To read Ricca’s words is an exhilarating experience. She brought extraordinary awareness, insight and depth to how sociologists may use language to acquire and communicate knowledge of the social world. The art and craft of writing, she argued, is a form of mediation whose aim is to expand capacities and competencies in thinking, reasoning and acting about and in society. This was her ambition, fully realised in a life committed to creating a responsible and empathic understanding of the social. In writing, Ricca joins herself as an author who, with research collaborators and unknown readers in mind, strive to shape and convey meaning so that our understanding is altered. Aware of the complexities of conveying experiences of any particular social situation to others, Ricca calls for a new ‘interworld’ language in sociology, in which the sociologist must be prepared to change readers’ hearts and minds, feelings and beliefs, while abiding by the complex standards of truth claims of disciplines. This new language would.
... heighten the impact of conveying original meanings in a form which has been transformed so as to allow them to function in another world. Rather than leaving readers unaffected, exactly as they were before they read anything, it seeks to stretch their capacities for social participation, so that in intellect and imagination, they are able to relinquish embeddedness in their own settings and thus visualise at least part of what it means to inhabit another. (Edmondson, 2000: 191)

Ricca was a transformative multidisciplinary sociologist evidenced by a legacy of publications, research and scholarship, teaching and her profound contributions to the university, national and international professional associations and to sociological knowledge.¹ A D.Phil student of Anthony Heath’s at Oxford, Ricca’s book, *Rhetoric in Sociology* (1984), is an early example of how she fashioned a philosophically informed set of questions in approaching the study of society. Ricca joined University College Galway and the small but growing Department of Political Science and Sociology in 1991.² Colleagues specialised in research and teaching in Irish politics, culture and society, survey research, ethnography, community and rural development and collective action. Teaching First Year Sociology and Politics, Ricca’s sociological voice reached hundreds of students over many decades, altering fixed understandings of culture, of the taken for granted aspects of social reality, alerting students to the constraints of and opportunities for action in social structures. Enhanced by a deep commitment to interdisciplinarity, social and political theory and research methodologies were her everyday tools, which she refined over and over, demonstrating their explanatory power and effectiveness in teaching, writing and thinking. Students sought her out, not just for doctoral supervision but for time willingly shared in sorting out practical difficulties, personal and professional, and, most of all, for the enjoyment of the intellectual conversations in which she freely engaged with every critical facility, at a moment’s notice. Thinking and analytical inquiry were her passions. Diving into a knotty puzzle with Ricca often began with a question about what a particular theorist might have meant by an argument or a research incident that appeared to defy expected explanations. What might be the possible social meanings of how somebody behaved under pressure or when a difficult choice had to be made? When presenting a sketch of an idea that was tentatively forming for a lecture, conference or article, what did she think of it? She would pause, tilt her head and then look you straight in the eye before the discourse began with rapidity, verve, imagination, as she effortlessly applied astute analysis to the debate. She listened like few other people did, giving the topic her full and exceptional attention, bringing her powerful intellect and empathic mind to the words as they passed over and back, with every aspect scrutinised, every detail drawn out, every argument met with a refined and more convincing counter argument, full of nuance and sociological sense. And, then a pause might follow to allow the words that filled the air to settle, taking shape in the mind, becoming ideas. In lifting a person out of embedded thinking, Ricca empowered others in conversation, inviting us in, to think anew about what we understand and pointing to what we might not yet know. One idea sparked another and a clearer direction for further inquiry appeared to magically manifest so emerged from these conversations and engagement with her
research more confident, more able, fully supported and energised in their own work. Her gift was to connect with others, to question and communicate ideas with the excitement and pleasure of seeing the world from a more nuanced sociological perspective. She interrogated priorities, examined the social construction of meaning in use, helping to develop arguments illuminated in unexpected ways and with everyday examples. Curious why people think or behave the way they do in the everyday, she would often ask ‘what do you do when …’ and the conversation would take off again – with excitement, fun, curiosity and great seriousness.

I am reminded of Ricca’s welcoming and generous presence in the School by a memory of her first office. The door was inevitably open and blinds pulled aside so that light spilled out into the dark corridor from the windows overlooking the river. On entering, Ricca offered tea – the red-leafed tea of South Africa was her preference. The walls were filled with artwork of abstract charcoal forms vaguely suggesting the human body spinning in a swirl of colours. A beloved but enormous metal brown sculpture refashioned from the parts of a rusted plough had to be moved from its residence on a chair each time a visitor called. ‘Understanding Strangers’ and ‘Sociology of the Environment’ were innovative modules exemplary of Ricca, as a creative, socially engaged and thoroughly contemporary sociologist and lecturer, committed to finding new ways towards human flourishing. For Ricca, the sociology of how we encounter others was particularly pertinent in understanding the fabric of Irish society, part urban and modern, with a patchwork of traditional values, practices and cultures stubbornly embedded at crucial intersections of state, church and society. Ricca’s teaching was enhanced by philosophical insights on the relationship between self, subjectivity and social relations, bringing interdisciplinary perspectives to bear on her subject. Her profound knowledge of political and social theory permeated courses taught on green politics and the environment, energising and motivating students on the urgency of global environmental protection policies and arguments for equitable sustainable consumption. Ricca
brought her students into the natural environment, teaching outdoors while relating to the ecosystems in which they lived and worked. Students learned that human responses to the physical world and how people related to each other were intrinsically intertwined over time and place. In following those interconnections, perceptions of the natural and human world were irrevocably altered.

Her life works combined three academic strands: rhetoric and the theory of argumentation; the philosophy of the social sciences and informal reasoning; and the study of the lifecourse and the sociology of wisdom. Interested in the sociology of ageing from the onset of her academic career, harnessing techniques from philosophy, politics and sociology, Ricca formed a unique approach to understanding older people and many of the predicaments involved in ageing, carrying out empirical work in Ireland and other European countries. With her guidance and supervision, doctoral students pioneered scholarship in the sociology of the emotions in Ireland, environmental sustainability and on the sociology of time among others areas. Ricca ensured that research students were well equipped with practical, methodological and theoretical tools to interrogate and analyse social problems and to write thoughtfully, making time for reflection, knowing that nothing is at it first appears. It takes a life-time to become a scholar and an academic (technically, professionally, personally and intellectually); to find convivial homes, the spaces/places, colleagues and students with whom to converse and work; to take on the challenges of different academic identities and roles; to be guided by one’s own aspirations and light while aware of changing institutional requirements for higher performance levels and demonstration of greater research impact; and, significantly, to serve and develop the disciplines in which we are honed with critical consciousness and integrity. The Social Science Research Centre was one such multidisciplinary congenial home. Ricca served as Chair and Board member, organising conferences, finding seed funding for research, providing direction for new symposia, supporting new programme development. Ricca was an outstanding mentor not only in the onerous formal roles of undergraduate year coordinator and graduate research committee member but also as informal post-doctoral and part-time staff advisor. Ricca contributed to and actively participated in school and university conferences, seminars and workshops with energy and enthusiasm for the intellectual debates that invariably ensued. Asking pertinent questions, sharing her thinking and associative ideas, Ricca’s commentary was supportive and critical, opening up new ways of considering aspects that lay at the heart of the matter. Ricca is remembered by many as being exceptionally kind, interested, generous with her time and practical in her guidance. Ricca served on the Executive Committee of the Sociological Association of Ireland and was an early co-editor of the *Irish Journal of Sociology* (1994–1996). As co-editor, Ricca gave full and careful consideration to developing sociological arguments, new theoretical framings and emphasised innovative areas for research inquiry. Inviting authors, readers and the sociological community into expanding the lively field of sociology in Ireland was a priority. Ricca was an invigorating, considerate and inspiring co-editor who realised the significance of giving as much time as needed to scrupulous editing and to debating with her co-editors too. Supporting authors and nurturing the *IJS* in its nascent stages as a publishing home for articles, book
reviews, debates and symposia on Irish sociology was a critical activity at the time, to become a point of reference and significance for future sociologists, yet to be born.

The passion and commitment that fires an intellectual life does not go out at a particular age nor on formal institutional retirement. Retiring from NUI Galway in 2014, Ricca was much sought after by international colleagues to contribute to postgraduate qualitative methods teaching, to public lectures, workshops and seminars with an abundance of invitations to conferences as a keynote speaker on wisdom and ageing, to which she readily responded. The erudite and thought-provoking editorials in the European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology (EJCPS) are testament to a pioneering, wise, imaginative and fearless global scholar who in more recent years with co-editors, established and shaped the first issues of the journal of the European Sociological Association. In taking the position of the other, Ricca’s lifelong commitment to knowledge that transforms difficult social and political relations is evident in the editorial extract below.

This journal’s mission is to interrogate the multiple ways in which cultural and political aspects of social life intertwine and affect each other. Their conjunctions lie at the heart of social interaction, structure, and change: human behavior cannot be understood without making sense of the interlaced mesh made up by the cultural and political aspects of social life. Permutations of power and meaning are therefore endlessly compelling, not only in theory but also in practice, not least in personal interaction. When encountering a new policy or person, your first reaction might reasonably be to try to form an image of the political and cultural circumstances that inform that course of action or that individual. If you do not, what they do or say might well remain irredeemably opaque to you (Edmondson, 2018: 235).

Being part of a European community of scholars dedicated to political and cultural sociology meant much to her, personally and professionally. Understanding the problems of community and of conflict and how to live well together in constructive political and social settings was part of a lifelong inquiry, an interest that expanded with Ricca’s co-editorship of the EJCPS. She supported authors whose primary language was other to the dominant language of publication, English. Aware of the limited academic spaces prepared to host unconventional or risky ideas, Ricca encouraged scholars to consider fresh ways of thinking, writing and presenting, across all language communities and formats. Keen to break away from dull and standardized formats, Ricca with her co-editors framed the EJCPS as a ‘hospitable’ space inviting ‘convincing texts no matter the approach or argument’ (Edmondson, 2015: 188).

We aspire to be hospitable to a sociological public that pursues integrity and insight but nourishes a healthy disrespect for standardized thinking, artificial classifications, or misconceptions of competition and ‘measurement’. If unconventional and controversial interlinkages between culture and politics can be discovered and imagined, so much the better … we are keen to support authors who take the risk of thinking, testing thoughts, writing thought provocingly (188).
Ricca was a most hospitable person whose natural disposition was to think about others and their predicaments – small and large. In a recent email exchange, Ricca mentioned the restrictions on meeting up imposed by COVID-19 and her hope for the world that a radically new global health care system would be developed. But her primary thought was for those who were suffering, ill and tellingly for people who lived in places or circumstances where they could not wash their hands.

Ricca’s book Ageing, Insight and Wisdom: Meaning and Practice across the Lifecourse (2015) draws from her observations of everyday life in the west of Ireland and from multicultural research. She brings the reader on a journey that is partly spiritual and wholly about love. The significance of language and discourse in meaning making across the lifecourse, the importance of positive connotations of old age and how to counter ageism provide new models for ageing research, for respectful human relations and for human flourishing. Reviews hailed the book as a tour de force of life, ‘elegantly written’ and ‘inspiring’ (Lin, 2017: 657). Ricca’s home in the west of Ireland is framed by the Atlantic Ocean, the granite boulders and sedimentary mountains of Connemara, a land and seascape that nourished her. She thrived there, as did her beloved family, dogs, cats and roses. Being connected to and in communication with her friends, colleagues, neighbours, and also strangers mattered to her, as she extended countless invitations to telephone, to write, to visit, to meet up, to share lunch out, to catch up, to relax and reflect. These meetings were anticipated by her with joy. Professor Ricca Edmondson’s passion for reading, for research, for writing, for teaching, for debate and her supreme interest in and enjoyment of interaction with a global network of colleagues and students, profoundly and positively shaped the growth and expansion of Irish and European Sociology. With her work, she shifted the compass. It is a rare thing to have had the privilege of working alongside an ethical and distinctive intellectual and a generous, warm and wise person, such as Ricca. In offering the gifts of sociology and sister disciplines to others, generations of readers will benefit from her legacy of thinking and writing on the construction and constitution of human relations, on wise actions and, crucially, on finding ways to get along well with others.

Bean feasa agus cara dilís.

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Notes
1. For more detail on research, reaching and contribution, please see Professor Edmondson’s academic profile https://www.nuigalway.ie/our-research/people/political-science-and-sociology/riccaedmondson/
2. Michael Laver, Kay Donohue (School Secretary), Chris Curtin, Michael D Higgins, Donal Igoe, Tony Varley, Gordon Hutton and Anne Byrne were members of the Department in 1991 with c.150-200 students in First Year Political Science and Sociology.

3. See http://ssrc.ie/ (accessed 14 July 2020).

4. Anne Byrne, Ricca Edmondson, Donal Igoe and Tony Varley co-edited the *IJS* from 1994 to 1996.

5. Established in 2012, Ricca Edmondson, Eeva Luhtakallio and Siobhan Kattago were co-editors of the *EJCPS*. See 2019 editorials by Edmondson and Luhtakallio here. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23254823.2019.1684623?src=recsys (accessed 14 July 2021).

6. The *EJCPS* editorials are open access and available online. See for example https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23254823.2018.1496572 (accessed 12 July 2021).

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