

Generation Bailout

Art, Psycho-Geography, and ‘The Irish Mind’ debate

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The Crisis Becomes Visible: Ireland and the European Project

Following a period of rapid economic growth beginning in the 1990s, Ireland was ranked by management consultants in 2002 as the most ‘globally connected’ country in the world¹. With this newly awarded status, Celtic Tiger exceptionalism, and a uniform acceptance of capitalist ideologies among the neo-rich, “a new monetary hero” was spawned – “the brilliant Irish capitalist”².

Under the centre-right *Fianna Fáil*, ‘crony capitalism’ prospered, and was largely defined by mutually beneficial arrangements between government and the corporate elite. The Irish Financial Services Regulatory Authority was appointed in 2003, but failed to “impose major sanctions on any Irish institution, even though Ireland had recently experienced several major banking scandals”, prompting the *New York Times* to dub Ireland “The wild west of European finance”³. The economic boom, (fuelled by an over active construction sector, extreme house price inflation, an unhealthy dependence on foreign multinationals, and easy access to credit) came

post-Imperial⁴ country on the peripheries of Europe, Ireland, having joined the anti-pluralist ranks of ‘new muscular liberalism’⁵ is now compelled to scramble, like the rest, for restitution in the crisis-ridden European project.

Many economists and cultural analysts have ruminated on the systemic failings of the Celtic Tiger era, and the implications of the subsequent financial collapse for Irish society. “The Celtic Tiger wasn’t just an economic ideology,” wrote Fintan O’Toole, “It was also a substitute identity. It was a new way of being that arrived just at the point when Catholicism and nationalism were not working anymore.”⁶ Describing the Celtic Tiger as a “mirage” largely defined by social inequality, Peadar Kirby warned of the “social costs of economic success in the era of neoliberal globalization”⁷. The main purpose of this text however, is to examine what is happening to the visual arts in Ireland at this post-bust juncture, with a view to highlighting current socio-political, intellectual and artistic concerns.

An emerging ‘political turn’, visible across recent festival formats in Ireland, will be examined in detail, portraying an institutional framing of an ‘emergence’ from crisis, supported by discourse on political exhibition making. Most notably, in cultivating a new fidelity to the ‘local’, contemporary Irish art is re-inhabiting familiar terrain – that of ‘land’, ‘place’ and the “native sensibilities of the local genius”⁸. Concluding thoughts will draw on a revival of the ‘Irish mind debate’ in cultural studies⁹, harking back to an earlier, seemingly simpler, era of pre-globalisation. Doing so it will query whether there is a specifically Irish intellectual tradition counter to a ‘hegemonic rationalism’ of ‘Anglo-Saxon/Ango-American logic’ which might enable “a reinvestment in the notion of what it means to be a republic”.¹⁰ In framing culture as decisively conditioned by changing economic and socio-political relations, how are current artistic and curatorial practices in Ireland producing a “systematic analysis of relations between economic interest and competing versions of identity on offer”¹¹? In short, I will examine artistic practices which consider national psycho-geographies as a supposed counter culture to material interest and burgeoning global hegemony.

Festival Formats: Curating the Political Turn

2011 was defined by waves of political protest and sustained campaigns of civil resistance, whose groupings were perceived as largely non-hierarchical in structure, characterised by a heavy reliance on internet technology and social networking sites for communication, mobilisation and reportage. Describing the Arab Spring protestors as “democracy’s new pioneers”, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri outlined how the self-organised, leaderless “multitudes in Tunis, Cairo and Benghazi” have the capacity to “invent a common plan to manage natural resources and social production”, concluding that “This is a threshold through which neoliberalism cannot pass and capitalism is put to question...Here insurrection touches on not only the equilibriums of north Africa and the Middle East but also the global system of economic governance...raising aspirations for freedom and democracy beyond the region.”¹²

Inspired in part by Cairo’s Tahrir Square, the global Occupy Movements patchily called for an examination of alternatives to capitalism, reactivating modes of resistance in the public consciousness with demonstrations, sit-ins and occupations of work places, corporate buildings and civic spaces. In an Irish context, Occupy protests in Dublin’s financial district and other parts of the country aligned in opposition to the State sale of Ireland’s oil and gas reserves, and the burden of ‘private debt’, referring to the billions currently being paid in increments to the unsecured bondholders of defunct banks. As redundant workers of the Vita Cortex factory continue to occupy the Cork premises in an ongoing dispute over the terms of their dismissals, an Anti-Eviction Taskforce¹³ seeks to prevent county sheriffs from carrying out ‘unlawful and unconstitutional’ repossession and evictions, while Occupy protestors seek to ‘liberate’ NAMA¹⁴ property, retaining vacant buildings as community centres and civic spaces, highlighting NAMA’s failure to deliver on a promised ‘social dividend’.¹⁵

In February 2011 the governing *Fianna Fáil* party suffered defeat on a historic scale. The new Fine Gael/Labour coalition, inheriting the post-Celtic Tiger economic wasteland, have subsequently reneged on many pre-election promises, most notably on political reform and the elimination of (crony) political patronage. Historic state visits from Queen Elizabeth II and Barack Obama articulated international statements of solidarity with Ireland, but the strategic interests behind the visits went largely unchallenged, with mainstream media coverage centring on the morale-boosting effects of these symbolic gestures. Visiting his great-great-great grandfather’s ancestral home in Moneygall, County Offaly, Barack Obama spoke about Irish-American connections, blood lineage and the (voting?) Irish Diaspora for whom the ‘homeland’ symbolised such extraordinary traditions and people. The Queen’s visit in May, the first by a British sovereign to the Republic since 1911 when Ireland was still under British rule, was a powerful reminder of the troubled relationship between the two nations. Poignantly, Ireland’s colonial past and history of mass emigration found contemporary resonance below the glossy media veneer, against the current backdrop of increasingly depleted national sovereignty, Europeanisation and financial ruin.

As 2011 drew to a close, several prominent Irish art events utilised their respective exhibition and seminar platforms to consider the current Irish situation, citing art’s potential to navigate political terrain. The curatorial framing of this ‘emergence from crisis’ centred largely on negotiating a position for art within this period of ‘re-building’. References to local and global networks of exchange persisted as a reoccurring theme. Curator driven statements gestured towards something radical, while substance was delivered with varying degrees of success.

Irit Rogoff recently described the process of ‘turning’ as not only a move away from out-dated modes of doing towards something more urgent, but also a means of propelling an audience towards active engagement. “In a ‘turn’, we shift *away* from something or *towards* or *around* something, and it is *we* who are in movement, rather than *it*. Something is activated in us, perhaps even actualized, as we move.”¹⁶ In reading ‘the political’ across curatorial formats, how were



Superflex, *The Financial Crisis (Session I-V)*, film Still (2009). A hypnotist takes us through four stages of economical disaster. The film is divided into four sessions. Presented by Frieze Films and Channel 4 and created for Frieze Art Fair 2009.

to an end in 2008 when the economy collapsed and Irish banks were unable to refinance their foreign borrowings, exposing corruption in Anglo Irish Bank in the form of hidden money and loans to ‘anonymous’ businessmen. In order to alleviate fears of a sovereign debt crisis, the Irish government nationalised six banks and issued a spectacular blanket guarantee to pay the bondholders, in the hope that the financial markets would regain ‘confidence’ in the euro-zone overall.

Receiving a bailout of €67 billion from the European Central Bank for this purpose in 2010, the Irish government swiftly shackled this debt onto the public, through the implementation of ‘austerity measures’ – a euphemism across Europe for forced cuts to public services and public ownership. Under such conditions, Ireland’s dire fiscal situation is set to continue for generations, amidst soaring unemployment, tax hikes, shrinking public services, and crumbling infrastructures for health, housing and education; the original pillars of the Irish free-state and 1937 Irish Constitution.

If Ireland’s boom phase was an exemplary model – an archetypal blueprint from which to observe the extent of ‘functioning Capital’ – then the bust phase will surely provide a necessary gauge to study its effects and measure its repercussions, not least for those still advocating larger doses of the same. Once a small, introverted,

new perspectives generated? How were audiences engaged, forcing “these spaces to be more active, more questioning, less insular, and more challenging”?

Dublin Contemporary 2011: ‘Terrible Beauty – Art, Crisis, Change & The Office of Non-Compliance’

Dublin Contemporary 2011 marked Ireland’s inauguration onto the international art circuit, promising a “quinquennial art exhibition of global magnitude and local consequence”. But while lavish international launches and optimistic visitor/revenue statistics created a celebratory veneer, tensions (both internal and external) overshadowed the ambitious project. Resistance had built up among the arts community in Ireland, who generally felt that the lack of information and communication projected an air of exclusivity. In early 2011 the original management board was dissolved¹⁷ and new curators were appointed. New York-based curator and critic, Christian Viveros-Fauné, and Franco-Peruvian artist and curator, Jota Castro, swiftly assembled the ‘Terrible Beauty’ theme, referencing Yeats and the 1916 Rising, alluding to the current climate of austerity, which could hardly go unnoticed.

The curatorial vision for the large scale event aimed to provide a departure from the flashy, conventional biennial or art fair model, drawing inspiration from the principles of the Italian Arte Povera Movement of the 1960s, which had reacted against the corporatisation of art and culture. This positioning aligned with a growing acknowledgement that the global art biennial format is a product of the “distorted relationship between art and market” – a value system based on “west-eurocentrism”¹⁸ – which is currently experiencing retrenchment in an age of “art-funding austerity”¹⁹.

As a platform for contemporary practices and periphery events, *Dublin Contemporary 2011* was critically relatively well received.²⁰ Certainly, there was an acknowledgement of the quality of the work produced by artists in Ireland, when viewed on this international stage. An emerging kind of ‘constructionist’²¹ aesthetic was discernable, suggesting an impulse to deconstruct, to salvage, and to clear, privileging an active ‘learning through building’ over a transmission of existing limiting forms of knowledge.

The Danish Art collective Superflex provided the most biting prognosis of the current Irish predicament, with a video-installation entitled *The Financial Crisis (Session I-IV)*. A space, containing hundreds of euro coins (which were glued to the floor), provided a backdrop for a video projection, which presented crisis in the euro-zone from a “therapeutic perspective”: “A hypnotist guides us through our worst nightmares to reveal the crisis without as the psychosis within. During 4 sessions you will experience the fascination of speculation and power, too fear, anxieties and frustration of losing control, economic loss and personal disaster. In Session 1 ‘The Invisible Hand’ we are introduced to the backbone of capitalism, the idea of the ‘invisible hand’ as the benign faith in self-regulation that prevents markets and people from spinning out of economic control. Under hypnosis we are asked to interrogate that faith and to imagine a world no longer governed by the invisible hand. In the following Sessions we go deeper and deeper into the financial crisis...”²²

Declarations that Dublin Contemporary could engage with “art and its place in society” or operate as a hub for “non-conformist art proposals”²³ proved unconvincing. Occasional glimpses of curator-centred hierarchies, and knowledge that the event was executed with a heavy reliance on internship staff, made it difficult to reconcile such a radical preamble with the hostile atmosphere palpable within the venues. Most disappointing was the format of the event, which did not deviate from the typical biennial model, doing little to circumvent notions of art as entertainment. Art market rhetoric and tourism statistics took precedence over any

politically motivated curation, bypassing any opportunity to engender political agency through the implementation of robust exhibition making strategies. Slogans reminding us that “art has the capacity to imagine and effect change in the social sphere” adorned the walls of the main venue at Earlsfort Terrace, while graffiti ‘subverted’ the walls of the National Gallery, producing a lacklustre veneer, conveying vague gestures towards institutional critique that were never formally realised.

Tulca Festival of Visual Arts“, 2011 - ‘After The Fall’

Tulca 2011, curated by Megs Morley, embarked on a socio-political inquiry into the world ‘After the Fall’, which negotiated imagined pasts and dystopian futures, producing an experience that was unequivocally of the moment. The programme was tightly under-pinned by an incisive curatorial statement, framing the event as a “pause in an endless circulation of ideas... positioning itself in the juncture at the end of one era and the beginning of the next”. The exhibition functioned as a point of convergence for many relevant conversations – civil protest, emigration, how capital moves – referencing land, territory and nationhood, punctuated with potent imagery such as ‘flag’, ‘border’, ‘island’, and ‘counter-monument’. These images resonated within an immediately perceived and conceived surrounding ‘Irish landscape’, while also offering access to wider geo-political discourse.

Filip Berta’s single channel video, *Homo Homini Lupus* (2011) gestured towards conflict in the euro-zone, with a depiction of wolves fighting over an Italian flag. A symbol of territory, the flag, luminous against the desolate landscape, is decimated, as the wolves each display their instinct to survive and dominate. In Elaine Byrne’s *A Message to Salinas* (2010), Mexican citizens articulated their desire to retain national sovereignty in the face of US intervention and state privatisation. A border is a defining national and geographical feature. The border zone, as place and ‘non-place’, as a site of migration, surveillance, and a threshold between native/foreigner, enemy/ally, import/export, has been revived as a source of study within geography and wider fields of social theory, providing a counter-culture to ‘borderless’ transnationalism. To the simple construction of binary terms – Good? Evil? Terrorist?²⁵ – the notion of borderlands enables a more nuanced engagement.

While The Good Hatchery, informed by their ‘islanded’ position, cultivated a fidelity to micro-geographies with a meditation on the transportation of cargo and *monarú earraí* (manufactured goods), Gareth Kennedy referenced 19th century industrialist logic, plotting an average location for all of the cargo pallets currently traversing the planet with his folk-fictional *Mean Pallet*.²⁶ In developing rural ‘folk-fictions’, Kennedy stages encounters between globalised and localised material cultures, in an attempt to identify social and environmental concerns within macro-economic contexts. Kennedy often works collaboratively with Irish artist Sarah Browne, producing temporary occupations which trace “alternative historical trajectories linked to contemporary concerns”²⁷.

In *Oral Hearing* (2009), Seamus Nolan re-staged and filmed the final session of a Bord Pleanála public hearing, where members of a small north Mayo community voiced objections to the Corrib Gas project, and the laying of a production pipeline by Shell Oil to bring high pressure gas inland, reaching the Irish coast at Glengad and Rosspoint. Members of the community took part in the re-construction, which took place in a local community centre. Formed out of a deep connection with their own locality, the contentious ten-year struggle against corporate and state forces cited concerns about public safety and safeguarding the rights of its farmers and fishermen as their main areas of concern, displaying an impressive accumulative knowledge of judicial

and democratic processes. The Irish state, viewing the Corrib gas field as ‘a gateway to sustainability’ deployed Gardaí to heavily police the area, facilitating construction workers to carry out their production schedule. “No matter how much knowledge or information people had gathered, it was secondary to a homogeneous globalised model of how things work”²⁸ stated Nolan. The myth of progress, enticed by corporate investment and the prospect of economic growth, was upheld, while the endangerment of nationhood, identity and cultural sovereignty declared by those claiming historical rights to working the land and seas, was unilaterally disregarded by an amorphous enemy. The local had become marginal.

Collective modes of resistance, protest and activism were expressed by several other artists including Amie Siegal and Jesse Jones. When re-appropriated into the present moment, surveillance footage²⁹ and megaphones³⁰ – symbols of ‘them and us’; the state and the disenfranchised classes – become inscribed with the time that has lapsed, calling for new modes of resistance within this post-binary political landscape. Recession in the 1980s was defined by trade union unrest following the adoption of neoliberal economic policies in the west, creating a shift from manufacturing and heavy industry into finance and service industries. The current recession is a product of these global economic systems, as the flight of capital shifts to the east, highlighting the precarious nature of labour within capitalism. Contemporary campaigns of resistance, as



already described, are becoming increasingly self-organised and more informed about law and civil rights, in trying to hold the state, authorities or corporations accountable for breeches of their own policies, relying on the judicial and democratic systems of international law. “The shift from the industrial form of production to the semiotic form of production – the shift from physical labour to cognitive labor – has propelled capitalism out of itself, out of its ideological self-conception”³¹.

Paul O’Neill has written extensively on the shifting parameters and apparatus of exhibition making, biennial culture, and the emerging role of the curator as “subject and producer of this discourse”³². Reflecting on O’Neill’s description of exhibitions as “subjective political tools” and “modern ritual settings which uphold identities”³³, it seems plausible that the formation of a ‘political exhibition’ is partially, if not largely, determined by the radicality of the curators’ own personal politics. Insights into Megs Morely’s own political persuasion are provided not just through her approaches to curation but also in her work as an artist. Recent works such as *Post-Fordlandia*³⁴ (a film produced in collaboration with Tom Flanagan) portray a fidelity to anthropological research, supported by textual analysis in the critique of capital, which frame the visual and material narratives, outlining artistic inquiries that are echoed in her approaches to curation. Tulca 2011 was a panorama of embedded insights that gradually merged, contributing to an overarching dialogue. O’Neill’s concern that artistic and curatorial practices should not be treated in isolation, but as co-existing spectrums “within the field of cultural production”, is further expanded

Seamus Nolan, *Corrib Gas*, Project Arts Centre, film still (2009). See, *Corrib Gas Project*: <http://vimeo.com/6947901>



The Good Hatchery, *Missionary 52,-7*, mixed media sculpture (2010). ‘Commonage’, Callan, Co. Kilkenny.

by Boris Groys when he described the interplay between exhibition-making and art as producing a space that “installs everything that usually circulates in our civilisation”³⁵. For Groys, the mass of exhibition visitors “...become part of the exhibition ...in a way that assists them in reflecting upon their own condition, offering them an opportunity to exhibit themselves to themselves.”

Examining civil rights, environmental campaigns, judicial structures and corporate agendas in proximity to artistic processes, Tulca’s visitors observed tangible connections with the surrounding location. This ‘landscape revival’ is not concerned with nostalgia for celtic romanticism, nor has it become interestingly kitsch following decades of subversion. An island engulfed for so long in cross-border conflict must now acknowledge that the biggest threat to national sovereignty comes not simply from the conditions of already having renounced national economic sovereignty under globalisation, but from the continuing political compliance and the “democratic deficit”³⁶ of the ‘flexible developmental state’. EU/ IMF financial logic and restructuring, enacted through the state via directives for local and regional government, propose another, arguably more intrusive round of regulating the rural and legislating for the domestic. Multinationals, most topically those in the business of oil and gas exploration and production, continue to seek to exploit and monetise the land and waterways, a prospect welcomed by the Irish government with the same enthusiasm as it embraced foreign direct investment in its economy. ‘After The Fall’, while focusing on these locally sited issues, is questioning the broader body politic, just as crisis in the euro-zone points to a broader systemic

concern – that of the ‘utility’³⁷ and permanent nature of ‘crisis’ as a function of capitalism³⁸.

TRADE Seminar 2011³⁹

Foreign multinational gas and oil exploration also became the focus of a group of artists participating in TRADE residency 2011, in Carrick-on-Shannon, with an examination of the devastation that hydraulic fracturing (a.k.a ‘fracking’⁴⁰) for gas would have on their locality. Their campaign ‘Talk About Fracking’ pertinently demonstrates the tangible links between global practice and local impact, with the national, (i.e the capacity of state governance to implement, mediate or reject those practices) occupying a determining position. As already outlined, the government stance on this issue focuses heavily on economic prospects, with Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Fergus O’Dowd, recently stating that “if there was a chance that billions of euros in untapped gas could provide a massive economic boost, the Government must take account of that”⁴¹.

The ‘Talk About Fracking’ campaign, while questioning the apparent consensus of economic necessity that subordinated the local, also functions self-reflexively in its capacity to align artistic activity with societal concerns. Interrogations regarding the social function of art have persisted across a spectrum of twentieth century movements, from dadaist and constructivist directives towards a new social order, to conceptualist and feminist experiments of the 1970s and relational aesthetics practices of the 1990s. Much of the discussion at the TRADE seminar centred on how art might continue to negotiate a socially engaged position, and the important role the artist plays in advocating active citizenship, challenging the commodity and entertainment functions designated by capitalism, which define art as a servant of the economy and support the bourgeois image of the artist as a ‘creative genius’ existing on the margins of society. Coupled with the proliferation of artist led initiatives across the country, alternative methods of production and display are emerging as defining features of the “new ecologies of practice”⁴² in contemporary Irish art. Formed largely out of practical necessity - the sharing of space and resources - artist led co-operative structures have become increasingly associated with seemingly political models of collective self-organisation. Although the suggestion that art, in this recessionary time, might experience a “renewed purpose” seem patronising, it does seem tenable that institutional and art market hierarchies are less prevalent in these spaces, with less of an emphasis on commerciality. But that is not to say they are entirely emancipated. In many Irish urban districts, artistic activity is becoming increasingly intertwined with urban planning, with numerous county councils inviting artists to temporarily ‘activate’ vacant commercial spaces in dormant retail sectors. While artistic practices in Ireland appear to be genuinely thriving under these conditions, revealing an underlying capacity for co-operative production, the lingering uneasy relationship between developer and artist is yet to be tested. Pitched as a ‘win win situation for everyone’, this arrangement is reminiscent of the gentrification discourse which followed the development of ‘creative quarters’ in Temple Bar, Shoreditch, Soho, etc. ; a debate too lengthy to enter into in this text. By contrast, the image of rural art practices emerging from the TRADE seminar utilised the distance from the (urban) centre as a pensive site for many artistic inquiries – commonage, local infrastructure, connectivity, and temporary publics – producing meditations on ‘the periphery’ and ‘the local’, which are translatable across a spectrum of geographies, cartographies and cultural discussions.

Cultural Geography - Signs, Routes, Perspectives

In his contribution to the TRADE seminar, artist Phillip Napier described the M1 motorway connecting Belfast and Dublin, which forms part of a larger European EU01 route infrastructure connecting Ireland to mainland Europe via land and sea links with Portugal and Spain, facilitating

an ease of passage for production and distribution within ‘Fortress Europe’. His observations centred on the ‘absent’ border checkpoint – no military, no surveillance, no flags – where the transition from one country to another, north to south, is only visible via the signage denoting either miles or kilometres. [Paraphrasing] “The logic economy has swept away the sovereigns of the foreign. A nation that historically was defined by Unionist introversion is now being asked to adopt an outward-looking perspective.”

‘Border-zone’ study within traditional anthropology, which examined primitivism and the typology of ethnic groups, seems increasingly static in the context of contemporary globalisation. The relationships between populations and the heterogeneous structures of geography, nation states and international law are becoming correspondingly blurred. Drawing on the influence of post-structural, post-colonial and Marxist theories, emerging interdisciplinary thought re-asserts the role of cultural struggle in reproducing social life, while making apparent the inherent power relations. Much of this deconstruction centres on a re-examination of cultural convergence and population mobility. Meanwhile emerging anthropological studies focus on the cultural differences between ethnic groups which persist precisely because of border division and examine identity and political organisation across national spaces in the context of global economic expansion, increased global transportation and telecommunication technologies.

Speaking recently north of the border, at the opening of his exhibition ‘Recalculating’, at The Void in Derry, Philip Napier examined the persistent connections between “frontier discovery” and the “lingering idea of terror in civil society”⁴³. ‘Recalculating’ is a continuation of the narratives explored in previous bodies of work, most recently in his ‘HMS Terror’ series, which examined Franklin’s ill-fated arctic expedition to the North West Passage in the 1840s, headed by Captain Francis Crozier, from Banbridge, Co.Down. Several countries are currently in competition to locate the shipwreck, which could establish economic sovereignty over the major sea way. Suggesting that the Arctic explorers were “the space men of their time”, Napier considered the HMS Terror expedition as being enshrined in myth and romantic imagination. With global warming the North West Passage has widened, offering potential for the expansion of a trade route linking Europe to China and the Far East. With dominant global power now shifting eastwards, the industrial and economic logic of connecting to China becomes salient, thus “accelerating consumption where the Communist ‘command economy’ meets and the capitalist ‘laissez faire’ economy”.

The most radical aspect of Napier’s work is the ease with which his sculptural installations oscillate between aesthetic manifestation, site specificity and cognitive abstraction. When linked to contemporary culture – the “atomisation of human experience, which creates anxiety and then offers a (comforting) resolution to that anxiety, for the purposes of consumption”⁴⁴ – any symbolic exploration into uncharted territory, (going without maps or satellite navigation technology, being stripped of co-ordinates) reactivates a potential to be curious; to navigate using fear as an instinctive force; to discover political alternatives; to observe the spaces where civil resistance occurs before armed combat is deployed; to devise our own ‘global positioning systems’. In this way the “expectations of the conditioned mind”⁴⁵ are disrupted, and there is “no easy resolution to that anxiety”⁴⁶. Referencing French philosopher Michel Serres’ analogy of the fly, whose pattern of discovery on a window pane portrays a “speculative route-making between cartographies of knowledge”, it becomes possible to observe the sites where translation between accounts can occur, back and forth between domains, without privileging one as accurate or authoritative.

On my journey into Derry city I was aware of the significance of painted kerbs stones, and the ceremonial removal of ‘London’ from its precursory position on road signs. I had heard about the tours of the Bogside, and the murals – enduring icons of the troubles – which have accumulated an ironic distance and become in

some way kitsch, turning the residents into tourists of their own history. These “visible manifestations of underlying conflicted realities”⁴⁷, which became legible externally through the mass media (with its “hunger for ‘drama’, a beginning, a middle and an end, heroes and villains and the idea of resolution”⁴⁸) are still palpable, real, and “not consigned (completely) to historical abstraction” in present day northern Ireland, despite its constant inscription as a post-conflict zone. When competing powers have caused turmoil to erupt, how might this ‘discontinuity’ of history and ‘unresolved remembering’ be meaningfully inhabited? Art, as a site for communally constructed, lateral rather than linear meaning, can pose the question of “...not, what does *it* mean, but what do *we* mean?”

When asked how art might navigate a position for the historical, national or local within globalised or post-colonial contexts, Napier suggested that these structures can be redefined through emphasis on ‘the particular’ through the embedded processes of situation, and the “transference of agency to place and context”. By constructing ‘psycho-geographies’, which engage across the symbolic structures of land, religion, place names, language and identity, micro-political landscapes can be represented while also acknowledging those “deep seated fault-lines which, like trade routes, are local and global, at the same time.” In this way, art practice becomes “local, but legible and meaningful elsewhere”, and the land becomes an active cultural force, rather than merely a subject of monetisation, consumption and political division. ‘Territoriality’, as an epistemological principle, provides a “cognitive framework through which the world is observed”⁴⁹, while it nonetheless remains a concept that needs careful attention and critique.

Concluding Thoughts - Art, Ethnocentrism, and the Future

Cultural accounts of ‘Irishness’ projected internationally via references to the land and territory have historically persisted through romanticism, celtic revival and nationalism, conveying an ethnocentric mindset constructed largely through an introverted fidelity to the native landscape. The idea that Irish cultural tradition is a product of specific (and previously unacknowledged) intellectual traits was the focus of the Richard Kearney’s ‘Irish Mind Debate’ of the mid-1980s.⁵⁰ With reference to Ireland’s strong literary tradition, Kearney suggested that the Irish position – of periphery and exile –produced an intrinsic ‘decentredness’ in the Irish population, generating a stereotype of the geographical or linguistic ‘other’, with a capacity to “respond creatively to dislocation and incongruity”⁵¹. The border, as a partition between Gael and Saxon, colonised and coloniser, catholic and protestant, was a geographical division that further permeated the Irish intellect, producing a distinct capacity to identify the ‘foreign’ over the ‘familiar’. Kearney also proposed that double vision – a Joycean kind of lateral thinking which simultaneously holds two contradicting thoughts in the mind – demonstrated a ‘dialectical logic’ characterised by an “intellectual ability to hold the traditional oppositions of classical reason together in creative confluence”, providing a counter-movement to the “mainstream hegemonic rationalism” and “linear, centralising logic of the Greco-Roman culture which dominated most of Western Europe”.

The main oppositions to this classification of ‘the Irish mind’, centred on a rejection of these proposed ethnic characteristics, which ultimately reinforced the celtic racial stereo-types devised under English rule, formed out of an enduring master/slave colonial self image. “...Kearney, in the cause of Irish nationalism, had essentialised Irishness and simply reversed the usual colonial claims that Ireland was full of people who simply couldn’t think straight, privileging this inability as an ‘alternative system of thought’.”⁵²

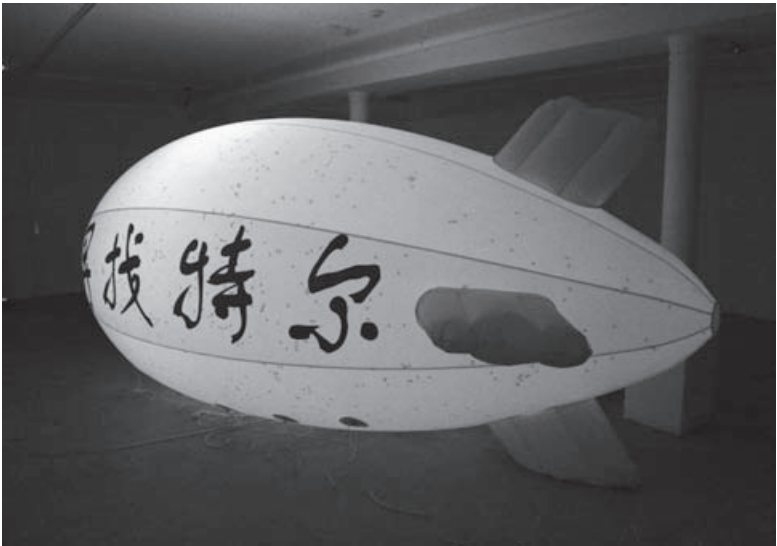
In attempts to identify a particular native sensibility in Irish art in the 1970s and ‘80s, ‘poetic, passive and introspective’ interpretations were positioned within nationalist, anti-modernist and romantic stylistic and iconographic contexts and aligned with a distinct lack of scholarly

analysis in art criticism pre 1990. These in turn contributed to the marginalised position of the visual arts in comparison with a strong literary tradition⁵³. Under these conditions, the Irish landscape, as a site of artistic, ‘native imagination’, assumed priority over any reference to increasing modernisation, or the influence of economic and consumerist forces.

Calling for a balanced assessment of ‘provincialism’ in art criticism in the 1980s, Tom Duddy highlighted a need for lateral thinking in the ‘local versus global’ dichotomy. In carving out an identity for ‘Irish art’ at that time, Duddy insisted that the ‘geographical aesthetic’ should resonate within the local, but must endeavour to resist clichés of Celtic mysticism and Nationalism (a ‘provincialism of the right’). Similarly, for Irish art to convey a ‘sense of place’, it should articulate an awareness of international influence, global issues, and the economic realities of modernism (a ‘provincialism of the left’) without pandering to trends.

In examining the influence of the Irish intellectual tradition on national identity, much of the discourse generated in the fields of cultural theory has historically privileged the ‘literary imaginative vision’ of traditional intellectual thought, which addressed nationalist, political and cultural concerns but “left the analysis of economic and class issues to others.”⁵⁴ Conversely, the emerging ‘specialist’ intellectual stratum of economic modernisation, reliant on state institutions, delivered only the technical requirements of nationalism (trade, economy, etc.) that were based on a generated ideological consensus, while marginalising socialist or radical alternatives. How can contemporary debates on nationalism (or localism?), as a counter to neoliberal globalised positions, move beyond historical abstraction, nostalgia or idealism? Fundamental to this debate must be a self-reflexivity regarding Ireland’s newly assumed national role in continuing to reproduce a competitive globalised space favourable to transnational capital, underscored by an acknowledgement of the power relations already put in place by a colonial past. How can “nationalism, culture and even racial stereotyping”⁵⁵ endure amidst current portrayals of Europe as one big “Western tribe” – a model conceived for the collectivisation of trade and resources, implemented through the modernisation of infrastructures, in the pursuit of a single European financial market over the last fifty years. The recent relegation of the older periphery states such as Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Portugal – which remain comparatively central given the new eastern european periphery⁵⁶ – and the socialising or ‘nationalisation’ of their respective debts have caused many cultural commentators to describe the European project as fundamentally flawed and unsustainable⁵⁷, with German philosopher Jürgen Habermas warning that present policies are leading to the “creeping death” of the European Union and the “sinking [of] 50 years of European history”. This ‘democratic deficit’ in Europe is representative not only of the increasingly precarious relationship between citizen and nation state, but also of the increasingly visible discrepancies between economic forces and societal realities, something which has arguably been at the core of the European common market/ currency from its conception.

This ideological void was the basis of (post-) autonomist media theorist Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi’s recent ruminations on ‘The Future After the End of the Economy’. Aligning economics not with the logic of science but with religious doctrine, he outlined an ideology based on “profits, accumulation, and power”, which gives credence to the future as a site of “infinite expansion”. Economists, akin to priests, “worship the dogmas of growth and competition, denounce the bad behaviour of society, require repentance for your debts, threaten inflation and misery for your sins, and profess social reality to be in crisis if it is does not conform to the dictates of these notions.”⁵⁸ The implications of his argument are further evident not only in the ‘crucifixion’ of Ireland⁵⁹ but also in the sacrifice of Greece to the economic gods of the European Union.⁶⁰ The future orientated ideology of finance, which draws its momentum from the



philosophy of flexible accumulation, cannot evolve self-reflexively in response to “changes in the social paradigm”.

Current economic ‘solutions’ to the global recession – that in refinancing the banks, credit will flow again, and consumption will resume, thus re-activating a stagnant economy, returning it to a path of exponential accumulation – place infinite faith in an ideology defined by the conceptual framework of future growth, with an insistence that society comply. But what if, as Berardi suggests, this version of ‘the future’ is actually over and we are “living in a space that is beyond the future?” This question forms a point of departure for the upcoming EVA International, in Limerick (19th May - 12th August 2012) curated by Annie Fletcher, and provides a few short thoughts on which to conclude this text. In the EVA press release Annie Fletcher states that “aesthetic practices and artistic thinking have an integral role at the juncture of the present and past, rather than as part of a prophetic future fantasy”⁶¹, supporting Berardi’s advocacy “for living slowly in the infinite present”. The active, contemporary Irish arts community, more educated and outwardly aware than previous generations, is displaying a capacity to engage not only with enduring legacies of the past, but with the destabilising and complex current realities of permanent crisis in a post-industrial era.

In distilling the present moment through historical, geographical and social lenses, identity unfolds within the vernacular of profit, privatisation and economic transnationalism with increasing ambiguity. A distinct connection with wider art practices reveals a congruity with international discourse, the elevation of the curator, the fluctuating form and function of the biennial, the temporary public⁶², the welcoming of the ‘political’ into the gallery space⁶³, supported and extended by a return to substance in art criticism. Echoing the politically self-organised and the horizontally collectivised, supplanting the alienated and exploitable individual, a reorganisation of the production process attests to the implications of community, which searches for alternative modes of being – exploring, living,

Above, top: Philip Napier, *Recalculating*, mixed media sculpture, (2012). The Void, Derry.

Above, bottom: Philip Napier, *Visual Amenity 1 (Erebus) & Visual Amenity 2 (Terror)*, mixed media sculpture, (2011). The Dock, Carrick on Shannon.

acknowledging fear, in being, for the moment, bereft of the answers previously provided by a linear and unconscious belief in the future. Drawing on this ‘present collective intelligence’, alternative routes can be found, proposing that, like Serres’ fly, we might experience “abrupt, unexpected, diagonal transitions of the mind” and “oblique accidental insights” which lead us up “the zigzagging but royal road to the understanding of how things come, and cease, to be.”⁶⁴

Notes

1 A.T Kearney, ‘Globalisation Index’, *Foreign Policy Magazine*, (2003). http://www.atkearney.com/images/global/pdf/Measuring_Globalization_S.pdf

2 Ciarán Bennett, ‘Dublin Contemporary, Dublin Diary’, *Artnet*, (September 2011). <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/reviews/bennett/dublin-contemporary-9-7-11.asp>

3 Brian Lavery and Timothy L. Obrien, ‘For Insurance Regulators, Trails Lead to Dublin’, *New York Times*, (2005). http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/01/business/worldbusiness/01irish.html?_r=1

4 Luke Strongman, ‘Post-Colonialism or Post-Imperialism?’ *Deep South*, v.2 n.3 (Spring, 1996). <http://www.otago.ac.nz/DeepSouth/vol2no3/post-col.html>

5 Bryan Fanning, ‘Irish Connections, Immigration and the Politics of Belonging’, *Variant*, Issue 26, (Summer 2006). <http://www.variant.org.uk/26texts/BFanning26.html>



Jesse Jones, *Against The Realm of the Absolute*, film still, 16mm film 12 mins, (2011).

6 Fintan O’Toole, *Enough is Enough: How to Build a New Republic*, (London:Faber and Faber, 2010).

7 Peadar Kirby, ‘Globalization, the Celtic Tiger and social outcomes: is Ireland a model or a mirage?’ *Globalizations* Volume 1, Issue 2, (2004) pp205-222.

8 Tom Duddy ‘Irish Art Criticism - A Provincialism of the Right?’ published in *Sources in Irish Art: A Reader*, Fintan Cullen ed. (Cork University Press, 2000) p91.

9 Richard Kearney, *Navigations: Collected Irish Essays 1976-2006*, (New York: University Press, 2006) pp17-31.

10 Fintan O’Toole, *Enough is Enough: How to Build a New Republic*, (London:Faber and Faber, 2010).

11 Liam O’Dowd, ‘Neglecting the Material Dimension: Irish Intellectuals and the Problem of Identity’, in *The Irish Review*, No.3 (1988), pp8-17.

12 Michael Harte and Antonio Negri, ‘Arabs are Democracy’s New Pioneers’, *The Guardian*, (February 2011). <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/feb/24/arabs-democracy-latin-america>

13 Fiona Gartland, ‘Anti-eviction Blockades Promise’, *The Irish Times*, (February 2012). <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2012/0223/1224312243910.html>

14 NAMA - National Assets Management Agency

15 Brian O’Connell, ‘Protesters take empty offices for community use’, *The Irish Times*, (Jan 2012) <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2012/0103/1224309736369.html>

16 Irit Rogoff, ‘Turning’, *e-flux*, (2011). <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/turning/>

17 “At the end of 2010 some money was actually committed to the project, but with the condition that it be managed by the same firm that had handled the St Patrick’s Festival, a very successful tourist event, though not one having to do with contemporary art. With the inevitable change in focus, the international art star curators disappeared and so did Rachel Thomas as curator, along with many of the original Irish artists.” Ciarán Bennett ‘Dublin Diary’, *Artnet*.com <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/reviews/bennett/dublin-contemporary-9-7-11.asp>

18 Interview with Huang Zhuan, *ArtZineChina*, (2008). http://artzinechina.com/display_vol_aid717_en.html

19 Ben Davis ‘The Humbling of the Art Biennial in the Age of Austerity’, *artinfo.com*, (December 2011) <http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/753700/the-humbling->

of-the-biennale-in-the-age-of-global-austerity

20 Several critics have produced cohesive responses to the exhibition, outlining details of artists, artworks and venues. See Chris Fite-Wassilak, ‘Dublin Contemporary’, *Frieze Magazine*, Issue 143, (Nov/Dec 2011). <http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/dublin-contemporary/>

21 I am using the term ‘constructionist’, while acknowledging the existence of the deconstructionist activity of the 1930s, and its revival in architecture in the 1980s. Firstly, I am commenting on a masculine DIY aesthetic visible in the work of several artists at Dublin Contemporary 2011, and other Irish art platforms. Secondly I am drawing comparisons between these artistic processes and the psychycological process of ‘leaning through making’- the basis of Jean Piaget’s epistemological theory of constructivism. Using this term in this way I am seeking a linguistic definition for the experimental process of ‘constructionist learning’ - the making of tangible objects as a as a mode of processing the world. See M. Cakir ‘Constructionist Approaches to Learning in Science and Their Implications for Science Pedagogy: A Literature Review’, *International Journal of Environmental & Science Education*, 3(4), (2008), pp.193-206.

22 http://superflex.net/tools/the_financial_crisis

23 <http://www.dublincontemporary.com/exhibition>

24 Tulca Festival of Visual Arts takes place annually in Galway, in the west of Ireland: <http://www.tulca.ie/>

25 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, ‘The Global State of War’, *War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), p16.

26 “The Mean Pallet functions as a symbolic barometer for worldwide economic activity. Estimated to be somewhere over the Caspian Sea, the mean pallet is moving eastward with an approximate velocity of 0.24 km/day, attributable to a high level of manufacturing and economic growth of the far eastern ‘Tiger economy’ countries.” [A tiger economy refers most commonly to Asian countries (such as Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan) who have undergone a period of rapid economic growth. In the 1990s the term Celtic Tiger was applied to the republic of Ireland.]

27 <http://www.kennedybrowne.com/>

28 Judy Murphy, ‘Corrib Gas row the subject of show in Tulca Festival of Art’, *The Connacht Tribune*, (Nov 2011). <http://www.galwaynews.ie/22584-corrib-gas-row-subject-show-tulca-festival-art>

29 Amie Siegel, *DDR/DDR*, HD Film, (2008).

30 Jesse Jones, *Against the Realm of the Absolute*, Film, (2011).

31 Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi, ‘The Future After the End of the Economy’, *e-flux* journal, (2011) <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-future-after-the-end-of-the-economy/>

32 Paul O’Neil, ‘The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse’, in *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, Judith Rugg and Michèle Sedgwick eds. (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2007) p13-28.

33 *ibid*.

34 Post-Fordlandia, Press release, June 2011.<http://www.galwayartscentre.ie/events/view-event/168.html>

35 Boris Groys, ‘Politics of Installation’, *e-flux* journal, (2011) <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/politics-of-installation/>

36 Mathias Albert, ‘Territoriality and Modernization’, *Institute for Global Society Studies*, (2001) http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/soz/iw/pdf/albert_3.pdf

37 Naomi Klein, ‘Wall St. Crisis Should Be for Neoliberalism What Fall of Berlin Wall Was for Communism’, presentation at the University of Chicago, (2008), available at *Democracy Now*: http://www.democracynow.org/2008/10/6/naomi_klein

38 Slavoj Žižek, ‘A Permanent Economic Emergency’, *New Left Review*, Issue 64, (July/August 2010) <http://www.newleftreview.org/?view=2853>

39 TRADE is an annual Visual Arts Programme supported by Leitrim and Roscommon County Councils, and the Arts council of Ireland. “The initiative consists of a residency phase, where four local artists work under the mentorship of an invited artist, and a seminar event – which has historically displayed a substantial engagement with current critical discourse. An interesting legacy has evolved out of contributions from an array of national and international participating artists, curators and thinkers.” Joanne Laws, TRADE report, *Paper Visual Art Journal*, <http://papervisualart.com/?p=7560>

40 Hydraulic fracturing (fracking) involves the propagation of shale and rock layers using pressurized fluid as a means of releasing oil or gas for extraction. Fracking has been suspended in France, South Africa, parts of Australia and a number of US states pending more detailed investigations

41 ‘Minister of State’s comments alarm opponents of fracking’, *The Irish Times*, (Jan 2012): “Exploration licences were granted to companies such as Tamboran Resources by the preceding Fianna Fáil government before any policy was developed around the fracking process. The income generated to the exchequer is thought to be negligible, especially considering the favourable tax concessions in place for oil and gas exploration, which allow consortiums to right off all capital and development debt, including security, policing and ultimately hefty public relations costs, before declaring any taxable profit. Any extra revenue

generated from future rises in inflation of gas and oil prices will be distributed as profits multi-national overseas partners.” <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2012/0127/1224310808790.html>

42 New Ecologies of Practice: A short season of projects by Catalyst Arts [Belfast] / Occupy Space [Limerick] / The Good Hatchery [Offaly] / Basic Space [Dublin]. NCAD Gallery, (9th February –13th April 2012). Exhibition and public seminar presenting the work of a number of Irish artist led initiatives, embodying new approaches to production, distribution and display, as a perceived counter to mainstream and institutional practices. <http://gallery.ncad.ie/index.php/2012/02/newecologiesofpractice/>

43 Parts of this section are paraphrased from Philip Napier’s artists’ talk in The Void, Derry, (10th March, 2012.)

44 Parts of this section are paraphrased from Declan McGonagle’s, ‘Remembering The Future’; an upcoming text on Napier’s work.

45 *ibid*.

46 *ibid*.

47 *ibid*.

48 *ibid*.

49 Mathias Albert, ‘Territoriality and Modernization’, *Institute for Global Society Studies*, (2001). http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/soz/iw/pdf/albert_3.pdf

50 Richard Kearney, ‘The Irish Mind Debate’ in *Navigations: Collected Essays 1976-2006*, (New York: Syracuse, 2006) p19.

51 Vivian Mercier, *The Irish Comic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962) p173.

52 Richard Haslam, citing Conor Cruise O’ Brien, ‘A Race Bashed in the Face: Imaging Ireland as a Damaged Child’, *Jouvert*, 4: 1 (Fall 1999). <http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert>

53 Dr. Róisín Kennedy, ‘Made in England: The Critical Reception of Louis le Brocquy’s A Family’, *Third Text*, Vol. 19, Issue 5, (September 2005), pp475-486.

54 Liam O’Dowd, ‘Neglecting the Material Dimension: Irish Intellectuals and the Problem of Identity’, in *The Irish Review*, No.3 (1988), pp8-17. Considers the roles played by intellectuals in debating Irish communal and national identity and investigates why material circumstances have been ignored in cultural studies worldwide; applies Michael Foucault’s definitions of traditional and specific intellectuals when examining intellectual criticism of Irish society, North and South, while comparing the focus on abstract traditional debates to the marginalisation of socialist or radical alternatives; refers to theories put forth by Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner and Maurice Goldring.

55 *ibid*.

56 The so-called peripheral countries of the eurozone are: Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain. However, EU membership has today grown to 27, including northern and eastern countries, the most recent being: Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia in 2004; Bulgaria, Romania in 2007. Until the mid-1990s, Ireland was classified by the EU as a single territorial unit eligible for aid from the Structural Funds (Objective 1). However, by 1999, because of the high levels of economic growth experienced during the previous five years, average GDP for the state exceeded this threshold. Regional disparities in levels of development and well-being were still recognised though, with the Irish government successfully seeking to have two regions recognised as eligible. See: Doris Schmied ed., ‘Winning and Losing: the Changing Geography of Europe’s Rural Areas’, (USA: Ashgate press, 2005).

57 See Fintan O’Toole, ‘Treatment of Ireland a disaster for European project’, *The Irish Times*, (May 2011) <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2011/0503/1224295913381.html>

58 Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi, ‘The Future After the End of the Economy’, *e-flux* journal, (2011). <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-future-after-the-end-of-the-economy/>

59 Fintan O’Toole, ‘Treatment of Ireland a disaster for European project’, *The Irish Times*, (May 2011) <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2011/0503/1224295913381.html>

60 William Wall, ‘This shameful sacrifice of Greece to the gods of the market’, *Irish Left Review*, (February 2012). <http://www.irishleftreview.org/2012/02/13/shameful-sacrifice-greece-gods-market/>

61 EVA International 2012, Press Release March 2012, <http://gallery.limerick.ie/Events/evaInternationalAftertheFutureMarchAnnouncement.html>

62 Simon Sheikh, ‘In the Place of the Public Sphere’ <http://www.societyofcontrol.com/research/sheikh.htm>

63 Tempered as it is by Anthony Davies’ observations in ‘Take Me I’m Yours: Neoliberalising The Cultural Institution’, *Mute* Vol 2, No.5 - ‘It’s Not East being Green: The Climate Change Issue’, (2007). <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/take-me-im-yours-neoliberalising-cultural-institution>

64 Steven Connor, ‘Fly’ (London: Reaktion Press, 2006) p184.