounters with different medical procedures from diagnosis to surgery, rehabilitation, and leaving my employment, all of which had a mental, physical, and emotional impact on me. I write very openly about the trauma of this procedure, the sense of loss, accepting change, and reconnecting with sensuality and sexuality while battling hormonal imbalance. I reveal the means of support I received, was denied, and found within me. Given that menopause is right up the front of public debates, the book fulfils the need for enlightenment and further revelation of what it means to lose female reproductive organs and go straight into menopause in a process of premature aging. It exposes the gap in the women's health education, the care system, and criticised employer's unsuitable internal policies. The essence of the story is that eventually, I found the new 'Me' in my new body, and managed to create conditions that sooth, embrace and connect with life's core. I will be reading a section from my book.

Petra Honkysova has lived in Northern Ireland for over 22 years and identifies as 'Chirish' – Czech and (Northern) Irish. I arrived as an au-pair, then worked and studied at QUB Social Anthropology to Masters level. My employment has mainly been in the Heritage & Tourism, Hospitality sector. Five years before the life-changing surgery, I entered the corporate world, which I subsequently left, returning to employment and activities that are joyful and meaningful to me. Currently, I work for the local council as a Visitor Information Advisor, while being self-employed as a Reflexologist.

Kristina Jacobsen - *Together at the Table: Crafting Cultural Curiosity & Connection Through Songs and Food*

In this presentation, I perform songs from my new creative-ethnographic project, a touring dinner-concert series fusing original songs, food, and community building. Together at the Table is both an artistic creation and a work of ethnographic research: a performance cycle of six original songs inspired by cultural encounters with food, each paired with a multi-course meal designed to accompany and amplify the stories embedded in the music. Each performance concludes with the audience, the chef, and the performers sharing the meal together, transforming the concert into a secular communion—an embodied, multisensory act of cultural connection and repair. Food and song become portals for curiosity and dialogue, inviting audiences to taste, listen, and remember together. As a form of public anthropology, it demonstrates how art can foster interdependence, healing and belonging through commensality—literally "sharing the table." The project rests on a simple yet profound premise: that eating and singing

together can restore the social fabric of our times, one table, one song, and one story at a time. In Belfast, I will perform two songs from the cycle, elaborating on both the vulnerable and empowering aspects of choosing to lead with my artistic self in specifically academic spaces.

Kristina Jacobsen is a singer, songwriter, and cultural anthropologist currently based in Helsinki, Finland. A CORE Fellow at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, she is also Associate Professor of Anthropology and Songwriting at the University of New Mexico. A former Fulbright Scholar to Sardinia (2019–2020), her recent books include *Sing Me Back Home: Ethnographic Songwriting and Sardinian Language Politics* (UTP 2024; NeoClassica 2025) and *The Creative Ethnographer's Notebook* (Routledge 2024), coedited with Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor. A touring musician, she leads international songwriting retreats through *Sing Me Back Home Songwriting*, integrating arts-based practice with ethnographic research and teaching.

Nat Jobbins & Hannah Bevan-Woolley - *For a method of collaging (Disability politics in west Belfast)*

Scholarly languages of fragmentation and contradiction are tracing human experiences of living in a frighteningly polarised world. How people hold together unbearable contradictions, patching together fragmented dimensions of life or senses of self, has been an ethnographic concern traversing swathes of anthropology. Yet ethnographic writing is still often bound by aesthetic and rationalist obligations to *make sense*, over-narrativising experiences that to our interlocutors feel truly irreconcilable. Lending them this coherence urges closer to a genre of totalising analysis that might fundamentally undo the truths of these experiences of fragmentation. Against this urge, I want to workshop a method of *collage* that allows more of the frayed analysis of fragmentation and contradiction to come through. Based on a year of fieldwork among Disabled and neurodivergent people in west Belfast, many of whom are queer and trans, I demonstrate how collage—of their journal writing, drawings, paintings, our correspondence, bureaucratic letters, voice-notes, and more traditional ethnographic vignettes—asks us to sit in more of the uncertainty and discomfort of trying to understand disability, or our disabled selves, beyond the narrow trappings of identity politics. By collaging together these forms of expression and exchange, I cannot help but ask totally different research questions.

Nat Jobbins is in their final year of a PhD in Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge, funded by an ESRC Doctoral Training Partnership and supervised by Yael Navaro. Their work asks what it feels like to be Disabled and neurodivergent within the neighbourhoods of west Belfast, in the context of a meshwork of housing, welfare and Troubles reparation bureaucracies that are particularly hostile to Disabled people. Their

life and bodymind have been steeped in disability for many years, and they particularly enjoy designing music education curricula for blind and minimally-speaking/non-speaking people, and running a blind music workshop.

Hannah Bevan-Woolley

Amanda Lubit – *Online fiber communities as sites of bodily transformation and expression*

This presentation will explore women's embodied experiences of online fiber communities, where members connect through their shared practice of yarn spinning, fiber preparation, dyeing, weaving, knitting, etc. I first discovered them after experiencing forced displacement and a subsequent period of severe illness and disability. These experiences dramatically altered my connection to and understanding of my own body, requiring a prolonged period of readjustment. Unable to socialise, leave my home, or even stand many days, I felt I had lost myself. With a background in other crafts, I chose to learn new fiber arts as a way to keep my brain and body active. Fiber preparation, dyeing and spinning is a transformative experience for both the fiber and the body. You manipulate textures and colors to produce yarns and fabric. You discover new sensations, ways of moving and forms of expression that reconnect the mind to the body.

Many of the women I encounter in these communities have similar stories of crisis bringing them to these fiber communities – e.g. mental health, disability. I will examine how these communities serve as an accessible site of healing, self-discovery, and connection with other women.

Amanda Lubit is an anthropologist and MSCA postdoctoral research fellow at Dublin City University and based out of Göttingen, Germany (the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity). My research focuses upon how women refugees and asylum seekers Northern Ireland experience and cope with various crises (e.g. housing, healthcare, racism). This work builds upon my previous research on migrant Muslim women in Northern Ireland, looking at visibility, belonging, embodiment, and movement. I published this ethnography open access with Berghahn in 2025 under the title *Life as a Migrant Muslim Woman in Sectarian Northern Ireland: an Exploration of Gender, Visibility, Movement and Placemaking.* I also have lifelong personal experience with various crafts, and became an avid fiber artist during a period of disability and trauma that began in 2021. I specialize in hand spinning and fiber dyeing alongside weaving, knitting and crochet.

Fiona Magowan - *Musical Empowerment, Multiple Selves and Wellbeing in an Australian Choir of People with Disabilities*

This paper analyses some social and emotional impacts of community singing and active participation in a choir of people with disabilities in Brisbane, Australia. I outline the history of the House of Soul band based in Brisbane before considering the effects of singing together, framing this process as one of an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991) performing for one another and then examine how the lyrics of the songs support various imaginaries. I argue that these imaginaries play into the formation of multiple possible selves, which support belief in singers' abilities not disabilities. This way of imagining the self brings past, present and future together and whilst constituting a separate element of becoming, it plays into the realisation of the present self. The past shapes possible selves through its mix of positive and negative influences, while the imagined state of the future self is fashioned in the projection of idealised hopes and fears. I propose that the specific form of participatory music making that is utilised with those with disabilities facilitates various imaginaries of possible selves which, in turn, improves senses of empowerment and well-being.

Professor Fiona Magowan is Professor of Anthropology and Fellow of the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute at Queen's University Belfast. She has published in three key areas on music, sound and the senses, the analysis of religion, conflict and music and sex and gender. She has conducted fieldwork in Aboriginal Australia, Brazil, Northern Ireland and Mozambique. Most recently, she has co-edited Sounding Conflict: From Resistance to Reconciliation (Bloomsbury Academic 2023) and co-authored/edited two books on sex and gender both with Hastings Donnan, the Anthropology of Sex (Berg 2010) and Transgressive Sex: Subversion and Control in Erotic Encounters (Berghahn 2009). Other work on music and gender includes the co-edited volume, Performing Gender, Place and Emotion: Global Perspectives (Rochester 2013), which was nominated for the Seminar for Ethnomusicology's Marcia Herndon prize. Her research further addresses music, religion and conflict, as in the co-edited volume Christianity, Conflict and Renewal in Australia and the Pacific (Brill 2016 with Carolyn Schwarz). Long-term fieldwork in Australia led to her authored book, Melodies of Mourning, (James Currey 2007) which was shortlisted for the 2008 Australian Stanner Award. She is a Member of the Royal Irish Academy and the Academy of Social Sciences.

Linda McKenna – '*Absolute want and utter despair', the body and the community: writing women's experiences of the 1798 Rebellion.*

I am working on my third collection of poetry which is inspired by women's voices which survive in archives relating to the 1798 rebellion. The archives are replete with the voices of ordinary women navigating their way through the most violent and traumatic period in early modern and modern Irish history. Sometimes fragmentary and partial, occasionally mediated by the words of men, their accounts testify to the violence and disruption experienced in County Down from 1796 onwards, the confusion and trauma following on from the battles of Saintfield and Ballynahinch, and the lasting economic, social and emotional impact of the rebellion on individuals, families and communities. The intention behind my poetry collection is to provide an imaginative response to this traumatic period as well as a poetic consideration of the universality of the themes of women facing violence, conflicting loyalties and civil disruption through the generations into today. I am also interested in looking at ideas around treason and petty treason and how 'divers kinds of treasons' can actually be a response to every-day violence and misogyny. I can offer a reading of some of these new poems with a commentary on the sources and voices which they respond to and interpret.

Linda McKenna has published two collections of poetry with Doire Press. Four Thousand Keys, was published in 2024. The title poem from my debut collection, In the Museum of Misremembered Things, (2020), won the 2020 An Post Irish Book Awards Poem of the Year. In 2018 I won the Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing in 2018 and the Red Line Festival Award. I have had poems published in a wide range of publications and have read in many venues and at literary festivals including in 2025 the Listowel Literary Festival and the Cork World Book Festival. I am a member of the poetry collective Femina Culpa with poets, Kelly Creighton, Milena Williamson and Emma McKervey, and we have read at a number of events including in the National Poetry Library in London

Alexandra Morris - *Metamorphosis: Tutankhamun and Disability in Ancient Egypt*

Tutankhamun is the most iconic and recognised pharaoh in ancient Egypt. He is known for the extreme beauty of his funerary goods and tomb by nearly everyone worldwide. He continues to remain largely misinterpreted in popular discourse. Additionally, his full embodiment as a disabled man has only begun to be recognised within the archaeological and Egyptological communities. Analysed with a new, groundbreaking, lens by a disabled Egyptologist, Tutankhamun becomes a vibrant man and ruler and not reduced to the "boy king" as he has traditionally been referenced in popular and historical discourse. Tutankhamun is only one example of this emerging field in ancient history and archaeology. Utilising this new lens, this presentation will also illuminate how disabled ancient Egyptians have been (mis)interpreted in Egyptological and

museological discourse, denying the public a more complete and richer understanding of ancient history.

Dr. Alexandra F. Morris is a disabled Egyptologist, and disability activist tying the past to the present. Her research is on disability in ancient Egypt, the Classical world, and creating inclusive museums. She is a Lecturer (Education) in Ancient History at Queen's University Belfast in Northern Ireland. Dr. Morris is a Co-Founder of the UK Disability History and Heritage Hub, President of the Museum Education Roundtable, Co-President of CripAntiquity, serves on the Editorial Board for Asterion Hub, and is a leadership member of the Disabled Action Research Kollective (D.A.R.K.). She has cerebral palsy and dyspraxia.

Sophia Obermeyer - *Performative Talk/Querfeminist Philosophy, Contemporary Dance, Crip Theory*

This contribution investigates verticality as a cultural, philosophical, and bodily norm, approached through lived experience and practice-based research. Drawing on crip theory, phenomenology, and Adriana Cavarero's concept of inclination, I examine how uprightness has been historically produced as an ideal of autonomy, balance, and rectitude, while bodily deviation, vulnerability and dependency are framed as conditions in need of correction. The presentation is grounded in a first-person perspective as a philosopher and dancer with a history of scoliosis treatment according to the Katharina Schroth method. This therapeutic practice—structured around breathing techniques, mirrors, wooden sticks, and alignment exercises developed in Germany in the 1930ies—functions as a concrete site where verticality is taught, visualized, and enforced as both a medical and moral imperative. Rather than treating this experience as autobiographical anecdote, I mobilize it as embodied access to the cultural techniques through which uprightness is normalized and stabilized. Through performative elements and choreographic demonstration, verticality is critically "cripped" by foregrounding inclination, imbalance, and interdependency. In dialogue with Cavarero's rethinking of inclination as a counter-image to the sovereign upright subject, these embodied interventions explore alternative orientations that resist ideals of self-sufficiency and straightness. By combining cultural analysis with lived bodily practice, this contribution proposes performative research as a method for reorienting dominant histories of verticality and for articulating alternative modes of embodied knowing.

Sophia Obermeyer - (she/her) is a dancer and philosopher based between Berlin and Bergen, Norway. She is currently completing a PhD at the Graduiertenkolleg Normativity, Critique, Change, where her research explores cripping verticality through

dance, philosophy, and practice-based inquiry. Supervised by Claire Cunningham, Alva Noë, and Kirsten Maar, her work bridges critical theory and embodied research. Alongside her academic work, she is active as a dancer and choreographer, developing collaborative projects with schools, interdisciplinary artists, and mixed-ability constellations of disabled and non-disabled dancers. Her practice is driven by questions of orientation, support, and alternative ways of moving and knowing through the body.

Rina Schiller - *Special Craft Gifts for Vulnerable Children in Need*

During the 1970s to 1990s Belfast has seen its fair share of the 'Troubles'. Especially affected were poor working-class areas, and children in those areas suffered considerably. In recent times they have been described as 'a generation of children robbed of their childhood'.

In the 1980s I made the acquaintance of a priest from one of these most deprived areas. He had chosen to live among his parishioners, to help them in whatever way he could, and to empower them to help themselves. I was mightily impressed by his compassionate example, which inspired me to contribute my own share. From then on, every autumn I gave a few weeks of my time to construct a special, unique hand-crafted project to be given to children/families mostly affected by the disturbing politics of this time.

In this presentation I want to show you pictures of some of these unique craft projects that were given out anonymously by my priest friend and his assistants at Christmas every year to those children that were most in need in their parish. The project shows how with creativity and personal initiative any of us can bring a little light into dark times.

Rina Schiller is an ethnomusicologist and musician. Since the late 1960s, she has performed folk music, on her own and with various folk groups. She studied Ethnomusicology at Queen's University Belfast (BA 1994, MA 1995, PhD 2005), and since the 1990s she has carried out research about various aspects of traditional Irish music, including its European dimension. Over many years she has participated in Belfast community sessions of this genre. In the 1990s and 2000s she has worked as a Teaching Assistant with a group of disabled people visiting QUB to play Gamelan music. In the 2010s she taught students ensembles at QUB Ethnomusicology to play Turkish folk music on original instruments. In the 2020s she got into a research project with a colleague, Hans Marquardt, to reconstruct the history of the famous, legendary 1960s to 1990s Berlin folk club Go-In, for assembling a website with information about all its artists (https://www.go-in-berlin.com). At present she is employed as Honorary lecturer and researcher in Anthropology and Ethnomusicology at Queen's University Belfast.

Her relevant publications include *The Lambeg and the Bodhrán* (2001), *The Elusive Celt* (2022), and *Rejects for Enjoyment* (2024).

Maruška Svašek – *Two Songs: Vision, Relational Ability and Empowerment*

This contribution introduces two songs developed through collaborative projects centered on visual impairment. The first song, composed by Taraab musician Professor Mohamed Ilyas, emerged from an educational health initiative that employed ethnographic and arts-based approaches to challenge stigmas surrounding eye care in Zanzibar. Incorporated into the documentary film Waathitika Wa Maradhi Ya Macho (Those Affected by Eye Diseases), it encouraged Zanzibarians to engage more attentively with issues of eye health.

The second project involved a collaboration between Royal National Institute of Blind People in Northern Ireland, anthropology students from Queen's University Belfast, local singer-song writer Joe Kenny, and composer Tristan Sparks. In the lyrics of Taking Steps, Kenny draws on exchanges between students and visually impaired participants to articulate a range of perspectives. The presentation brings the two musical works into dialogue, using the concept of relational ability to explore questions around vulnerability, needs, skills, and empowerment.

Maruška Svašek is Professor of Anthropology at Queens University Belfast, co-Director of the Centre for Creative Ethnography, and Fellow of the Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice. Her research interests include creative practice, ability, and the affective relationality of humans, artefacts and spaces in an era of globalization, transnational connectivity and environmental change. Her publications include *Ethnographies of Movement, Sociality and Space: Place-Making in the New Northern Ireland* (2018, with Milena Komarova) and *Creativity in Transition: Politics and Aesthetics of Cultural Production Across the Globe* (2016, with Birgit Meyer).

Milena Williamson – *'My supposed body': the body in the Old English metrical charms, translated and remixed*

This creative poetry reading and literary analysis will give context for the Old English metrical charms and some of the ways in which the body is explored. I will read from a selection of my own charm-poems, particularly the ones that explore illness and the speaker's desire to cure their loved one. The charms address: a sudden stitch, miscarriage/pregnancy, a fever, a rash, infections and tumours. I will investigate how the body of the patient/charmed is a site of vulnerability (i.e. illness) while simultaneously, the body of the charmer is site of em(power)ment that can speak and act the charm into effect. Milena Williamson is the author of a poetry pamphlet, *Charm for Catching a Train* (Green Bottle Press, 2022) and a poetry collection Into the *Night that Flies So Fast*

(Dedalus Press, 2024). Her second pamphlet, *Milk & Moon-water* is forthcoming from the Emma Press in July 2026. She has an MA and a PhD in poetry, both from the Seamus Heaney Centre at Queen's University Belfast. Her poetry has been recognized by the Society of Authors' Eric Gregory Award and the Ireland Chair of Poetry Trust project award.