

8. Ideas without substance.

It is very different to know something as an act of knowledge, or as a result of direct experience²³.

In my work, I use to tell to my trainees that they do not have any direct idea of what it means what they are talking about.

They might have notions about disabilities, homelessness, been victims of abuses or social exclusion. They might have suggestions. They have prejudices, for sure. Still, most of the times, they do not know what it really means. Differently, the people they work for, they don't only know, they own and acknowledge it.

I found Cristina Fallaràs words a precious witness to clarify this concept with a transparent evidence:

«I'm writing from down below, from the collapsed part (of society). I've been living in the dark for so long that my eyes are getting used to the gloom and I can clearly see the new arrivals.

(...) From here, we can barely see those that remain on top, we have to strain our memory. We know how they live, what they eat, what they buy, how they dress and move because we were up there not so long ago. But misery imposes selective amnesia and I think that is a small part of our salvation.

Those on top, on the other hand, do not look at us. They can't. There remain the journalists, the informers who try in vain to report on poverty, on evictions, the reasons for suicides. But how can they?

If you have never had the electricity or the water cut off – or both - then your idea of poverty is without substance... »²⁴.

²³ Adopting Watzlawick words, it is very different to know a language and to know something about a language (ref.: *Pragmatics of human communication*, 1967)

²⁴ Cristina Fallaràs is a Spanish journalist who was evicted and wrote about her

In her “Hearing Essay”²⁵, Evelyn Glennie proposes a similar point of view:

«... there is a common misconception that deaf people live in a world of silence. To understand the nature of deafness, first one has to understand the nature of hearing. Hearing is basically a specialised form of touch. Sound is simply vibrating air which ear picks up and converts in electrical signals, which are then interpreted by the brain ... most of us know very little about hearing, even though we do it all the time ... ».

The same words can be heard from any person experiencing any sort of exclusion and of social stigma. The same words from people with disabilities, or by parents of children with disabilities. By victims of violence. By ethnic minorities, Roma, asylum seekers and refugees.

Most of care-workers are sensible; all of them, all of us, have notions, prejudices, perceptions. Everyone has its own ideas on others, its own representations of the world. These are precious allies: being open-minded, remembering there is always something to learn from the individuals-in-need one works with. Again Schopenhauer.

Otherwise, one risks to be self-centred and self-sufficient. A condition that fits perfectly with onanism. Nothing against it, but notably it tends to be quite a solitary praxis. Being de facto opposite in term of aims, movements and net results than with the ones of care-work.

experience in the article *I'm the evictee telling you how it is* (Liberation, 31 July 2013). The English version is available at:

part 1: www.presseurop.eu/en/content/article/4006161-i-m-evictee-telling-you-how-it-13

part 2: www.presseurop.eu/en/content/article/4014311-i-m-evictee-telling-you-how-it-23

part 3: www.presseurop.eu/en/content/article/4015001-i-m-evictee-telling-you-how-it-33

The French version at: www.presseurop.eu/en/content/source-profile/501-liberation

²⁵ Evelyn Glennie is a virtuoso percussionist performing at international level, winner of many awards worldwide. Although she is profoundly deaf since she was 12, she taught herself to hear with parts of her body other than her ears. In response to criticism from the media, she published *Hearing Essay* and *Disability Essay* (1993) to discuss her condition and contends that deafness is largely misunderstood by the public. Ref.: www.evelyn.co.uk/literature.html

Each time I hear someone pretending to know the truth on how a given condition is because of its study or because the time spent in a certain services, my eyebrows tend to raise. I tend to doubt on such positions, and I agree with Cristina Fallaràs and Evelyn Glennie instead. The absolute truth is usually considered an attribution of divinity. I met many trainers and trainees in my career; most were talented, but none was divine.

Furthermore, the necessity for a person of self-considering himself as “knowledged” seems to be bound to an inner grammar, which is commonly closer to narcissism, egotism, or to defences against insecurity. These are the grammatical structure behind the “über alles” position.

On contrary, curiosity and openness for what a person is out of any standardised categories usually helps in approaching care-work praxis.