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### Curating, cultural capital and symbolic power: representations of Irish art in London, 1950-2010

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**0044: Dislocated Speech, Silence and Curatorial Narratives**



**Fig. 5.1** Frances Hegarty, *Turas*, 1991, video still

Entering a darkened room, the viewer walks across a series of small light boxes embedded in the floor, forming a pathway. The light boxes show fragments of text in the Irish language submerged in water, which seems to increasingly “reclaim” the text to the point of its eradication. At the end of the path, there is a large screen at floor level showing a sparse interior vignette of an adult daughter and her mother (Fig. 5.1). A book is passed back and forth between the two in silence, making tangible that an act of transfer is taking place. A soundtrack can be heard in which the mother speaks, repeating the same sentence again and again. The daughter tries to imitate the sound of the speech, but she fails at every attempt. The mother’s speech is fluent, natural. The daughter’s attempt at the correct intonation is laboured and clumsy. The words are similar but they are never the same. The mother closes her eyes. She seems to focus all of her energy on the task of making her child speak but it is no good. The daughter fails, again and again. The transfer is interrupted when the daughter stands up. She walks towards the camera and the scene is blocked out before the scenario starts to replay again.

This installation was exhibited in *Distant Relations* with a view to shedding light on diasporic issues relating to the Irish in Britain. Its title, *Turas*, is the Irish word for journey. Yet the title, like the content of the conversation, remained unintelligible to the non Irish-speaking viewer. In a later interview, Hegarty explained what is being spoken:

The sound is me asking her repeatedly, in Irish, if she can return my language to me, and she says, “Of course I can give you your Gaelic. I absolutely believe that I could give you your language back again.” (Murray 1999: 84)

Reflecting on the linguistic transfer taking place Monica Ross has commented:

In *Turas* Hegarty re-enacts the prehistory of the passage of every child from the space of maternal intimacy into language – the primal split which forms our cultural identity and where the loss of one is the gain of the other. *Turas* layers an additional scene over this primary instance. We are made aware that something traumatic has occurred, that the mother and daughter are more than symbolically separated. (2004: 26)

Ross identifies how the scene of transfer is also a scene of loss, but not just in the Lacanian sense that entry into language entails losing an original unity (with the mother). She observes that Hegarty has undergone both a linguistic and a physical displacement, with emigration relegating her primary entry into language – her mother tongue – from her conscious memory:

In her spare reconstruction of this intimate dynamic, the artist makes something much larger and more complex plain – the cultural dilemma of Ireland and all those subject to its diaspora. The effect of this second splitting of the personality in language is both a symbolic and physical experience of migrants. The task of representing the grievance of such cultural partition, particularly where it has been enforced, is announced by *Turas* as the journey which all of Hegarty’s works undertake. (26)

Ross’s observation of this loss as representative of Irish diasporic experience is insightful, but it requires some qualification if justice is to be done to the full complexity of the work and to the particular cultural paradigms it draws on. Firstly, as Patricia Palmer clarifies elsewhere, “mother tongue” and “native language” are not necessarily synonymous in the Irish context, despite Irish being the official language of

the state since Independence (2001: 1). As most Irish emigrants already speak English as their first language, Hegarty's experience is thus not generally representative of "the cultural dilemma of Ireland and all those subject to its diaspora," as Ross contends. It is rather the expression of a minority who still speak Irish as a first language.

Hegarty's experience as a native-Irish-speaking migrant is more strongly evocative of the waves of emigrants who left Ireland in the famine era, most of whom were from rural Irish-speaking areas. This reading was enhanced in earlier versions of the same work that included footage of a physical journey from the port of Derry on the River Foyle – the departure point of Hegarty's emigration and of thousands of emigrants in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – to its source in Donegal. The artist's frustrated attempts to return to Irish, a pre-Anglicized mother tongue, can be read as an embodiment of the impossibility of a return to "origins" from a migrant perspective, but also from a postcolonial perspective, because of the wider loss of Irish as a lingua franca during the colonial period.<sup>188</sup> Ireland's heterogeneous political history is in fact embedded in the linguistic one. The artist's voice politicizes the perceived speech act by simultaneously evoking a colonial history and the contemporary moment. In the Northern Irish context, where Irish-English, Ulster Scots and Irish are spoken, Irish has been used as a language of political resistance and Sinn Féin and Republicans argue for the preservation of Irish as the link to two thousand years of Gaelic continuity (Palmer 2001: 1).

The discrepancy between Ross's account and a historical explanation of Hegarty's lived experience firstly draws attention to the differential positioning of emigrants, which breaks down the potentially homogenizing force of the notion of Diaspora. It invites us to consider the inherent tension in *Turas* between the common understanding of language as expressive of national, regional or racial identity, which is inherently bound up with certain values, and a more political view of language as a tool in the creation of a community. We have seen Hegarty speak Irish from a culturally

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<sup>188</sup> The loss of Irish as mother tongue of the nation was initiated by British colonial imposition of the English language in the Elizabethan era but is popularly associated with the first occasion of mass emigration of Irish people during the Famine era (1830s) when, under British rule, half of the population died or emigrated (Palmer 2001; Carroll 2003). Clair Wills suggests that the more complete picture is of the English language proceeding by means of "prestige and active consent," rather than domination by coercion and passive consent, in line with Gramsci's theorization of hegemony (1991: 24). For members of the Young Ireland movement of 1848, the project of creating one linguistic community was thus akin to creating the nation, and transcended the potentially divisive effects of class, urban/rural populations, social status etc. (Lloyd 1987: 71).

alienated position in *Turas*, removed from her “authentic” identity. The implicit but undemonstrated second half of this linguistic scenario would be to consider Hegarty as an English-speaking artist in the British context. She would appear to be a native English speaker, but in the absence of any defining features, her Irish accent and dialect vocabulary would be the most obvious marks of social and cultural difference. *Turas* hints at the almost imperceptible scene of translation that opens up when emigrant Irish artists speak in the London art world. It suggests that there is a gap between the artist’s apparent ability to speak and the lived conditions for the production of discourse.

I see this (obscured) scene of translations as indicative of a wider phenomenon within the art world; namely the assumption that all artists can “speak” and be heard in the international art world. On close inspection, the apparent freedom to speak is troubled by the difference between producing discourse and producing a discourse which will be heard and recognized as legitimate. I want to pay attention here to how the symbolic power relation between speakers engenders the social conditions of the possibility of establishing (art) discourse. *Turas* provides a departure point from which to consider the voice and the relationship between speech and art discourse production. This chapter focuses on the symbolic aspects of artists having a voice, as well as the physical voice, which, I wish to articulate, embodies history linguistically.

*Turas* cannot be exhausted in a single reading. We can recall Jacques Lacan’s account of nostalgic longing for the time before the daughter’s symbiotic relationship with the mother is interrupted, leaving a permanent trace in her psyche. As Ross’s reading had intimated, this psychic trace is also a linguistic trace that might be attributed to the national level. Writing about the video’s transition from land to language, Hegarty writes:

[T]he Mothervoice offers itself as an alternative, a repository of knowledge and a fund of cultural energy with which to resist the effects of displacement. In *Turas*, the daughter’s relationship to the Mothertongue is not only gendered but predicated on a genealogical link with the maternal body. There is also an analogy between the separation from the mother and the emigrant’s trauma of lost access to both language and the physical landscape. (Ziff 1995: 119)

Hegarty’s emphasis on the maternal relationship that precedes the speech act reminds us that speech is also tied to the body. The loss of the mother tongue is also a physical loss

which goes beyond the loss of a linguistic register to affect all of Hegarty's artistic output. In a catalogue interview Hegarty intimates that despite using her own body as a point of focus throughout her oeuvre, she cannot use her own voice: "The only place where I have a problem with that is my voice. When I've used it, I'm unable to do that" (Murray 1999). This loss of voice affects Hegarty deeply at the level of production. Her practice at large is marked by this absence of self-voice.

Barthes' understanding of Kristeva's notion of the *geno-song* comes to mind: "the space where significations germinate 'from within language and in its very materiality'" (1977: 182).<sup>189</sup> Barthes makes specific reference to the "materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue" or what he names the grain of the voice. For Barthes, this "grain" was an individual voice imparted in the "very precise space ... of *the encounter between a language and a voice*" (1977: 181). As Hegarty repeats her mother's language, her disconnection from it becomes apparent. She lacks the "grain of the voice" to bind it to herself. Barthes refers to the *geno-song* as "that apex (or that depth) of production" which is deeper and to be distinguished from "directed communication, representation (of feelings), expression etc." (182).

Hegarty seeks out this "grain of the voice." Rather than considering her identity as potentially hybrid, Hegarty seems to ground the possibility of identity on the recovery of an original or authentic identity. In the catalogue interview, she speaks of her "growing awareness that in order to reclaim what I knew and gain access to my culture and its literature, I would have to reclaim/relearn my mother tongue" (1999: 37). The insistent possibility of recuperating an authentic national identity through language detracts from the ambivalent status of (Irish) emigrants in the conception of the national "we" in Ireland and in England.<sup>190</sup> At the same time, however, the gaps, silences and slippages in *Turas* hover towards acknowledging the impossibility of the translation, pointing towards a radical deconstruction of the notion of the unitary subject. Hegarty sees the relearning of her lost mother tongue as a necessity, but equally, the laboured and painstaking attempts and the frustrations felt during the re-acquisition point to the

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<sup>189</sup> Kristeva distinguished between "pheno-text" and "geno-text" to emphasize the continuum of effects that passed between the formation of the speaking subject and the works produced by him or her. In *Revolution of Poetic Language* (1984), she uses these terms to analyze how the subject's relation to the maternal body and the social order manifests itself in the form and content of a poem.

<sup>190</sup> This drive towards a homogenous identity also replicates the ways in which the conception of a shared language, race and identity in the setting up of the Free State suppressed difference in its conception of Irishness.

implicit violence of the action. What is meant to be natural is re-introduced in what finally appears to be the most unnatural manner, despite and infringing upon the mother-child relationship. In this way the scenario also anticipates the distance between Irish emigrants to England and their anglicized children, which is more than a generational gap. Hegarty's wish for a return to authenticity reflects the difficult birth of the notion of a hybrid identity, "second-generation" Irishness being a contested and largely invisible identity in Britain and Ireland alike (Gray 2006; Walter 2008).

Artist and writer Shirley McWilliam, who interviews Hegarty in the catalogue, comments on Hegarty's momentary inhabitation or possession of spaces in a number of recent video works. Hegarty responds: "But not in a way that leaves a permanent mark, because that's part of the political landscape that I'm trying to avoid or trying to avoid speaking of" (1999: 80). Although it is merely a passing comment, her stated attempt "to avoid speaking of" what is nevertheless present, alerts us to the fact that her childhood loss of voice is compounded by a kind of self-censorship of her adult speech as an Irish artist in London. I am interested in the intertwined relationship between these two occasions of loss of voice – the absence of this unheard voice in the art work itself, as well as in the discourse that is produced around it.<sup>191</sup> I wonder if there is space in curatorial narratives to hear these kinds of silences and to address the work in question with regard for the wider social and cultural phenomena it evokes.

In this chapter, I want to consider these questions in relation to an exhibition from 1999 entitled *0044: Irish Artists in Britain*, which, in contrast to *Distant Relations*, celebrated what it described as the "transnational" position inhabited by Irish artists living in London. Hegarty was selected to participate in this exhibition, for which she chose to exhibit *Auto-Portrait #1*, a video work dealing with her self-image. In this chapter I will bring her earlier work *Turas* to bear on the multi-layered speech acts surrounding the *0044* exhibition as a whole.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> See also Alison Kooistra (2008) for an analysis of the relationship between being seen, having a voice and embodying identity.

<sup>192</sup> In his review of the exhibition for *Iconophilia*, William V. Ganis referred to Frances Hegarty's video installation, *Auto-Portrait #1* as "the exhibition's literal and emotional center," with the loud soundtrack actually giving the exhibition a pulse, while presenting a self-image without a voice. He writes: "*Auto Portrait #1*, 1999, is a narrative sequence of strobes increasing in cadence. The artist claws at herself until under increasingly bright light she becomes skeletal and dematerialized. Later in the sequence, Hegarty mimes her rematerialization, grabbing substance from the void and putting herself back together as the strobe tempo slows" (Ganis: 1999). *Auto-Portrait #1* is the first of three self-portraits Hegarty makes around this time. In the second one, she includes a distant voice that is not her own and in the third, her

In chapter two we observed that Le Brocquy did not protest against curatorial reframing of his national identity as English, and with it, the reframing of important aspects of his work. His silence was seen to be a strategy of advancement and a mark of ambivalence regarding his national identity. In this chapter I will negotiate the interplay between the authority of the curator, social opinion and artists' own reflections on their practices and artistic identities in more depth, using artists' interviews from the catalogue, the curatorial essay, a related interview with the curator and wider critical response to issues surrounding Irish emigration to Britain. My aim is to examine how the symbolic power relation between speakers engenders the social conditions of the possibility of establishing discourse.

In the absence of other visible markers of identity, Irish people's use of regionally varied dialects is collapsed in the English context into a perceived "Irish accent" which typically triggers stereotypical associations, which are "embedded in English culture, available to be drawn on in specific contexts" (Walter 2008: 174). The digits in the exhibition title *0044* refer to the telephone dialling code for the UK, a title which refers to the artists' position as interlocutors between the two countries, with an emphasis on speech. Following in the conceptual footsteps of *Turas*, I will examine the potential gap between the migrant artists' apparent ability to speak or produce discourse and the submerged gaps and fissures that operate in response to the social conditions for the production of discourse.

The exhibition offers an unusual opportunity to examine the relationship between ordinary speech in the form of artists' interviews and the production of a more official discourse through the artists' works, the exhibition as a curatorial act, and through what the artists and curator say about those works. The exhibition concept itself begs questions about the often contradictory relationship between curatorial conceptions of migrant artists as, on the one hand, metropolitan intellectuals and, on the other, members of a diaspora and potentially an embodied "history of the present within the *longue durée* of colonialism-nationalism" (Radhakrishnan 1993: 764). We will observe that the artists' voices awkwardly inhabit the indeterminacy between the double status

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own voice becomes present. Sharon Kivland describes how, in the work "this liberal act of speech produces what appear to be undesirable side effects, which in their turn have an effect on the supposedly curative flow of speech. She clutches at her throat, plucks at her dress. ... Her breathing is rushed. I hold my breath; my chest hurts. The words suffocate her and there is no respite from remembering (2003: 13).

of metropolitan professional and postcolonial diaspora, which leads towards sketching out a grey area between national and transnational discourses.

For this study I look in particular to Pierre Bourdieu's analysis in *Language and Symbolic Power* (2003). Bourdieu criticizes linguists like de Saussure for approaching speech "as if the *capacity to speak*, which is virtually universal, could be identified with *the socially conditioned way of realizing this natural capacity ...*" (2003: 54). He argues rather that the linguistic competence necessary to produce grammatically correct speech in no way qualifies the speaker for the production of legitimate language that is "likely to be *listened to*, likely to be recognized as *acceptable* in all the situations in which there is occasion to speak" (2003: 55). This social capacity to speak is drawn from the *habitus* and thus the social conditions for the production of legitimate discourse involve long-term cultural narratives, with the meaning and value of speech determined by history. Having seen the Irish transition to whiteness in the last chapter, this explains for example why Irish accents might be admired in the U.S. context but are considered to be of low cultural capital in the former colonial Motherland (Walter 2001a; 2008). The structure of these linguistic relations depends on the symbolic power relation between the two (or more) speakers on an individual level and on the level of national discourses.

### **The Exhibition**

*0044: Irish Artists in Britain* has been one of the few contemporary art exhibitions to explicitly engage with the emigration of Irish artists.<sup>193</sup> By doing so, the exhibition also broke wider silences within Irish cultural discourse, where the accumulative cultural affects of emigration have been rarely, if ever, discussed, despite emigration being one of the most defining characteristic of Irish society (O'Sullivan 1994). The exhibition confronted a specific silence about the privileged position of London-based Irish artists on occasions of national representation abroad. As a former commissioner of Irish representation at the Venice Biennale, Murray was interested in using *0044* as an occasion to reflect on this situation. As internationally-oriented displays like the Irish pavilion at the Venice Biennale did not tour to Irish venues until recently, this work generally went unseen in Ireland and *0044* provided a significant opportunity to change

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<sup>193</sup> *Distant Relations* and *Diaspora Project* were the only two exhibitions addressing this subject to date. See Ziff (1996) and Hardy (1994) respectively.

this situation. The exhibition also toured to the U.S., where it was shown among other venues at the prestigious P.S.1 gallery in New York as well as at the Albright Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, whose assistant curator Claire Schneider had aided the overall selection.<sup>194</sup>

In his curatorial essay, Peter Murray outlined that the twenty artists represented in the exhibition did not constitute a group in any formal sense of the word. He perceives them collectively because of their places of origin and location, being “for the most part ... born and raised in Ireland, and now liv[ing] and work[ing] in and around London” (1999: 9). The artists were mostly in their thirties and forties, having been making art professionally for a decade or more. Two-thirds of the artists were women. This reflected the fact that there has been a higher number of women emigrating from Ireland than men in most decades since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the centrality of women artists to Irish art discourse in the 1990s (Gray 2004: 1). The P.S. 1 press release further illuminated that the exhibition aimed to address “issues of identity and mobility among artists moving between two countries.” The artists were said to explore the theme of transnationality, which the title allegedly referred to. Murray suggested that the high regard for emigrant artists in Irish selection processes might be attributable to the perception that their work was more “connected” to the international art world, or what appears to be the British art world specifically. He emphasizes that migrant Irish artists are “instrumental in *defining* the visual arts culture of Britain today” (1999: 10, emphasis added). *0044*’s reframing of emigration as a success story resonated with a wider reframing of Irish culture in which “crises in the nation-state [we]re recoded as opportunities in the global village and “[w]hat would have been seen as emigration mutate[d] into ‘working abroad’” (Merriman 2005: 493).

If we compare the narrative emerging in *Turas* and *Distant Relations* to the curatorial narrative surrounding *0044*, a tension emerges between two apparently conflicting readings of the subject position of the Irish emigrant artist in Britain. On the one hand we find a successful metropolitan subject choosing a lifestyle and on the other a contemporary embodiment of historic narratives of colonisation and migration.

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<sup>194</sup> The exhibition opened at P.S.1 and ran from June 20-Aug. 29 1999 before touring to Albright Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, Sept. 17-Nov. 8 1999, Crawford Municipal Art Gallery, Cork, Ireland, Nov. 1999-March 2000, and Ormeau Baths Gallery, Belfast, April 2000. It was the inaugural exhibition in the new Exhibitions Wing at the Crawford Municipal Art Gallery.

Both readings homogenize what is in fact a very diverse experience. The range of contemporary migrant positions undermines homogenizing definitions of diaspora, which fail to distinguish between degrees of mobility, levels of attachment, access to resources and forms of cultural capital. The participating artists have differentiated degrees of privilege and career mobility and their individual histories are varied.

Mo White is the only artist who was born in Britain of Irish parents and has always lived in Britain, while Frances Hegarty moved there at the age of eight. Of the rest, six moved for undergraduate study, a further six for postgraduate study and the remainder in mid-career. Over half of the artists moved to London in the 1980s, the most recent period of mass out-migration from the Republic of Ireland (Gray 2003: 4). Still living in London in the 1990s, they are seen to embody the new entrepreneurial spirit associated with the Celtic Tiger. It is now cool to be Irish in Britain, we are told, and emigrants' success stories take centre stage, despite the statistics that most Irish emigrants to Britain still had no third level education. Far from being "caused" by the "adventurous spirit" of individualistic and upwardly mobile adults, Jim Mc Laughlin observes that "Irish emigration has always been a social response to structuring processes operating at the level of the national and global economy" and continued in this vein during the Celtic Tiger period (2000: 320).

Murray's exuberant claims about the artists' defining presence might be identified with one particular success story – namely Mark Francis's inclusion in *Sensation: Young British Art from the Saatchi Collection*, exhibited at the Royal Academy the previous year. This breakthrough, after sixteen years of study and professional practice in Britain, was followed by a series of international exhibition opportunities that certainly earned Francis the reputation of being well connected internationally. There are four other participating artists whose success is conspicuous, not least Siobhán Hapaska, who also studied in Britain, who has shown at the I.C.A., the Serpentine and the Whitechapel, and was included in Documenta X. Kathy Prendergast, who completed her M.A. at the Royal College in London, has exhibited at the Tate Gallery, the Royal Festival Hall and the Camden Arts Centre, as well as representing Ireland at the Venice Biennale. John Gibbons, who studied at St. Martins in London, is also well regarded within British sculpture and has had solo exhibitions at the Serpentine and Taylor Galleries. Andrew Kearney, who did his M.A. at Chelsea, won

the Barclay's Young Artists Award at the Serpentine Gallery and has had a solo exhibition at the Camden Arts Centre. For the majority of the *0044* artists, exhibiting in London means participation in group shows in small galleries with varying levels of reputation.<sup>195</sup> A few have occasionally been represented in more high-profile venues.<sup>196</sup> In general, access to more prestigious or state-run institutions has been limited to Irish-themed exhibitions, such as Frances Hegarty's participation in *Distant Relations* at the Camden Arts Centre and Paul Seawright's inclusion in *Contemporary Irish Photography* at the Royal Festival Hall.

Bourdieu points out that one of the few forms of transmission of cultural capital that is relatively autonomous from the bearer of cultural capital is the academic qualification, which acts as a certificate of cultural competence, regardless of the holder (1986: 247). It is perhaps not surprising then, that educational institutions, including London's most prestigious art colleges, appear to be the main means for Irish artists to enter the London art scene. Yet, as Bourdieu warns, the economic and social yield of the educational qualification depends on social capital (connections), usually inherited or via existing acquaintances, which can be used to back it up (1986: 243). While the continued importance of college ties in one's artistic career is not in itself unusual, it does seem that, despite their relative success, the artists have difficulty in widening their professional circles. For example, artist Tina O'Connell, who continues to rely on the network she built up during her M.A. at Chelsea, describes herself as having a "low profile" in London.<sup>197</sup>

The *0044* exhibition started out with a rather different working title, "Mind the Gap," which seemed to point to the potential disconnections within the artists' complex inhabitations. This earlier title better evoked the artists' absent presence in the Irish art world, their disproportionate representativeness of Irish art abroad and the possible

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<sup>195</sup> These include Central Point Gallery, Camerawork, Chisenhale Gallery, Anthony Wilkinson Gallery, Victoria Miro, 291 Gallery, Frith Street, Paley Wright, Cubitt Street Gallery, Cole and Cole, The Tannery, Dirama Gallery, The Showroom, and London Artforms.

<sup>196</sup> Notably Nicholas May has been included in group exhibitions at the Royal Festival Hall, the Tate Gallery and the I.C.A., while Elizabeth Magill has been included in group exhibitions at the Whitechapel and the Serpentine galleries.

<sup>197</sup> For those who have not done a Masters in London, the situation is more difficult. Daphne Wright has had two solo exhibitions in London in the eight-year period since her graduation from a Masters in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. In the *0044* catalogue she describes how, having arranged her first London exhibition, no one came. "It was a disaster because no-one saw it ... The first time, I knew nobody. There are so many shows in London, you need to know people" (1999: 172).

disjuncture between the reception of their work in the British and Irish contexts. When Peter Murray invited the artists to participate, their overwhelming response was one of concern, however. The artists were anxious that the exhibition might highlight their ethnicity or nationality in any way. This reaction might have prompted a deepening of the curatorial engagement, prising open potential conflicts between national and transnational art discourses. But it might equally have meant that the show would not go ahead, depending as it did on the artists' involvement. Murray responded to the artists' resistance by reassuring, "I want the exhibition to be about the artist's voice and not about some curatorial concern" (Allen 1999: 31). Despite this intentionally self-effacing curatorial departure point, a decisive curatorial narrative becomes necessary to resolve the tension between this opportunity for self-expression and the silencing of identity discourses that must be put in place to facilitate the exhibition. We are asked to consider the artists as articulating "universal positions" as "independent" artists and the shared diasporic status of the artists is not mentioned in collective terms, despite the focus of the exhibition on migrant artists.

Bronwen Walter talks about "diaspora" entering the vocabulary of the Irish population most clearly through President Mary Robinson's inaugural speech of 1990 in which she introduced the keynote theme later elaborated as "cherishing the diaspora" (2001: 11). Yet, it has remained a rather contentious term; enabling a more inclusive definition of Irishness on the one hand and being criticized for its exclusionary functions on the other. Academics like David Lloyd have critiqued its applications in the U.S. context, where it is said to enable privileged Irish to "jump on the ethnic bandwagon" (Walter 2001: 13). In the British context, Breda Gray has argued that the term homogenized both gender and class, implicitly referencing transnational privileged classes and excluding working-class female migrants (Walter 2001: 14).

Roger Waldinger and David Fitzgerald point out that what is otherwise referred to as "transnationalism" in discourse addressing immigration is usually its opposite; namely "highly particularistic attachments antithetical to those by-products of globalization denoted by the concept of 'transnational civil society' and its related manifestations" rather than attachments "extending *beyond* loyalties that connect to any specific place of origin or ethnic or national group" (2004: 1178). This appears to equally be true of *0044*, in which the use of the term "transnationalism" forecloses a

discussion of hybrid identities and migrant subjectivities that might put pressure on the terms of identity used within Irish and British art discourses.<sup>198</sup> The term sidesteps rather than addresses the artists' positions in social and artistic discourses. It forecloses symbolic conflict over canons of the kind that we have seen emerging tentatively in chapter one with Orpen and disavowed in chapter two in relation to Le Brocqy and Bacon.<sup>199</sup>

The reasons for the *0044* artists' concerns about reference to their nationality are not directly stated but it is implied within the catalogue essay that they stem from a general awareness of the pitfalls of recent identity politics in limiting the range of meanings in their work. This makes sense, given the backlash against identity politics exhibitions in the international art world in the years leading up to *0044*. However, national identity played a different role in British art discourse than elsewhere. This was due to the centrality of a group of artists who became known as the yBa's (young British artists).<sup>200</sup> Murray suggests that "one of the defining characteristics that united the artists of what has become known as the YBA ... phenomenon is the same adamant refusal to be defined or viewed in terms of ethnicity," sameness here referring to the *0044* artists who are said to do likewise. Rather than rejecting identity, however, the yBa artists are known for their ironic redeployment of national identity. They have been credited with a reinvention of derivation and the recasting of roles and stereotypes (Legge 2000).

The significance of the yBa's was partly in their role as barometer of a wider political backdrop in which what "British" represented came under pressure from many sides. Within England this pressure came from minority ethnic groups and the integrationist project of the European Union; within Scotland and Wales from demands for devolution and within Northern Ireland from the entry of Sinn Féin into the

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<sup>198</sup> The relative absence of hybridity as a means of analysing Irish identity stems from wariness about the dangers of a possible cultural relativism that is at odds with the strategic necessity of adopting British/Irish binaries in oppositional politics (Kirkland, 1999: 213).

<sup>199</sup> This avoidance also means that the Irish art world does not have to acknowledge the extent to which British facilities and funding have supplemented the resources of the Irish art world, particularly until the Celtic Tiger economy. See also Cotter (2006).

<sup>200</sup> The yBa phenomenon originated in 1988 when a group of 16 students from London's Goldsmiths College took part in a self-organized exhibition called *Freeze* at a warehouse in the London Docklands. The term Young British Artists is derived from shows of that name staged at the Saatchi Gallery in London from 1992 onwards, which brought the artists to fame. Key artists included Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin, Mark Wallinger, Michael Landy, Gary Hume and Sarah Lucas.

mainstream political debate and the emergence of the peace process (Hickman 2007: 20). The contradictory relationship between these various factors is foreclosed in *0044* through a particular reading of the transnational to mean *beyond* national discourses. Nevertheless, closer inspection of the artists' interviews suggests that national identifications continue to inform their work, both negatively and positively.

If we look at the contents of the exhibition, one of the striking aspects of the art works is that they make very few references to Irish culture on a visual or conceptual level. In the P.S.1 press release, Murray is quoted as saying "Any visitor to *0044* who is looking for familiar or stereotypical views of Ireland is likely to be disappointed." However "familiar or stereotypical views of Ireland" are not the only possible way for artists to engage with their cultural backgrounds, despite a common association of Irishness in the Irish art world with hyper-visible content. What I have in mind is a more complex engagement with location as a network of social, cultural and political discourses, both historical and contemporary. There are other ways of reading the absence of traces of the artists' national origins. Bourdieu argues that artists' typical denial of national belonging should be regarded as a strategy of advancement. He also points to a further operation of self-censorship in the case of an unequal exchange rate for the cultural capitals of those in question (1977: 655). The lack of Irish references in the exhibited works raises the question of whether these artists can speak in Britain as Irish (or Northern Irish) artists. It seems to me that many of the issues raised in *Turas* regarding the gap between the apparent conditions for speech and the lived reality operated more generally within the production and reception of Irish art in 1990s London. I look more closely now at the conditions for the production of discourse as experienced by one artist, Daphne Wright, before considering how her observations shed light on the conditions for the production of the exhibition narrative as a whole.

### **Language and Critical Reception**

Daphne Wright is the only *0044* artist who reflects explicitly in her interview on the relationship between her artistic practice, the conditions for production and the reception of the work in the London context. Born in the Republic of Ireland, Wright had moved to England ten years earlier to do her M.F.A. at Newcastle-upon-Tyne Polytechnic. She had been actively engaging with identity issues in her work as an

undergraduate at Dublin's National College of Art and Design, but it was not until she moved to England that she perceived her own subject matter in this way. This reflects the kind of new perspective Murray identifies as opening up through emigration, which can lead to a more engaged practice. However, in Wright's case, she also felt compelled to engage with identity by staff on the M.A. course. In her catalogue essay she recalls:

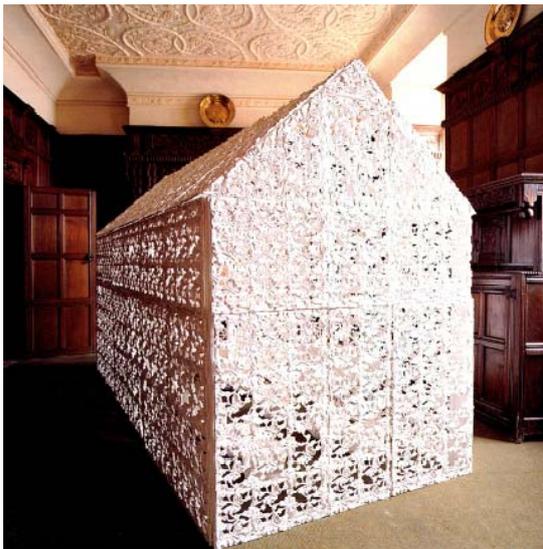
[E]veryone that wasn't white, everyone that was black or from somewhere else was made to look at themselves. The white British students get on with their art, the other students get on with the problem! (1999: 173)

Following her graduation, Wright found that this engagement with identity had negative repercussions for the reception of her work. She comments "I hate saying this, but people don't look any further at the work; they slot you into a pigeon-hole when you discuss the research."

This dismissive reception was not only a consequence of the demise of identity politics discourse, however. Wright became wary of how any attention to her Irish nationality affected the reception of her work. In England she now says "Don't put me in as the Irish artist" because "anything that's a peculiarity in the work will be put down to being Irish. I look at all those pieces now and I want to delete the language." In fact, Wright changed her artistic language almost entirely as a response to this reductive reception. In the 0044 catalogue two images of Wright's installations are displayed on facing pages: *Still Life: The Green House* (Fig. 5.2) from 1995 and *Indeed, Indeed* (Fig. 5.3) from 1998. To compare the two gives us an idea of the kind of visual vocabulary formerly used by Wright and the current work in which the language has been "deleted." Although her strategies of artistic adaptation have quite specific political motivations, they give us an example of the kind of change of artistic tack that can occur when an artist immigrates to a country with a field whose discourse is of relatively higher symbolic capital than the field in their nation of origin.

In *Still Life: The Green House* Wright was searching for a visual language that referred to her own background. She chose to use plaster casts of Georgian house decoration, associated in Ireland with the Protestant Big House and Church of Ireland

culture.<sup>201</sup> She was aware of the irony of people assuming that, as a Protestant, she must have grown up in such a house. In reality the only way in which she connected to this architecture was through her experience of living in run-down bed-sits, made by splitting such a house into thirty or forty segments. In *Still Life: The Green House* she tried to subvert the visual language of the Big House. She made replica panels of the plaster decoration and used them to construct a “glasshouse.” The glasshouse contains what appear to be plaster rocks, recalling the saying “people in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones.” Given the standard meaning of the phrase to warn that people in vulnerable situations shouldn’t criticize, the architecture which in Ireland is associated with a holding of (colonial) power thus returned subverted as a position of vulnerability. Up close, the “stones” are in fact plaster casts of cabbages, which reverts the greenhouse to its horticultural function, yet simultaneously undermines expectations by presenting a rather common vegetable in a highly ornate setting.



**Fig. 5.2** Daphne Wright, *Still Life: The Green House*, 1995 (left)



**Fig. 5.3** Daphne Wright, *Indeed, Indeed*, 1998 (right)

Both readings seem to allude to the tenuous position of Protestants within Irish culture. The title *Still Life* also conjured up the stasis of cultural relations within the

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<sup>201</sup> The Big House refers to the houses of the Protestant landowners, whose distant forefathers in the 17<sup>th</sup> century would have been English and Scottish colonial settlers, who moved to Ireland to secure British rule.

postcolonial nation, while the subtitle *The Green House* further mingled two cultural and political heritages – the Protestant Big House and green, the national colour of Ireland. The work begs questions about the heterogeneity of Irish identity, about cultural hybridity and the possibility of holding power in one relation while being subordinate in another. As such, it points to the multiple contradictions of Anglo-Irish relations, past and present.<sup>202</sup>

In *Indeed, Indeed* from 1998, the visual language which Wright earlier found most suitable to describe her own cultural predicament is nowhere to be seen. In its place has come a kind of anamorphic aesthetic. The surfaces of the organic structures have been covered, wrapped in a layer of aluminium foil, a material she later refers to as having a kind of autistic language of its own (Curtis 2006: 6). The silvered surfaces have become hardened, refractive, unlike the porous and fragile plaster exterior of *Still Life: The Green House*. The presence of the structures is rather overwhelming, reaching over three and half metres in height. The addition of small foil gulls at various points of the surface reinforces the viewer's sense of being a diminutive presence in an overwhelming landscape. Up close, a theatrical male voice can be heard emanating from the structures, reciting a rhyming verse that revolves around the phrase "Dead indeed. I was dead indeed."<sup>203</sup>

The contradiction between the animated speaking voice, the message conveyed by the voice and the static impenetrable forms is significant here. The narrator is present but absent and strangely non-emotive, given the message being communicated. Wright comments that she has tried to remove the "nuggets of emotion" that were available in the earlier constructed spaces. In the catalogue interview she says:

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<sup>202</sup> Wright read widely on postcolonial issues at the time and I wonder if she was aware of Indonesian novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer's use of the glasshouse as a metaphor for the total surveyability of the colony, cited by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*, an issue that returns in Wright's heightened self-consciousness of her own surveillance in the British context. Ananta Toer named his novel *Rumah Kaca* – literally The Glass House (Anderson 1991: 184).

<sup>203</sup> The chain verse goes as follows: "Deed'n deed'n double deed, Dead indeed. I was dead indeed. Like a penknife at my heart; When my heart began to bleed. Dead indeed. I was dead indeed. Like a penknife at my heart, Dead indeed. I was dead indeed. Deed'n deed'n double deed, Dead indeed. I was dead indeed. When my back began to smart. When my heart began to bleed. Dead indeed. I was dead indeed. Like a penknife at my heart. I was dead indeed. When the door began to crack, like a hickory at my back. Deed'n deed'n double deed. Like a penknife at my heart. When my heart began to bleed. Dead indeed! I was dead indeed. When my back began to smart" (O'Regan 2006: 44).

The big silver coils in *Indeed, Indeed* are like icebergs, with the voice of the man saying, "I'm dead." It's this thing of detached emotion. It's a very removed piece. (1999: 169)

Wright's explanation of her own work prompts consideration of the relationship between the art work's occupation of space and her position as an artist in social space. She mentions that she no longer allows herself the "privilege of being in a complete emotion, of being enraged or whatever." She explains that, "For people to live around one other, to move around one another, that luxury is not possible, not allowable" (1999: 169). The position of *Indeed, Indeed* in space is, in the artist's words, "very removed." The surface of the aluminium foil is reflective, throwing the viewer back on their own image rather than encouraging intimacy. There is a disjunction between superficial appearances and what lies within. The jagged anonymous forms of the icebergs create distance. The work suggests an uncomfortable presence, bound up with a kind of absent or frozen emotion, curtailed self-expression.

Without collapsing the distinction between the distance embodied in the work and Wright's negotiation of her sense of place as an artist in London, I would like to draw parallels between the two. Bourdieu emphasizes that cultural capital is not only objectified or institutionalized, but also embodied in persons "in the form of what is called culture, cultivation, *Bildung*" (1986: 244). This capital is acquired through the *habitus* and depends on the cultural capital held by the family in particular. Bourdieu elaborates that the position occupied in social space is very closely linked to this cultural capital and especially "the self-assurance given by the certain knowledge of one's own value, especially that of one's body or speech":

The practical "science" of positions in social space is the competence presupposed by the art of behaving *comme il faut* with persons and things that have and give "class" ("smart" or "unsmart"), finding the right distance, by a sort of practical calculation, neither too close ("getting familiar") nor too far ("being distant"), playing with objective distance by emphasizing it (being "aloof", "stand-offish") or symbolically denying it (being "approachable," "hobnobbing"). (2006: 472)

He calls this practical way of experiencing and expressing one's own sense of social value "bodily hexis" (2006: 474). This sense of finding the right distance pervades *Indeed Indeed* in a very direct manner. If we look now at Wright's reflections on her

interaction within the London art world, we will see that the artist's bodily *hexis* and its relationship to her linguistic capital in particular also play out in other areas of her professional life.

Roland Barthes reminds us that while the artwork travels far from the body, the speech act is irrevocably tied to the body, "narcissistically retained" by the body (1977: 204). This is typically an uncomfortable retention for the Irish artists. Wright, for example, feels confronted with her own Irishness on occasions when she is asked to give an artist's talk. Having avoided explicit references to her identity within her work, Wright finds that on occasions when she must be physically present her voice becomes a giveaway of her Irishness, with similarly negative consequences. In the catalogue interview she elaborates:

I resent when I put up a show and people hear an Irish accent or the press release says you're Irish, and people then use simplistic language to explain your work. It makes your work read one-dimensionally ... If you're asked to give a talk on your work, you categorise yourself by being Irish. I refuse to do them, or I don't speak; I play a sound piece. It doesn't follow that your accent would make your work political.

Wright is a native English speaker. Yet when she opens her mouth, her accent is the striking feature that exposes that she is *almost but not quite* English, an ambiguous status I have examined in relation to Orpen in chapter one. Wright has the linguistic competence necessary to produce grammatically correct speech, but her social capacity to speak is drawn from her *habitus* and the relation between Wright as an Irish artist and her implicitly British audience.

Writing during the French occupation of Algeria, psychiatrist Frantz Fanon commented that even when a speaker from a dominant nation speaks another language badly, one can nevertheless not forget that "he has a language of his own, a country, and that perhaps he is a lawyer or an engineer there ..." (1986: 34). For the postcolonial subject speaking the language of the former coloniser, there are other associations. The embodied memory of origins in the Irish voice relates not to cultural authority, but to a history of colonial plurilingualism. It recalls the act of mimicry inherent in the adoption of the mother tongue of the colonizer. Regardless of the contemporaneity of her work and regardless of the conscious intentions of her audience, Wright's voice will evoke

archaic references and stereotypical discourses that will almost inevitably lead to simplistic responses.

Wright's unease in the face of public confrontation is in tension with her relative success within the field. Yet previous experiences have alerted her to the kind of auditory surveillance that will operate when she speaks. Homi Bhabha's explanation of the psychology of colonial surveillance comes close to conveying the dynamics of what is taking place here:

This process is best understood in terms of the articulation of multiple forms of belief that Freud proposes in his essay on fetishism. It is a non-repressive form of knowledge that allows for the possibility of simultaneously embracing two contradictory beliefs, one official and one secret, one archaic and one progressive, one that allows the myth of origins, the other that articulates difference and division. (2004: 115)

Wright recognizes that, regardless of the content of her work, she will evoke "myths of origins" or arrested forms of Irishness, through the act of speaking alone. Refusing to speak is no solution, however, because her silence would confirm the audience's (and possibly even her own) subconscious anticipation of her inability to produce a legitimate discourse. Without Wright's explicit reconstitution of the narrow associations of Irish culture, a stereotypical understanding of Irish culture as such will inevitably be presupposed, producing a reductive explanation of her oeuvre. This is an example of the kind of occasion where culture-as-such must be presupposed for an explanation of an individual work, as I discussed in my concluding reflections of chapter three on the necessity of undermining the teleology of representation. I would argue that this kind of situation can only be resolved by a simultaneous breakdown of the teleology inherent in representation and a radical reconstitution of the implicit definition of Irishness within nationally-framed exhibitions.

Bourdieu comments on how prolonged inequality in the relationship between the speaker and the audience has the potential to become "the root of a sort of permanent linguistic insecurity" for the less dominant speaker. Although it is entirely unintentional on the part of the dominant interlocutor, "the supervision and censorship of the dominant language exert a constant pressure." The common response is a sort of self-censorship:

By “watching their tongues,” the dominated groups recognize in practice, if not the supervision of the dominant (though they watch themselves most closely in their presence), then at least the legitimacy of the dominant language. This disposition towards language is, at all events, one of the mediations through which the dominance of the dominant language is exerted. (1977: 655-6)

By “watching her tongue” and thus accepting the status quo, Wright perpetuates the inequality between Irish and English culture. Like Hegarty, Wright’s work in general becomes informed by this issue of the self-voice. While Wright censors her voice in her public performances, she sets up a slippage of register between self and voice in her sculptural works.

In many of her subsequent works, Wright creates a juxtaposition of a sculptural environment with a soundtrack of a speaking voice that is usually Irish. She tries to convey the gap between the voice as an expressive vehicle and a displaced organ by only using the first-made recording of the narrator reading the material. In a manner that has distinct parallels with Coleman’s *A Ploughman’s Party*, the “I” in Wright’s narrative thus does not collapse into the subject of the work. It critiques the surveillance of the voice by providing a voice that confounds the system of accumulating knowledge through listening. Writing about her motivation for this approach, Wright comments:

What I am trying to achieve is the quality of bad animation or of poorly dubbed films, where you see the mouth moving but the voice is in a different place. I find that a really compulsive condition. I suppose that’s how I look at the relationship between the sculpture and the voice. You have a sculpture before you but the mouth is in the wrong place; the voice has gone in another direction. I find that a very poignant place to position the work and the viewer. (qtd. in Morrissey 2006: 12)

The poignancy of the image of the mouth “in the wrong place” takes on wider social meanings when it is read against accounts by a number of other 0044 artists on the negative receptions of their voices in social space, as we will see below.

Bourdieu observes that in terms of voice, accents become the main source of symbolic capital or what he specifically calls “linguistic capital.” He explains that pronunciation and diction provide the surest indices for social placing, because “the memory of his or her origins, which may be otherwise abjured, is preserved and exposed” (1977: 659). This phenomenon emerges in the accounts of a number of the

other participant artists. For example, when asked in the catalogue interview about his immediate reception in London as a young art graduate in 1980, Northern Irish artist André Stitt comments on how his accent made him feel inferior:

I did feel a lot of low self-worth, like I was some kind of third-class citizen. This was always made very obvious by the way one spoke. (1999: 145)

Stitt experienced this situation as a form of moving down the class ladder. His observation sheds light on a wider dynamic of a historical and contemporary linking between working-class identity and Irishness, with the two being seen as synonymous. Bronwen Walter explains that “at an individual level Irish accents may trigger this association, drawing in middle class Irish people” (2008: 175). Walter also refers to a slippage between ethnicity and class in England. When Limerick-born artist Tina O’Connell reflects on her experiences of anti-Irish racism in her catalogue essay, she tellingly finds it necessary to assert both her whiteness and her class position:

I take no more notice of it than the man in the moon. In comparison to other people, it’s the tip of the iceberg, because basically I’m white and middle class, and if I don’t open my mouth I can get away with an awful lot. (1999: 124)

Keeping her mouth closed to avoid racism, O’Connell too “watches her tongue.”<sup>204</sup>

In his catalogue essay Murray recalls O’Connell’s response as a sign of Irish artists taking no notice of what, he suggests, is a petering out of anti-Irish racism. Although Irish accents became more popular in the British media in the 1990s, the

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<sup>204</sup> An exhibition entitled “*Conquering England*”: *Ireland in Victorian London* held at the National Portrait Gallery, London from 9 March to 19 June 2005 set out to revise the assumption of the working-class background of Irish emigrants during the Victorian era. Differences in the approach of the two curators, Roy Foster and Fintan Cullen, were evident in their catalogue essays. Cullen uncovered neglected perspectives: “Apart from refocusing attention on the artistic, literary and political contribution of the Irish to Victorian London, it is hoped to reclaim a number of forgotten individuals and groups, many of whom have been sidelined due to gender and/or lack of a distinctive voice.” An implicit reversal in power relationships rhetorically echoed in the exhibition title (a quote from playwright George Bernard Shaw) returned more problematically Foster’s description of the emigrants’ successes. He described for example how “Irish people colonised central areas of London metropolitan life in the Victorian period” and to “Irish writers who colonised whole areas of the journalistic world” as well as to how Yeats and his circle of Irish authors “had colonised and dominated the Irish Literary Society.” This implied that the success of a class of Irish petit bourgeoisie compensated for or became equivalent to a kind of Irish colonisation of London, a claim made all the more problematic because of the contested relationship between the Victorian rule and the Famine, which many historians claim far exceeded that of a natural disaster alone and amounted to genocide by the British colonial government (2001).

wider impact on the low cultural capital associated with Irish accents is slow to be felt. Even in the late 1990s O'Connell finds it necessary to keep her mouth shut. Irish emigrants occupy a complex position within the social constitution, benefiting from their whiteness which is perceived as making them more easily assimilable. This undoubtedly affords a level of protection from certain kinds of racism, as O'Connell indicates. Nevertheless, the shrinking of the discourse of race into the black/white binary also leads to a forcible inclusion of the Irish within the "white" category, which discounts the very real "auditory" racialization that typically follows the English reception of Irish accents and reinforces racism as colour-based.

### **Emigration**

In his review of the *0044* exhibition at P.S.1, William V. Ganis writes that:

The theme that runs through the show is a sense of alienation that occurs, not so much through manifestations of identity politics, but from the disembodied representational stance and the artists' psychological estrangement from being cultural outsiders. (1999)

More accurately perhaps, the sense of alienation that occurs from the psychological estrangement brought about by emigration is intimately tied up with aspects of identity politics that evoke the contemporary political situation and recall a colonial history in complex ways. Despite the overall emphasis of the *0044* concept on connectivity, Murray does revisit the initial departure point for the exhibition which had emphasized this perceived alienation common to many of the works. In the *0044* catalogue, he reaffirms that underneath the proposed concept of connection and personal success stories lay more complex areas of disconnection and implicit cultural failures:

[T]he concept of this exhibition is much less to do with ethnicity than with examining the dislocation that occurs when people move from one country to another, a move which brings them in contact with a different environment. It focuses on how artists react to that jolt and how it influences their work. If there is a theme to this exhibition, it is not about Ireland or England, and the interminable political wranglings that constitute their relationship at a political level. It is about the personal fractures, faultlines and dislocations, less significant perhaps on the grander political stage, but that nonetheless constitute the reality of people's lives and the attempts made to repair damage from these traumas. (1999: 9)

In an interview held prior to the exhibition, Murray had also highlighted the potentially productive shift of consciousness brought about by emigration, which seemed to explain why Irish artists in London passionately explored ideas artists in Ireland only toyed with (Allen 199: 30). In the exhibition catalogue artist Maud Cotter, who had been living in London for five years at the time of the exhibition, emphasized the analytic distance that emigration affords her:

Exile is fantastic. It's the neutrality of it, and the fact that you can look back on yourself. You get to a point where you can remove both from where you are and where you came from. But something about it was that I never felt as fully engaged with Ireland as much as I did when I was in London because you are free of the context, so you are totally free to examine it. (52)

It is interesting that Cotter (like Murray) uses the term “exile” rather than emigration or diaspora. It seems to emphasize the individual nature of the experience, evoking the romantic artist outside of society. It brings focus to the personal in disassociation from the social or political.

In his essay, Murray cites Cotter's reference to London as a “neutral” location. The personal is seen in dissociation from the political “fractures, faultlines and dislocations.” The politicization of self-identity that accompanies Irish migration to Britain falls out of this equation. Yet “Irish identity is ‘political’ in England” and, as Murray later mentions, all particularities and political allegiances tend to be flattened in the process (Gray 2006: 215). Research shows that many immigrants from Ireland overlook this reception in the early years in a wish to assimilate, underplaying incidents of racism or discriminatory passing comments in the process (Kells 1995: 32). However, on the long term, emigration also changes one's relationship to the national because what has been described as “the alienation effect” forces emigrants to relativise their original condition. This starts at the personal level but with time, it often facilitates a greater shift in cultural consciousness and, being made to feel conscious of one's nationality daily, a greater sense of oneself as a political subject. Although writing in the rather different context of Algerian emigration to France, sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad's description of this process is insightful:

[E]migration authorizes a new social, and therefore political, world-view, a new representation of [the emigrant's] relationship with the world, and of

the position he occupies within it. ... Whereas the old attitude, which was historically and culturally determined, made him seem deeply attached to the colonized condition, which was perceived – and how could it be otherwise? – not as a product of history, but as a sort of natural “given”, he now discovers the historicity of that condition; in other words, he ascribes to it an origin, a social genesis and, therefore, a historical meaning. (2004: 91)

In the case of immigration from Ireland to Britain, this raises questions about received ideas about the relationships between the two nations, past and present, and the location of one’s own complex affiliations in relation to them. Significantly, John Carson and Paul Seawright, the two artists in *0044* who make explicitly political work, both comment on how their migration facilitated a shift of consciousness that led to greater interest in the political. Let me elaborate on how this influenced their artistic production.

Belfast-born Seawright’s migration to Britain to study at the age of eighteen or nineteen sparked a new interest in politics. In his catalogue interview he recalls:

Up until that point I had never really made any photographs about the political situation, and leaving made me hungry for information about the conflict. I started collecting political books, texts, all kinds of stuff, reading material I would never have read if I had stayed in Ireland. When you’re close to something you’re not interested in it. (1999: 137)



**Fig. 5. 4** Paul Seawright, *Gate: Belfast*, 1997, C-print on aluminium,  
Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin

Seawright is best known in Ireland for subtle but powerful photographs engaging with the urban landscape marked by the Troubles. He comments in the interview that he has deliberately avoided making work in Ireland in recent years to deal with more generic issues that go “beyond” this specificity. *Gate: Belfast* (1997) (Fig. 5.4) is an example of his location-specific work, being one of a series depicting physical barriers that divide Protestants from Catholics in public space in Northern Ireland. The gate fills the whole image, occluding the horizon line and creating a sense of unease, while the star-shaped structure vaguely recalls the British flag. Seawright’s less identifiably Irish works include the *Untitled (from Missing Series)* (1997) in which apparently innocuous landscapes are presented; however, through the title and an uncanny tension within the framing of the images, the viewer is led to suspect that something has happened here.

Seawright suggests that his own discomfort at the inclusion of Irish references in his work seems to be shared by most of the artists in *0044*:

I don’t know what work people are showing, but when you look at the list, in a strange way the majority of the people are not dealing with Irish issues directly. I even feel uncomfortable about that myself, which is why recently I haven’t been making work in Ireland. I’ve been making some work out of Ireland, making a point that some of the issues I am dealing with are generic issues that go beyond the specificity of Ireland itself. (1999: 140)

The artist does not elaborate on why this might be the case. However, closer inspection of his C.V., presented in the catalogue, suggests that his success in Ireland, the U.S. and mainland Europe has not been matched to date in London, despite having lived there for over 15 years. Although Seawright is free to speak about Irish subjects in his work, it appears that the price of that dialogue is a blocked mobility in the London art world. On the two occasions that he has had solo exhibitions in the London context (both at the Photographer’s Gallery), the first exhibition entitled *Police Force* bore no relation to Northern Irish politics, while the second, *Orange Order*, explicitly represented Unionists. In retrospect, it seems that his later strategy of eliminating specifically Irish references also paid off for Seawright. Three years after *0044* he was commissioned by the Imperial War Museum to document the aftermath of the war in Afghanistan. In the

following years the range of sites for his photographic works and his scope of exhibition venues seem to have grown accordingly.<sup>205</sup>

In fact none of the artists whose careers are most successful in London have explicit Irish content in their work. Let us consider for example Siobhán Hapaska, whose successes had included a solo exhibition at the I.C.A. and group shows at the Serpentine and Whitechapel galleries. She has also represented Ireland at the Venice Biennale. In her catalogue interview, Hapaska does not mention any explicit choice to eliminate Irish references in her work, but she states that the inability to identify the origin or precise meaning of her work creates a sense of dislocation that is important to her. In *0044* she exhibited three fibreglass sculptures, whose opalescent surfaces have been polished to perfection. *Want* (1997) and *Hanker* (1997) were wall-mounted works that resembled high-tech components blended with the anonymity of minimalist sculpture. The most recent work, *Land* (1998), was placed on the ground and sprouted tiny plants, but its aerodynamic shape and celestial blue surface suggested escape rather than rootedness. The form was based on the stylised silhouette of a motorbike lying on its side but it recalled rock formations in its form and smoothness and through the small circular indents that resembled rock pools. For emigrant artists, the subject of land is often an emotional one, yet Hapaska's sculpture invites no personal narratives as such.

In her catalogue interview Hapaska discusses *Mule* (1997) (Fig. 5.5), an earlier sculpture that resembles a racing car the wheels of which have been replaced by tufts of fake donkey fur. *Mule* also emits the sound of an approaching storm, of shells exploding and of a mule braying. When her interviewer comments that her works are not silent but “seem to be constantly murmuring,” Hapaska responds:

No, they definitely are not silent. It's more like they have concussion or slight amnesia, as if they've been traumatised by a former existence and an inability to understand what is required of them. (1999: 73)

In her response, the artist distances this state of amnesia or trauma from her self, overriding the possible association of the sound of shells exploding with her youth in

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<sup>205</sup> Having moved away from the specificity of his earlier Irish works, some critics have raised questions as to whether Seawright's later works, which can be appreciated purely in terms of classic Modernist notions of aesthetics, serve to engage or distance viewers from their underlying issues. See for example one blogger's discussion of this shifting relationship in his Afghanistan series and his Invisible Cities project (Hugh: 2010).

Northern Ireland. She refers in passing to “the suffocating history flowing beneath the skin of the object” but does not elaborate on what this history might be. To borrow a phrase from philosopher George Steiner, the “semantics of remembrance” are denied by her will towards amnesia, yet the work nevertheless seems to act as a response to what the artist refers to as a “former existence” (qtd. in Palmer 2001: 1).



**Fig. 5.5** Siobhán Hapaska, *Mule*, 1997

*Mule*'s opalescent surface has been polished to perfection. When Hapaska's interviewer makes reference to one critic's suggestion that the “neurotic perfection” of her surfaces might represent a fear of expression, the artist replies:

The reflective surfaces safeguard against a saturation of memory and overload. I wanted to keep them fresh. I wanted them to be self-contained and self-sufficient. The surface creates a sensual boundary between the internal life of the object and the person. It was important to eradicate my presence from these objects. They were not meant to be about me. I wanted to give them their own life, as if they had just arrived from somewhere. (1999: 73)

There appears to me to be a tension between this stated wish to eradicate her presence, to ensure against a saturation of memory and the traces of her subjectivity in what she

describes. While meaning to express detachment, her words recall the emigrant's difficulty with balancing attachment and independence. Sayad explains that the condition or paradox of the emigrant is that "he [goes on] being present despite his absence" in his country of origin (2004: 125). Although Murray emphasizes the positive aspects of this double inhabitation, it is not necessarily wanted by the artists. Hapaska intends her surfaces to "safeguard against a saturation of memory and overload." She wants to eradicate her presence from the objects, to make them appear as "just arrived from somewhere" rather than having a place of origin.

In the interview, Hapaska does not draw parallels between her art works and her position as an artist in social space, but whether or not it is a conscious choice, the titles of many of her recent works seem to act as keywords of diasporic experience. Consider for example *Land* (1998), *Heart* (1995), *Here* (1995), *Hanker* (1997), and *Stray* (1997). Furthermore, *Mule* seems to me to embody the different temporalities embedded in the 0044 artists' lived realities. Its opalescence and aerodynamic shape communicate the desire to escape, to be weightless, placeless and timeless, while the donkey fur undermines the potential speed of the object, insisting on physicality, rootedness and slow labour. Hapaska refers to the "push and pull" of the idea of progress and the memory of motionlessness. There is a palpable tension between the difference paces within *Mule*, from the speed of the racing car shell to the slowness of the beat of burden evoked by the fur and the sculpture's title. The use of fake fur seems intent on reminding us of the inauthenticity of nostalgic memory. It stands in for the past rather than claiming to represent it.

Bourdieu uses the term "hysteresis" to describe a similar disjuncture in temporalities, particularly when the habitus lags behind the material conditions that gave rise to it and with which the habitus has to catch up:

The categories of perception that agents apply to the social world are the product of a prior state of this world. When structures are modified, even slightly, the structural hysteresis of the categories of perception and appreciation gives rise to diverse forms of allodoxia ["misapprehension"]... representations of present reality that do not account for new realities.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> (Bourdieu 1996: 219). In its original scientific context, the hysteresis effect refers to the physical phenomenon whereby there is a time lag between the actual reversal of a magnet's poles and the point when that reversal begins to take effect, the different ends of the magnet now repelling north or south where they once attracted these poles (King 2000: 427). Bourdieu highlights that "the hysteresis of habitus, which is inherent in the social conditions of the reproduction of the structures in habitus, is

It seems to me that the artists represented in *0044* are also caught in a hysteretic position. In keeping with the habitus of their place of origin, their rhetoric is susceptible to interruption by moments of alienation when they conduct their speech from a subordinated position that is at odds with their professional status. The curatorial discourse that frames the artists in *0044* appears itself to be caught somewhere between the national and a shifting sense of transnationality in keeping with global developments and Ireland's newly acquired place on the global economic stage. This negotiation between the national and the international recalls aspects of the *A Sense of Ireland* exhibitions as well as *Distant Relations* in many respects. Yet there is a marked attempt in *0044* to leave behind a nationally-oriented conception of artistic belonging by way of the concept of transnationality. I want to look at the relationship between the national and the transnational in more detail before examining wider implications of understandings of transnationality for curatorial discourse more generally.

### **Transnationality?**

Before discussing transnationality in relation to the artists' status, I would like to pause to consider what the term "transnational" really signifies. The prefix comes from the Latin preposition *trans*, which means "across, to or on the farther side of, beyond, over." This provides alternative meanings: going *beyond* national boundaries or interests, or working *across* existing national boundaries or interests.<sup>207</sup> The first understanding of trans-national is therefore close to the term "postnational," implicitly rendering nations and nationalities obsolete, while the second is closer to the term "international." It leaves nations and nationalities intact but acknowledges a close network and high level of exchange between them. The exhibition title, *0044*, seems to refer to this sense of "transnational." It acts as a metaphor that emphasizes the artists'

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doubtless one of the foundations of the structural lag between opportunities and the dispositions to grasp them which is the cause of missed opportunities and, in particular, of the frequently observed incapacity to think historical crises in categories of perception and thought other than those of the past, albeit a revolutionary past" (2005: 83). See also Bourdieu's discussions of hysteresis in relation to education (2006: 142).

<sup>207</sup> Transnationalism is defined as "Extending or having interests extending beyond national bounds or frontiers; multinational" (OED 1989).

connection to both locations.<sup>208</sup> However, as Derrida reminds us, there are often gaps between what the speaker intends to say and what his or her words are nevertheless constrained to mean. If we examine the title further, we will find that it evokes many points of contention embodied in the exhibition as a whole.

Murray tells us that the *0044* title “derives from the telephone dial code between Ireland and Britain,” but it is rather the international dialing code used to access Britain from many places in the world. (The Republic of Ireland has its own international dialing code, 00353.) The implication that Ireland and Britain have their own communication code, separate from the rest of the world, unwittingly reveals something of the claustrophobic cultural relationship between the two nations. It also gives a sense of one-way traffic from Ireland to Britain. Although the abstract nature of the numbers in the title give the appearance of impartiality, renouncing in advance any form of political engagement or comment, further examination shows that politics nevertheless lead a clandestine existence. Murray’s and the P.S.1 press release’s explanations of the title overlook that the same dial code must be used to access Northern Ireland from within the Republic of Ireland.<sup>209</sup> This “detail” introduces the Northern Irish situation, troubling a depoliticised conception of transnationality. It calls for an answer to the same kind of prior methodological problem to be resolved that we saw the curators of *A Sense of Ireland* faced with in 1980, namely “how to deal with present history and its immediate prehistory?” (Radhakrishnan 1993: 758).

If we look further to the curatorial essay in the catalogue, we find multiple occasions where references within the text foreclose, but nevertheless bear testimony to the presence of symbolic struggle. Murray describes the artists as being “for the most part ... born and raised in Ireland” for example, and in doing so raises the question of whether the artists born and raised in Northern Ireland are also included in his reference. Are they British, Irish or both? Elsewhere, in the subtitle of the exhibition, *Irish Artists in Britain*, it is implied that the artists born in Northern Ireland are indeed conceived as

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<sup>208</sup> The P.S.1 press release framed the title differently, by acknowledging that it was the international telephone code for Britain, and suggesting that it thus communicated the transnational identity explored by the artists in their work. However, this claim contradicted the fact that that the works had not been selected in terms of any formal connections to each other. In fact, as we have seen, what they have most in common is their shying away from reflection on identity, transnational or otherwise.

<sup>209</sup> As on many borders, the arbitrary nature of geopolitical division can be experienced first-hand in many places in Northern Ireland where one can stand on one side of the road and be within a *00353* network area (Republic of Ireland) and then cross the road to find oneself in a *0044* network area (Britain).

Irish. Moreover, despite Murray's interest in a relational understanding of identity, Irish-born artists in Britain are also seen as necessarily retaining their Irish identity. This forecloses analysis of their (future) assimilation into the British canon or a consideration of how a relational understanding of identity might come to bear on canon-formation. The contradiction between the concept of transnationality and this reinstatement of one fixed national identity and location is left unconsidered. Research on middle-class emigrants from Northern Ireland and the Republic alike attests to a far more contradictory sense of belonging that is based on interests as well as affective ties and that typically changes depending on the context (Kells 1995: 8-10).

There are a number of occasions in the curatorial narrative when a train of thought appears to be halted before it reaches its likely conclusion in political discussion. Murray observes, for example, that artists from Northern Ireland are most likely to feel a sense of cultural alienation:

[T]he artists are activated by a strong sense of place ... However, this sense of place may not necessarily be translated into a sense of belonging. In some cases with these artists, there is actually a sense of being alienated from one's homeland, even while living there. This is particularly evident in the consciousness of the artists who were born or grew up in Northern Ireland. (1999: 10)

The reader is provided with no means by which to consider how we might conceive the relationship between this sense of alienation and such events as the Troubles, despite Murray's specific reference to artists from Northern Ireland. There is furthermore no sense that cultural alienation might relate to postcolonial cultural conditions.

Murray's engagement with the postcolonial relationship between Ireland and Britain is understandably tentative. He attempts to do justice to the complexities of power relations that are too readily flattened by indiscriminating references to colonialism, problematizing the binary of colonizer/colonized. Yet, the final effect comes close to a disavowal of the overall inequality of the relationship. He writes:

A history of colonialism is easier to construct when there is considerable geographical distance or distinct racial differences between the colonised and coloniser. Britain and Ireland are separated by only a hundred miles of sea, both islands have been colonised over the millennia by waves of different races, and so the reality of the relationship between the two islands is complex, with Ireland historically a colonised neighbour but often

complicit in the wider colonial ambitions of Britain England itself emerges finally, not so much as a colonising force, but as a country that has itself been colonised over the centuries, creating a complex web of dominance and submission. (10)

The need for cultural diplomacy in the organization of international exhibitions is unquestionable. However, when diplomacy becomes the driving force of the critical framing of the work at hand, the result is not entirely separable from the effects of prior censorship within the field.

In a move that seems to sidestep issues of identity rather than opening up the kinds of confrontation with identity that migration brings about in different ways for migrants from the Republic and Northern Ireland, Murray stresses the artists' interest in moving beyond national identities. He gathers together quotations from the artists' interviews to demonstrate the apparent predominance of this wish:

Paul Seawright is determined to avoid being "tagged" with national labels: "If you say Northern Irish, it's like you're making a political statement. If you say I'm British, which is what I would have felt growing up – again, another political statement. So it's very, very difficult." Anne Carlisle points out that irrespective of political posturing, the issue of not really belonging is so deeply embedded in the Northern Irish psyche that it has become a physical and mental state in its own right. Echoing the sentiments of Mo White, Nicholas May and other artists in *0044*, she finds it liberating to be nowhere: "I can ask am I Irish or British, or both? Now that's what I call a real 'free state.' When you perceive yourself positively as being nowhere, even though you may not have chosen but inherited that position, you become comfortable about the idea of making connections, because you've got no place to defend." (1999: 11)

The quotations Murray selects all refer to an interest in moving beyond national identities, yet these sentiments are not as generally representative of Irish artists as they are presented. Paul Seawright, Anne Carlisle and Nicholas May all come from Northern Ireland and I consider their attitude to reflect the kinds of engagement with an unstable sense of place we have seen in the work of Belfast artist Philip Napier rather than transnationalism per se. In fact technically speaking, artists from Northern Ireland are migrating within the British nation, so the term "transnational" has limited applicability, except for in its political dimension, which is disavowed here. Mo White was furthermore born in Britain to Irish parents, leaving her with the difficult dilemma of

what she experiences as her second-generation Irishness at a time when such an identity was not recognized in public life.<sup>210</sup> The political tension to which this so-called “transnational” approach forms a response is very far from the lived experience of artists from the Republic of Ireland and does not explain why they also demonstrate ambivalence towards their national identity. Presented together with artists from Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland artists’ ambivalence appears to be a logical response to a direct political context, yet in reality it is the result of a far more contradictory disposition that I associate with postcoloniality.

Let us look again at what we are implicitly asked to assume is a transnational account of artistic reception:

Some of the artists have been chosen (as part of group shows mainly) to “represent” Britain in international exhibitions, thus benefiting both from historical links between the two countries and from a mutually accepted policy of both British and Irish governments that regards domicile as “belonging”. This transfer of identity tacitly acknowledges a relational understanding of identity formation and of the relationship of the individual to society. The artists develop different strategies to deal with this problem of identification. (1999: 11)

In this account, what might otherwise be perceived as the hegemonic subsumption of Irish artists’ identity in the British context is framed as a mark of transnational cultural success. Murray puts the word “represent” in inverted commas, which seems to insist that this representation is merely nominal, rather than having real repercussions. This is possibly intended as a further response to the reluctance of the 0044 artists to represent Ireland in the exhibition. Yet in order to justify the alleged lack of tension, Anglo-Irish relations appear to need retranslating. The curator reframes the postcolonial relationship as “historical links between the two countries,” links which have “benefited” the artists, it appears, although we are not told how. The artists furthermore gain from “a mutually accepted policy of both British and Irish governments that regards domicile as ‘belonging,’” although we are not told how. Yet, Murray paradoxically concludes: “The

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<sup>210</sup> In the 1991 census the options for self-identification were white/non-white, with an additional line on which to add ethnicity if desired. The counting mechanisms used to create the census later discounted this line. It was not until 2001 that “Irish” was added as an identifiable ethnicity, creating the space for second-generation Irish to be British by nationality and Irish by ethnicity (Kells: 1995).

artists develop different strategies to deal with this *problem* of identification” (emphasis added) (1999: 11).

In fact the real problem of identification is that the absence of a recognized diasporic identity has been detrimental to the welfare of Irish immigrants at large, who reported blocked social mobility, alarmingly high levels of unemployment, physical and psychological illness and suicide.<sup>211</sup> Despite forming 11% of London’s population and being Britain’s largest minority, the Irish Diaspora has been structurally written out of official narratives. This followed a long-term policy that the assimilation of Irish in Britain should be based on denationalization as much as an inevitable process of integration (Hickman 1996: 45-55). During the time of the exhibition Irish emigrants were fighting to be recognized as an ethnic minority in order to combat their poor access to social welfare services. This inability for the Irish Diaspora to be heard within hegemonic discourse forms the backdrop against which the artists, problematically, insist on silence. A consideration of this backdrop contrasts starkly with Murray’s rose-tinted reference to how “the history of Irish emigrants living in Britain has been one of social transition. Their movement in economic terms has been steadily towards prosperity, and with that prosperity has come assimilation into the dominant culture” (1999: 12).

While Murray assures that the exhibition will be “primarily about the artist’s voice,” there are occasions when his interest in diplomatic Anglo-Irish relations is challenged by the artists. In particular, John Carson’s work raises the question of whether the artist’s voice will continue to be heard when what it has to say has the potential to create controversy. Out of the twenty artists exhibited in *0044*, Carson is the only one who directly challenges fixed conceptions of Irish identity and associated stereotypes, engaging with the distinction between originating from Ireland as opposed to being an “Irishman,” and playfully engaging with stock images of Irishness. An early work from 1978, that was not included in the exhibition, is a case in point: *I’d walk from Cork to Larne to see the 40 shades of green* was titled after a famous Johnny Cash song. Carson walked 320 miles across Ireland, photographing “anything green – cabbages,

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<sup>211</sup> Research from the late 1990s reported that Irish males suffered an unemployment rate 50% higher than the white average, that they were the only migrant group whose life expectancy shortened on arrival, that they had a 30% higher rate of poor health than their British counterparts, that they were twice as likely to be hospitalized for psychological distress and had a 50% higher rate of suicide. “The Irish Community in London,” London Civic Forum, Voices for London Policy Commission, March 2002.

milk-crates, 'go' signs, industrial complexes, railings, a plastic coat – as a means of radically deconstructing the song's nostalgic sentiment.”<sup>212</sup> In the *0044* catalogue, art critic Mic Moroney described one of his performances entitled *So What* (Fig. 5.6):

One of [Carson's] many surreal juxtapositions was a slide of the veteran Free Presbyterian leader and fomenter of Ulster's Democratic Unionist Party, Ian Paisley, with the word 'PADDY' plastered across him. Carson usually accompanied this with a commentary of how, having come from good loyalist stock, his own inescapable Irishness was starkly brought home to him in London, where he was roughed up in bars on more than one occasion for having the accent of an IRA man. (1999: 36)



**Fig. 5.6.** John Carson, *So What*, 1990, video still from performance

Raised in a Loyalist household, Carson had considered himself to be British until the racist reception of his voice in London made him come to the realisation that he was Irish. This experience appears to be common among Protestant emigrants from Northern Ireland (Kells: 1995). By using the term “Paddy,” the stereotyping reference to all Irish men, to refer to Unionist leader Ian Paisley, Carson turns the derogative reductive terms of British racism back on itself. He breaks the chain of signifiers of Irishness and Britishness, creating space for change, although the political implication of the work is distinctly nationalist.

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<sup>212</sup> “0044: Contemporary Irish Artists in Britain” Press release, Albright Knox Gallery. [http://www.albrightknox.org/Past\\_Exhibitions/1990s/0044.html](http://www.albrightknox.org/Past_Exhibitions/1990s/0044.html). Accessed July 2007 and May 2010.

Barthes suggests that stereotypes can not be transcended but must be confronted in order to be destroyed: “Setting the stereotype at a distance is not a political task, for political language is itself made up of stereotypes, but a critical task, one, that is, which aims to call language into crisis” (1977: 199). Carson does something similar here. He calls the very language of the fixity of Irish identity into crisis and confronts the language of Anglo-Irish relations in the process. Through the alienating effect of emigration, Carson discovers the grain of his own voice, the relationship between language and his voice in all its materiality. Following Sayad, we can see that this experience has authorized a new social and therefore political world-view for Carson and has given him a renewed social capacity to speak. The black humour inherent in Carson’s performance refuses any celebration of Irish nationalism, but its subversive mockery of an entire system of representation is an explosive cocktail in the context of Anglo-Irish relations.

In the catalogue Murray reframes John Carson’s experience as merely an occasion of British misunderstanding of Irish politics, thus undermining Carson’s subversion of stereotypes:

John Carson has also had to confront simplistic British views of Northern Ireland, having been roughed up on occasion in bars for having the accent of an IRA man. (1999: 12)

By not mentioning how this misunderstanding led to a formative proto-nationalist experience, Murray silences the inherent political narratives. This seems representative of the wider silencing of politics in the representation of Irish artists in Britain in 0044. Yet, arguably, Carson’s experience perfectly reflects the “gap” that opens up between self-perceptions, reception and a changing sense of self as a result of emigration.

In an interview addressing the exhibition, Murray had proudly boasted that “a considerable amount of the vitality of the Young British Art scene is actually coming from Ireland” (Allen 1999: 30). Yet he passes over a more specific critical commentary on the points of consonance and dissonance in the Irish and British artists’ work. In fact, Carson’s renegotiation of Anglo-Irish identity makes an interesting point of discussion in relation to yBa artist Mark Wallinger’s *Oxymoron* (1997) in which he recreated the Union Jack in the colours of the Irish flag. Elsewhere, Elizabeth Legge suggests that the yBa’s presentation of a disempowered self was partly the outcome of the interiorization

of postcolonial theory. These British artists, she suggests, cast themselves in a way that is theoretically informed by the presentation of the disempowered colonized other in postcolonial theory. Ironically, as Legge elaborates, the yBa artists occupied their “loss of Empire” seats “with an almost anarchic sense of power,” “produc[ing] a recognizable voice both for the art and its criticism” (2000: 6). Even in their disidentification with power, the yBa artists showed their ability to be heard within hegemonic discourse. This led to a recuperation of their “critique” for a rebranding of dusty old Britain as Cool Britannia. I wonder how the *0044* artists related to this development.

### **Minding the Gap of Transnationality**

Abdelmalek Sayad argues that to associate migration solely with freedom of choice and mobility overlooks the fact that the constitution of migration patterns and the reception of migrants fall under national systems of governance, independent of the will of individuals, however much they are informed by the dynamics of community life. If we ignore this system effect “we surreptitiously erase that which creates the objective truth of the immigrant’s situation” (2004: 162). This observation is relevant to the wider experience of immigrant artists, whose situatedness in relation to national narratives is not acknowledged by their labeling as “culturally diverse” rather than inhabiting a specific positionality vis-à-vis their country of origin and residence. The *0044* artists’ lived experiences demonstrate that being an artist does not cut one off from the range of social and cultural processes experienced by all migrants, although they are experienced in differentiated ways. The *0044* exhibition’s original title, *Mind the Gap*, seemed productive in pointing to the space between fixities. The notion of the gap implicitly makes space for artists’ occupation of different positions – potentially supplementary as well as contradictory – within Irish and British art discourses. It creates space, for example, to talk across the kind of gap that opened up when Orpen’s work was presented in Dublin and London by drawing attention to the ways in which people inhabit identities and social positions in complex and often contradictory ways. To recall Chantal Mouffe once again:

It is only when we discard the view of the subject as an agent both rational and transparent to itself, and discard as well the supposed unity and homogeneity of the ensemble of its positions, that we are in a position to theorize the multiplicity of relations of subordination. A single individual

can be the bearer of this multiplicity and be dominant in one relation while subordinated in another. (2006: 77)

The incommensurability of Ziff's framing of artists in London as inevitably subordinate and Murray's celebration of their definitive presence suggests the ongoing difficulty in doing justice to the tensions as well as the possibilities. The narrative clarity typically expected of curatorial discourses also hampers a more interrogative approach, as I discussed in the previous chapter.

Murray's preference for a new articulation of emigration is understandable, given that the traditional understanding of "a one-way outward flow" is at odds with the artists' mobility and their centrality in representing Irish art in international events (Walter 2001: 11). In his shift to a transnationalism assumed to mean "beyond the national" Murray nevertheless seems to be caught somewhere between the conception of the artist as a cosmopolitan intellectual and/or romantic exile and a conception of cultural deterritorialization. By deterritorialization I refer to the ways in which people now feel they belong to various communities despite the fact that they do not share a common territory with other members (Papastergiadis 2000: 208). Although globalization has become a more tangible experience in the decade or more since 0044 took place, this strain on curatorial narratives seems to persist. Curators very often oscillate between received art historical notions of the artist as an autonomous individual (exile) and contemporary understandings of (collective) processes of identity formation. The often contradictory responses evade the question of whether artistic expression is viewed as an expression of an authentic cultural identity or as an expression of social and political particularity. This particularity can in fact be almost impossible to address in formal terms, thanks to art's traditional denial of its situatedness within particular social and cultural discourses.

In my previous analyses of the work of Orpen, Le Brocquy and Bacon, we have seen how the ongoing rigid separation of national discourses tends to bring about conflicting readings which typically co-exist in different locations. Rather than being negotiated in relation to each other, the reading produced by the dominant nation is generally received as universally valid. In contrast, one might harness the potential of the initial departure point of "Mind the Gap" by reading *across* existing national boundaries. By more fully addressing the double consciousness that is inevitably

constituted through migration, these alternative readings might be negotiated in relation to each other. I mean double consciousness here in the sociological sense of the co-existence of two places of identification for the diaspora, the new field or habitus with which one is confronted through emigration often being read relationally to the field and habitus of origin.<sup>213</sup> A deeper engagement with double consciousness might potentially challenge the unquestioned privileging of readings from dominant nations, making space for minor narratives. This double reading might prompt a re-negotiation of the exchange rate between the cultural capitals of the nations in question. Outside of the ethical and political repercussions of such a move, I contend that trans-national readings might open up a more sophisticated understanding of emigrant artists' oeuvres, past and present.

In order to do so, curators would firstly need a vocabulary with which to talk across the relationship between the artistic, cultural and political, which I have proposed Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus*, field, field of power and cultural and symbolic capital provide. Such a negotiation would also require a much deeper understanding of the psychological processes that are brought about by emigration, which, rather than being a one-time event, might better be seen as an ongoing reconfiguration of one's habitus of origin relative to that of the culture of residence. The reception of Irish artists' work in London demonstrates that this is not the undifferentiated melting pot situation that references to transnational or global identity as being beyond the national seem to imply. Rather, as Radhakrishnan suggests, aesthetic and philosophical paradigms operate hierarchically (2003: 23).

Although the political aspects of the Anglo-Irish encounter colour the reception of Irish art in London in particular ways, I propose that the artists' efforts to adjust their work to the demands of the new context and their subordination of the identity of origin is representative of the broader experience of many emigrant artists today. Research suggests that contemporary artists typically move to a small number of dominant countries (Wu 2009). Inevitably then, they are forced to negotiate their originary

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<sup>213</sup> In the case of the Irish in Britain, it is generally not until the second diasporic generation that this comes closer to Paul Gilroy's (1993) understanding of double consciousness as "both/and" (in this case, both British and Irish, as the 2001 British census made room for). For many Northern Irish this self-understanding had already applied before emigration. Mary Kells confirms this in the mid 1990s in relation to middle class migrants from Northern Ireland with Protestant and Catholic backgrounds (1995: 8-10).

dispositions regarding cultural, social and artistic values, as well as political beliefs, in contexts where the *habitus*, field and field of power in the place of residence is understood to be of higher cultural and symbolic capital. This negotiation process can include responding to a (positive) reception of one's work as exotic, which is nevertheless reductive, failing as it does to secure a place in art history, as we have seen with Le Brocquy in chapter two. It can include the kind of introjection of supervision we have seen in *0044*, because of more specific tensions in the respective histories of the two countries, or solely a sense of lower cultural value, which may or may not be directly linked to a colonial history.

These issues can not be addressed unless the relationship between *habitus* and field (of origin and residence) are made visible; rather than positing the situation in terms of certain artists "having an identity" vis-à-vis a field that is taken to be culturally and politically neutral. Contemporary artists today often address their migratory experiences within their work. Yet their insights and the increasingly sophisticated theoretical understandings of double consciousness they draw on are rarely brought to bear on curatorial narratives surrounding artists who do not take this experience as explicit subject matter. I would like to see this knowledge brought into the curatorial narratives of all exhibitions addressing the work of artists who migrate, whether historical or contemporary. With regard to historical artists, for example, a retrospective of Arshile Gorky's work held at Tate Modern in 2010 comes to mind. In what was otherwise a wonderful display of Gorky's oeuvre, the wall texts tended to interrupt and undermine the complex ways in which the experience of being an immigrant informed the artist's work.<sup>214</sup> The wall texts emphasized formalist readings of the paintings, with

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<sup>214</sup> The social and political implications and references within the artist's work were largely understated in the wall texts, although referred to in the biography presented on a separate wall outside of the exhibition. Curiously, following the initial introductory wall text, the other eleven wall texts replicated the contents of a small pamphlet that accompanied the exhibition word-for-word, with the exception of the following sentence, which was omitted from the wall text: "Although Gorky was politically on the left, and abstraction and radical politics were seen as interlinked, he differed from his friend Stuart Davis in preferring not to combine art and activism." It was the only text that made explicit reference to Gorky's political beliefs. In the wall texts curators Martin Gale, Head of Displays, Tate Modern and Ben Borthwick, Assistant Curator, Tate Modern, made a courageous move, however, in referring to the Armenian pogroms "which are widely recognized as the century's first genocide," a move which prompted critique from the Turkish government. In response, the Tate issued a flyer in which it was explained that the wording in the wall texts had been carefully selected to demonstrate the contested status of the term. The flyer went on to point to discrepancies between the British government's constitution of the pogroms in terms other than genocide and the European Parliament's acceptance of the status of genocide.

selected references to biographical and contextual factors, in standard fashion. Throughout, Gorky's engagement with the European canon is given greater weight than his overt visual engagement with his migrant memory. Wall texts in the "Garden in Sochi" room made reference to Gorky's "general recuperation of his mythic past," which undermines the psychological intensity of some of his best works, inspired by the deep-felt tension and poignant investigation into the relationship between past and present, interior and exterior.<sup>215</sup>

Little insight is provided about the kind of interior processes that follow immigration, which might lead to greater insight into the partly figurative "biomorphic abstractions" referred to. In the "Image in Khorkom" room – Khorkom being the artist's childhood village – there is for example no comment on the subject matter of a number of paintings which incorporate visibly female body parts, as if in an interior renegotiation of woman as archetype, memory and human presence in his life, past and present. The wall text states that these works "seem to allude to Gorky's Armenian roots and experiences, more than a decade after his emigration" with no further elaboration. In fact, Gorky relates these to a specific childhood memory in his published letters. Later inspection of the biographical timeline showed that the painting was begun the year of Gorky's first marriage. Yet the wall text provides no sense of how, for the immigrant, moments of life change like this tend to prompt such reflections on origins, often bringing about an intense reconfiguration of the self.

As many canonical artists originate from less powerful countries, a reconsideration of these well-known artists' migrant status – often subsumed by the identities of the dominant countries where they reside – might furthermore lead to a full realization of the "cultural diversity" or more accurately, the presence of alterity, within the Western canon. While the writing out of non-Western artists from the canon has understandably been given precedence within cultural identity discourses, this

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<sup>215</sup> To offer one example, the wall text in the "Garden in Sochi" room referred to "a magically evoked memory of his father's orchard in Khorkom" before situating Gorky in relation to the European Surrealists in wartime New York. The "magical" evocation seems to divorce the memory from reality, just like the aforementioned reference to a "mythic past." Although Gorky's encounter with the surrealists is an important artistic milestone, the stated "coincidence" between his engagement with migrant memory and the surrealist concern with psychological reality and non-rational images seemed to foreclose reflection on the crucial differences between Gorky's work and that of his surrealist peers. In a tag accompanying *Cornfield of Health* (1944) in a much later room, André Breton is cited in a manner that seems to confirm this differentiation: "Gorky is the only [surrealist] who maintains direct contact with nature" by combining the process of looking at nature with "a flux of childhood and other memories."

revisionism from within and its potential for a redistribution of cultural capitals unevenly accumulated in major canons to date should not be underestimated.

In pointing to the gaps of silence within the speech act in this chapter, I have tried to demonstrate that representation can coincide with enforced absence on other levels. While Spivak's famous question "Can the subaltern speak?" is concerned with subaltern identities that can not be addressed in hegemonic terms, I contend that it is also crucial to attend to a comparable (albeit unequal) "violence of silence" in dominant discourses on major artists' work, which forecloses the space of alterity. This is partly constituted by the oversight of readings from dominant locations, which typically misunderstand what I referred to in chapter one as "minor narratives." *Turas* reminds us that a barely perceptible scene of translation can belie the most apparently simple transfer of knowledge. My proposition of "minor curating" would aim to create space for precisely this kind of submerged alterity. In this globalizing world, the shape of culture is shifting towards flux rather than stability and towards double or multiple locatedness. This makes it urgent to seek out ways in which curatorial narratives can be reconfigured to incorporate new understandings of cultural practice – and furthermore, to creating an enabling space in which new identities might be articulated.