New Ecologies Between Rural Life and Visual Culture in the West of Ireland: History, Context, Position and Art Practice

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Abstract

Can a mode of trans-disciplinary visual inquiry, shifting and subjective, serve as an enquiry into location, an interrogation into the mechanics of belonging, and a reflection upon the relational connections between the local/rural and the national/global?

This thesis provides a critical account of the role of a socially engaged 'activist' arts practice that seeks to address the tension between differing perspectives on place and space in the Burren, Co. Clare, in the West of Ireland. A body of work, *Viscqueux*, is a reflection upon my personal, psychological identification with the landscape of the region. This informed and underpinned two subsequent public artworks, *Cross Land* and *X-PO.* Both projects were catalytic actions that created or revived public space for exchange and collective interaction. *Cross Land* examined the agricultural and natural consequences of changes in landscape regulation and farming practices. *X-PO* is an interstitial space enabling new connections and social exchange between various 'publics' in the locality.

It is a central argument of this thesis that expanded and inclusive definitions of arts practices play a key role in this new formation, producing new understandings of overlooked and often disregarded local knowledge. The research makes use of transdisciplinary and dialogical modes of visual inquiry as a reflexive enquiry into location, an interrogation of the mechanics of belonging and a reflection upon the relationship between the local/rural and the national/global. The thesis describes and sets this project within a particular context, one that reflects upon histories, circumstances, positions and socially engaged arts practices of both local and wider significance. The physical demonstration of this body of work (the thesis) takes the form of exhibition documentation, video, photographic documentation of events, images and paintings together with a written text providing a critical account of/argument about the role of socially engaged 'activist' arts practice in a unique and specific site.

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Author's declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed

Deirdre O'Mahony September 1st 2012.

INTRODUCTION

I Genesis of the Research Project

This doctoral project was undertaken following the completion of my MA in Fine Art Practice at the Crawford College of Art in 2005.[1] A further reappraisal of my practice was required in response to the social and environmental changes taking place in the rural context in which I live in Co. Clare in the west of Ireland. My MA research focused on reframing 'landscape' as an active mode of cultural reflection, and was made complicated by the realisation that the natural ecosystem is rapidly changing. In the course of this MA project my practice began to shift from one centred on painting to a multi-disciplinary practice that was context-specific; by context-specific, I am referring to the critical writing of Miwon Kwon and Grant Kester.[2] A further area of enquiry opened with the development of my public art project for *Ground Up 2* in 2004. This was an introduction to collaborative research practices. (For a full account of this trajectory in my practice, see *Appendix I*.) I was commissioned to further develop this public art proposal at the commencement of my doctoral project in October 2005. My PhD research required that I shift my practice from site-specific to context specific, and it then took another turn, moving to context producer (*Cross Land)*, and then, finally, to context shifter *(X-PO)*.

II Plan and Development

This doctoral project has two components, the visual practice consisting of personal and public arts practice and the written text tracing the development of this practice and framing it within the context of contemporary critical and philosophical theory. The original title of my thesis was *The Trouble With Beauty: Aesthetics, Ecology and The Legacy of the Picturesque in The Rural Landscape of the West of Ireland.* My intention was to:

- examine the psychological legacy of the use of images of the west of Ireland landscape as signifier of a distinct and differentiated, uniquely Irish cultural identity in the formative years of the Irish State, and its effect on the contemporary post-agricultural context of the 21st century.
- produce a body of work for public exhibition which serves to interrogate the picturesque from a contemporary perspective through the representation of hidden narratives of contemporary land use and environmental degradation; the fragile, abject, hidden, 'other' face of landscape.
- research and develop the *Shifting Ground* Partnership project.

Three projects significantly informed and changed both my practice and my theoretical understanding of this field: a public art commission, *Cross Land*; a group of paintings and photographs dealing with water quality, *Viscqueux*, and the *Shifting Ground* project, which researched the role and function of Public Art in Rural Contexts, and which resulted in the *Shifting Ground* conference in October 2006. The research for *Shifting Ground* led to critical consideration of the work of agencies that were actively involved in developing this area of practice, in particular Grizedale Arts and Littoral in the UK. Close consideration of public art practices in Ireland and the regulation of land use informed the programming of a series of the *Shifting Ground* seminars on aspects of art practice in rural contexts (See Appendix 2). The curation of an exhibition for the conference, *Local Local,* developed a further strand in my practice and was also informed by Lucy Lippard's writing. The conference brought together national and international artists, theorists and arts agencies.

The *Ground Up 2* research process introduced the notion of collaborative practice. In tandem with this development I began to research collaborative art practices as a way of publicly interrogating notions of "belonging" and "community", and this initial review led to further research into the writings of Grant Kester, Pierre Bourdieu and Nicholas Bourriaud.

III Re-evaluation of Aims and Objectives

The exhibition *Viscqueux* presented my personal practice within the historically and ecologically relevant location of the Fisheries Tower in Galway. The work was informed by further reading of Julia Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves* and *Power of Horror* and Lucy Lippard's *Lure of the Local*. In October 2006 the *Shifting Ground* conference stimulated a consideration of related issues in public arts practice (Lacy), the relations of collaborative work (Bourriaud) and what Grant Kester has termed 'dialogical' practices.[3] The commission for *Ground Up 2,* re-named *Cross Land*, marked a shift from the site-specific to the context-specific, 'an extension of the discursive virtualisation of the site, at least to the extent that identity itself is constructed within a complex, discursive field.'[4] Informed by my expanded critical understanding *Cross Land* became a more open, relational project and created a space for a public forum on the future development of the region. A clear avenue of further inquiry was a trans-disciplinary praxis, as defined by Guattari in *The Three Ecologies*, that could potentially address the problem of how to sustain both rural communities and the natural environment.

The conference, public artwork and exhibition projects clarified and provided the critical frame for the first stage of this doctoral project. Following their conclusion I re-named my doctoral thesis *New Ecologies between Rural Life and Visual Culture in the West of Ireland: History, Context, Position and Art Practice.* The key question was whether a mode of trans-disciplinary visual inquiry, shifting and subjective, could serve as an enquiry into location, an interrogation into the mechanics of belonging, and a reflection upon the relational connections between local/rural and national/global. Could such an interrogation address the particular social, cultural, environmental and historical circumstances of the landscape of West of Ireland and contribute to the discourse within contemporary international art practice concerning the rural as a new site of artistic experimentation and action in relation to the ecological imperatives of the twenty-first century?

The answer to this question, and the final outcome of this doctoral thesis, was the *X-PO* project.

IV The Structure of the Written Component

The physical demonstration of this body of work, the doctoral thesis, took the form of an exhibition in the Burren College of Art Gallery (15th May – 9th June 2009). The exhibition incorporated archival material, documentary film, paintings, photographs and found objects. It documented the various strands of this practice; public artworks, subjective personal practice and publications. It is a central argument of this thesis that expanded and inclusive definitions of arts practices play a key role in this new formation. This written text and the accompanying documentary DVDs, catalogues and photographs document the process and development of the thesis and set it within local, national and global, theoretical and critical contexts.

PART 1: Landscape and the West of Ireland: History, Conflict and Context

Chapter 1 examines the particular set of power relationships embedded in postcolonial and colonial landscape representations of the west of Ireland, and the use of such representations in reifying a distinct, uniquely Irish, identity in the formative years of the Irish State. The development of a post-Independence iconography of the western landscape is traced and its function as the embodiment of national identity examined. The research is focused on the writings of Yvonne Scott, Sighle Bhreathnach-Lynch, Catherine Nash, Ciarán Benson and Lucy Cotter and their interpretation of the ideological struggle to integrate the internal differences and competing interests of the modernist and nationalist “selves”, which, in my view, has yet to be resolved.

Chapter 2 looks at the specifics of the local context of the Burren in Co Clare and traces the recent history of conflict around differing notions of progress and development in the region. An environmental dispute concerning the siting of a

visitor and interpretive centre in the locality activated environmental and rural development conflict at an international, national, and local level. The chapter deals with the power relations and issues of control and identity made evident by this dispute between the “born-in” (local) and “blow-in” (newcomer) communities in relation to the representations and expectations of place, space and landscape. The particular role of artists in mediating and representing the landscape of the Burren as variously “sacred" and sublime is explored in relation to the problematic relationship between modernist and nostalgic notions of rural culture.

PART TWO: Community, Art and Site

Chapter 3: Concepts of community, aesthetics and politics are examined through contemporary philosophical, political and aesthetic critical texts. The challenges presented by Jean-Luc Nancy’s notion of ‘inoperative’ community, a ‘*praxis* of community’ to counter hegemonic ideas of an organic, tradition-based rural *gemeinschaft*, are thought through and considered in relation to Gilian Rose’s reflection on stratagies of silence as a form of cultural resistance in community arts projects in Edinburgh. Such a community of performed connection is an iteration of inoperative community and a ‘coming together of excess to discourse.’[5] Jacques Rancière’s egalitarian vision of communality is one that allows ‘any body’ to imagine and perform community. His analysis of politics, aesthetics and the relational dynamic between the two presents a possibility for challenging and examining the unacknowledged systems and structures of power relations and hegemonic cultural representations. He offers the dual proposition of the possibility of revealing a ‘common sense’, however provisional, while simultaneously revealing underlying difference, suggesting the possibility of an aesthetic that might actively disrupt notions of what constitutes identity and community in Ireland. It is in that space provided by the aesthetic experience that the political appears, and a *dis*-identification with the sensible occurs. Chantal Mouffe insists on acknowledging the affect and effects of an ‘Us – Them’ dynamic on subjectivities and the dynamic of rivalry between

adversaries. Her concept of agonistic democracy argues that a truly radical democratic society is one in which relations of conflict are sustained, not erased.[6]

Chapter 4: This chapter reflects upon community arts and cultural democracy in rural Ireland and establishes a contextual frame for a reading of three key texts relating to community based, dialogical, social/relational art practices and environmental change: the contribution made by Suzanne Lacy and others to *Mapping The Terrain: New Genre Public Art*; Grant Kester's *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art*; and Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics.* All three texts/writers have reflexively re-framed the social dimension in contemporary art and made significant in-roads in examining the aesthetic and ethical issues arising from public art practice within the broader social sphere. Their writing has been central to the further expansion of the field of process-based rather than object-based approaches to making artworks, and to the understanding and evaluation of my critical practice. The texts are set alongside the arguments they have produced, including the debates around 'aesthetic' versus 'ethical' positions taken up by Kester and Claire Bishop.

Chapter 5: considers the idea of site and context-specificity in contemporary public art practice and some theoretical and practical approaches to engaging with the particular nuances and relational connections between site, community and place. Miwon Kwon's critical and historical analysis of 'site-specificy' is considered in relation to the turn towards community art practice and the deaestheticisation and dematerialisation of the art object. Kwon relocates the idea of a site-orientated practice as a fluid, discursive 'double mediation' between the mobalisation of contemporary life and the specificity of place. Kwon's arguments are considered in relation to Lucy Lippard's idea of a 'multicentred' sense of place, as are the differences between their respective understandings of the restorative and reflective nostalgic impulse. Suzanne Lacy's durational project in the Appalachian Mountains, *Beneath Land and Water - A Project for Elkhorn City*, is considered in depth as a

model of a collaborative project in a rural context. The work raises several pertinent issues: the use of public art to regenerate economically depressed rural regions; the ethical issues arising in durational projects; public expectations and reception; and the political and aesthetic issues inherent in representing the work; and all of this opens the way to considering the visual alongside the dialogical within aesthetic language. Ideas of public art practice put forward by Simon Sheik that relate to a specific, local set of parameters or 'publics', are considered in relation to the fragmented nature of contemporary rural life in the West.

PART 3: Being-In-Common: A New Ecology of Visual Art Practice

Chapter 6: This chapter examines psychoanalytic theory, in particular the writing of Julia Kristeva, and considers the idea of abjection as an active dynamic in the transformation of individual and collective identity. Reflecting on my subjective emotional connection to and identification with the landscape, (via Yi-Fu Tuan's idea of 'topophila') and the interplay between painting, photography and material forms as a means of disrupting idealised notions of landscape and the West, the work opened a space for critical reflection on the subjectivities engendered by competing perspectives on the land/landscape and deals with the development of my painting and photographic practice as a form of critical reflexive inquiry into my subjective identification with the Burren. Lake Inchiquin, close to my home in Co. Clare, was the site of ongoing visual investigation into the relationship between nature and culture and was played out through the issue of water quality. Kate Soper's writing on the need for an empathetic re-sensitisation towards nature and Félix Guattari's "Ecosophy" of the three ecological registers – environment, social relations and human subjectivity – are seen here as disparate lenses through which to view global ecological disequilibrium.[7] Guattari argues that artists have a special position between society and the environment and his writing enabled me to critically situate my 'personal' practice and understanding of identity and alterity in rural Ireland.

Chapter 7: *Cross Land* provided an interrogative frame through which to examine questions arising from landscape regulation and its effects. It was a temporary work, one of a series commissioned by Clare County Arts for *Ground Up*, a programme of context-specific artworks in rural contexts that took place between 2003 and 2007. This chapter describes the social, agricultural and ecological context for the project and its effect on my practice. The project involved site research and consultation with farmers, ecologists and BurrenLIFE between 2006-2007, culminating in a public 'gathering' to publicly discuss anxieties about a development plan for the region. Activating a spatial-cultural discourse between agencies, farmers, scientists, artists, and local inhabitants, the process led to questions about how best to effectively engage different stakeholders in an extended process of collective, and potentially agonistic, reflection on a sustainable future, and prompted the idea for the final outcome of this PhD research – the *X-PO* project.

Chapter 8: This chapter outlines the transformation of the former Post Office in Kilnaboy and its development as a dialogical aesthetic project where 'conversation is reframed as an active, generative process that can help us speak and imagine beyond the limits of fixed identities, official discourse, and the perceived inevitability of partisan conflict.'[8] The project unfolded in three stages: the curation of a programme of artworks by contemporary artists that addressed relevant issues in rural areas; a 'social' activation process; and the creation of archives that related to the personal and collective history of the site, not only to represent, but to work through, and propose 'new orders of affective association, however partial and provisional'.[9] Hal Foster's analysis of the potential of the archive led to further consideration of his ideas on the artist as ethnographer, and the role of archival processes and collaborative art practices that use a process of exchange and dialogue as a form of 'service provision' is examined in relation to the writings of Andrea Fraser.

Chapter 9: The process of collaboration in the collation of three archives is analysed in relation to ideas of aesthetics, politics and representation. The unfolding process of engagement with various groups of participants at *X-PO*

through the creation of archives relating to aspects of rural life, history and essentialising representations are discussed as part of an ongoing, unfolding *praxis* of community through collaborative interactions and public exhibition-making processes reflexively considered with particular reference to the writing of Hal Foster. The presentation of my 'personal' practice in the form of an installation of paintings and photographs is considered and the dialogical potential of exhibition making as a catylyst for activating new understandings of the meaning of place, space and community - an idea of aesthetics based on communication rather than the art object. The thesis concludes by summarising the creative outcome of my practice-based research in relation to this doctoral research, its contribition as a significant contribution to knowledge in the form of a body of creative work and the furthering of my personal and professional development.

1 Deirdre O'Mahony, "Peripheral Vision - Place and Culture in twenty-first century rural Ireland". MA Thesis. Crawford College, Cork, 2005.

2 The thesis will explore the theoretical writings of these authors in relation to site and context-specific practices in Chapter 5 and 6.

3 'A dialogical aesthetic…is based on the generation of a local consensual knowledge that is only provisionally binding and that is grounded instead at the level of collective interaction.' Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) 112.

4 Kwon, *One Place After Another* 112.

5 Rose, Gillian Rose, "Performing Inoperative Community", *Geographies of Resistance* 200.

6 'While antagonism is a we/they relation in which the two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground, agonism is a we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents. They are 'adversaries' not enemies.' Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2005) 20. Qtd. Maria Lind, "The Collaborative Turn", Johanna Bhilling, Maria Lind and Lars Nilsson, eds., *Taking the Matter into Common Hands On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices.* (London: Black Dog Publishing 2007).

7 Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. Ian Parker and Paul Sutton. English Edition. (UK: The Athlone Press 2000)

8 Kester 8.

9 Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse", *October* 110, Fall 2004, 24.

Chapter 1.

The Trouble with Beauty: the West of Ireland and the construction Irish National Identity.

1.1 Introduction:

The landscape of the West of Ireland occupies a particular position within Irish culture and Irish art history. In order to conceptually frame the development of this PhD project, it is necessary to give a brief account of the way that cultural representations of the landscape have both embodied and functioned, in W. J. T. Mitchell's words, as 'a site of visual appropriation, a focus for the formation of identity.'[1] In this chapter I outline the importance of the West in conceptualising the new nation state as authentic, independent and enduring, distinctly 'other' than the colonial subject state.[2]

1.2 Sign and Symbol.

To use Gillian Rose's words, the West of Ireland is a 'power-produced space'.[3] It has been a source and symbol of national identity, its cultural importance further underlined by its double function as a representation of the nation state and as a signifier of difference within Ireland. The wildness of the landscape and the Gaelic culture and tradition has drawn artists to the West and it has played a crucially important role in Irish art over the last hundred years.[4] Catherine Nash argues that the construction of the West as manifested in Ireland was a part of a broader discourse within the European context, a discourse that included anti-modernism and the romantic primitivism of early modernism.[5] It was culturally framed as an arena 'in which the natural forces condition, harden and breed the people to physical and spiritual

perfection'.[6] Nash puts forward the notion of the West as a cultural landscape of multiple meanings, arguing that, even today, the West is repeatedly presented as 'outside time, separated from normal temporal development'.[7]

In the early nineteenth century literary representations of the West linked national identity with the Celtic feminine "other".[8] The exotic rural margins were appreciated, but regarded as inferior to the dominant imperial centre. A key text in this regard is *The Wild Irish Girl,* an Anglo-Irish Gothic romance by Sydney Morgan. Joep Leerssen argues that the publication of the novel in 1806 was profoundly influential, particularly in its exotic depiction of the West.[9] The novel followed a familiar pattern personifying Ireland as a female and representing her colonial relationship with England as one of sexual exploitation or oppression. Through her extensive use of footnotes, Morgan educates the reader in Irish culture; like many other cultural nationalists of that time she was concerned with locating a distinctive Irish identity within Gaelic history and reviving and regenerating a national culture based on that constructed heritage.[10] Leerssen describes the novel as 'an Anglo-Irish transmogrification of Gaelic raw materials.'[11] Such ideas of Old Gaelic mysticism, later embraced by Lady Gregory, W.B. Yeats and AE Russell, have been well documented and have bedevilled Irish art ever since.

The subsequent Celtic revival was fuelled by a desire to reify the authentic, primitive, yet culturally rich life of the West and, from the mid-nineteenth century, artists, archaeologists, folklorists, anthropologists and others came to study the region. Paradoxically, this influx was encouraged by the access provided by the railway lines that opened the West to tourists. Many commented on the contrast between the aesthetic appeal of the dramatic landscape and richness of people's cultural lives and the abject poverty and deprivation of a marginal existence.[12] Robin Flower's famous account of the Gaelic-speaking people of the Blasket Islands, *The Western Isles,* described the Spartan frugality and rich oral history of the islands, where people lived 'under the mercy of the world.'[13]

1.3 Representing Nationalism.

The powerful, feminine, allegorical representations of landscape used to symbolise resistance in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century changed with the catastrophe of the famine from 1845 to 1848. From the mid-nineteenth century Sighle Bhreathnach-Lynch notes that representations of national identity took the form of 'cowed and melancholy' figures.[14] During the late nineteenth century Gaelic revival, Bhreathnach-Lynch notes the appearance of a new archetype, one demonstrably 'other' to the former colonial power: the earthy, virile, masculine, Catholic, Western Gael.[15] Observing that while the image of the West was a source of positive identification for the Irish male and symbolically asserted the repossession and dominance of the land, 'it anchored women to a nurturing role, reinforcing 'a "natural" affinity between women and nature.'[16] Catherine Nash also observes that the nation's gendered social and economic system was reinforced by the control of inheritance within family farming which supported both the regulation of sexuality and the perceived threat of autonomous female sexuality to this social order.[17]

Fig. 1: J.M. Synge, "Currach collecting turf from a Galway hooker", *The Aran Islands* (Oxford U.P. 1979) 146.

However J.M. Synge, with a different perspective on femininity, saw in the West a place 'where all art is unknown,' but where people's experience had 'something of the artistic beauty of mediaeval life.'[18] Society on Aran was very different to the constrained, prescribed social life of the post-famine mainland. Synge refers to the women's 'complete absence of shyness or self-

consciousness', far removed from the Madonna figures invoked as role models by the Catholic church and nationalist groups at the time.[19] When Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* opened in Dublin in 1907, his characterisation of a lawless, sexualised pre-famine society provoked riots and outrage amongst nationalists, revealing tensions between conflicting ideas of Irish identity and how it should be represented that continued to re-surface in Ireland throughout the twentieth century.

1.4 Painting the West: National Identity and the Iconography of the West.

The paintings of Paul Henry, Charles Lamb, Séan Keating and others were central to the establishment of an iconography of the West. They promoted an unblemished, pure landscape, populated by a 'hard-working, Irish-speaking, Roman Catholic race.'[20] The painting *Loch an Mhuillan* by Charles Lamb, epitomises the genre: the thatched cottage, the hazy mountains and the faceless, red-shawled women stooped by domestic labour. Paul Henry's paintings were reproduced and used to promote the West as a tourist destination both within Ireland and abroad.

Fig. 2: Charles Lamb. *Loch an Mhuillan/The Mill Lake*. Early-Twentieth Century, Oil on Canvas 15 ¾" x 19 3/4", National Gallery of Ireland.

In her analysis of agrarian romanticism as an idyllicising urban discourse of the countryside, Nina Lubbren argues that the quest for a rural Arcadia was more often, 'about (urbanised) artists' resistance to the effects of modernisation' and was fuelled by the market for paintings that fed 'the dreams and nostalgic imaginaries

of art's bourgeois audiences.'[21] This was certainly the case with Henry, who made a life-long career from periods of time spent on Achill Island in County Mayo between 1912 and 1919. His paintings, particularly the unpopulated landscapes, came to symbolise, for many people, a vision of the 'real' Ireland. He published an account of those years, *An Irish Portrait,* which echoes Gauguin's famous description of his relationship with Tahiti.[22]

> I wanted to study the lives of the people and their surroundings as closely and as single-mindedly as the French naturalist Fabre...the habits and ways of this remote community surrounded by savage rocks and treacherous sea, provide me with all I require as a painter. [23]

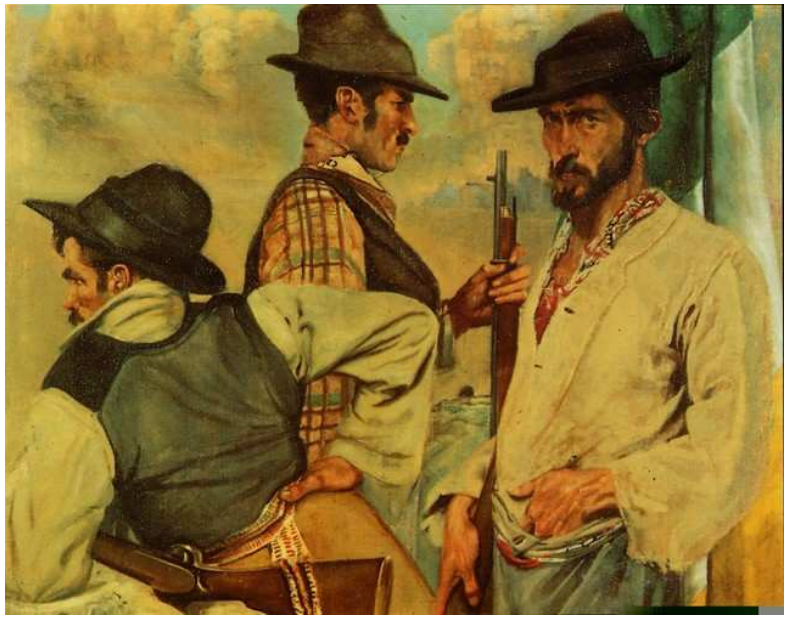

Fig.3 Séan Keating. *Men of the West.* 1917. Oil on Board 45 ½" x 56", Collection Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin.

Both Séan Keating and Charles Lamb were preoccupied by the authentic representation of what Lamb called 'the national essence.'[24] In his scathing criticism of Keating's painting of republican gunmen, *Men of the West*, artist Robert Ballagh observed that it was 'more reminiscent of being West of the Rio Grande than West of the Shannon'.[25] In this Hibernian arcadia, Kenneth McConkey notes, 'Henry's landscapes came to symbolise Ireland as a kind of nirvana for which Keating's patriots would gladly die.'[26]

Parallels between cultural representations of the West of Ireland and the American West have also been observed by Luke Gibbons who sees both as 'sites of cultural survival, the sole

remaining enclaves of traditional values in a world corrupted by progress and industrialisation'.[27] However, Gibbons contrasts the individualism and liberation invoked by the idea of the Wild West in its American form with the manner in which the West of Ireland is represented as an escape from the fragmentation and individualisation of modern life. The attachment to the rustic pre-modern idealisation of rural life in the West was never really challenged within Irish art history until the late 1960's. Interestingly, for Robert Ballagh, the equation of rural life with all that is truly Irish was 'perhaps the greatest inhibiting influence on the development of twentieth-century Irish art.'[28] This was a perception I was to interrogate in the course of this PhD.

1.5 Ireland's "Selves".

Fig. 4. Paul Henry. *Connemara Landscape*, 1926.
Oil on Canvas 51 x 61.5 cm. Private Collection.

From the beginning of the State the revival of the Irish language and Gaelic culture was at the forefront of cultural policy. Tom Duddy argues that Keating, McGonigle, Henry and others fulfilled the nationalist agenda to 'place, localise, regionalise, naturalise, root, and generally "countrify" Irish artists'.[29] Irish visual artists were rarely revolutionary, and in the early years complied with the new state in the creation of a national mythology that could be readily identified with the 'national sense of self'.[30] Ciarán Benson, psychologist and former head of the Irish Arts Council, has applied his reading of psychological and contemporary philosophical texts to this sense of self and he argues that the national 'self' is

better understood as a 'more or less well integrated *community of selves.*'[31] Contrasting the aspirations of Mainie Jellett, one of the few Irish artists to promote modernism, with the nationalist academicism of Sean Keating, Benson defines the difference between the two artists as 'the difference between revolution and rebellion'.[32] Keating was preoccupied with embodying the virtues of the *New Ireland,* whereas Jellett regarded modernism as a serious attempt by the *New Century* to create an identity for itself.

Jellett had studied painting in Paris under Cubist painter Alfred Gleizes, and was an articulate and analytical critical thinker who actively set out to counter the conservative academicism promoted by the Royal Hibernian Academy (RHA) in the early years of the state.[33] Jellett's intervention (as a Protestant, Anglo-Irish, foreign-trained, woman artist) was not welcomed. However, this did not prevent her from evangelically promoting modern art. The Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael governments were determined to 'impose public order on the private mind' and rigorous censorship was practised in all art disciplines.[34] Irish artists living in Europe returned during World War II and were joined by the members of the White Stag Group, British artists who settled in Ireland as conscientious objectors, creating a more open, cosmopolitan attitude and influencing younger Irish artists. The establishment of the Constitution in 1937, and the subsequent change of government in the 1940s, were followed by the development of

Fig.5. Mainie Jellett. *Western Procession*. 1943. Oil on Canvas. 43 x 86.5 cm. Private Collection.

new state industries and the beginning of a measure of creative freedom.

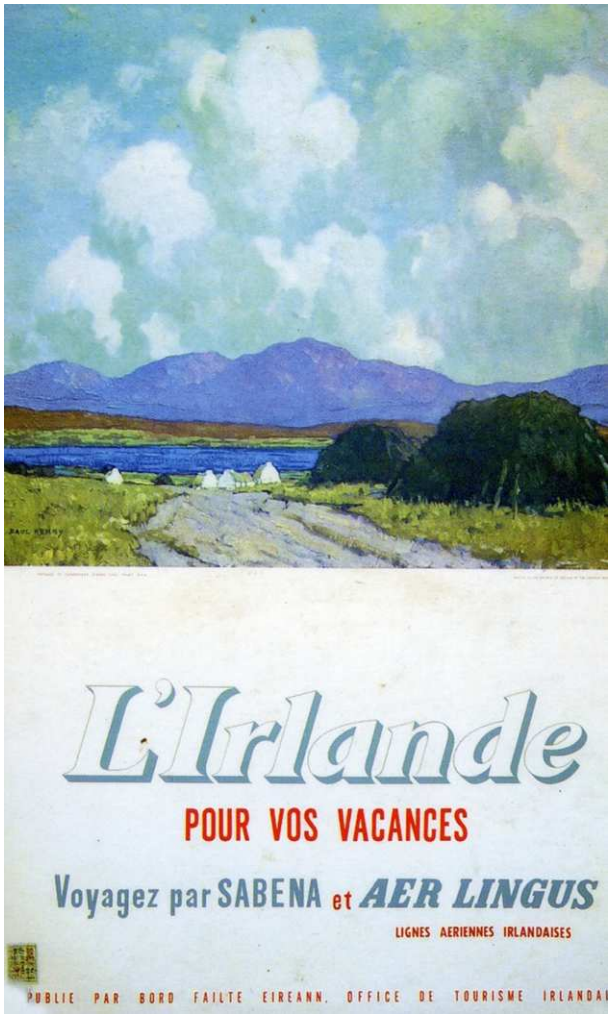

Fig. 6. Paul Henry *L'Irlande pour vosVacances*. Lithograph 101.5 x 63cm. Courtesy Gallery 29 Dublin.

The Living Art exhibitions started in 1943 in reaction to the Royal Hibernian Academy's rejection of work by Louis Le Brocquy. These exhibitions, selected by a committee led by Jellett, slowly paved the way for modernist ideas to enter Irish visual culture. However, this took place outside the nationalist cultural institutions, and critical success was confined to the international, rather than national, arena. Visual arts in Ireland remained resolutely localist, parochial and clientelist until well into the mid-twentieth century. It began to change in the nineteen seventies when the 'nationalist' hegemony in art colleges and institutions run by the Department of Education and the Royal Hibernian Academy (in Brian O'Doherty's opinion, 'splendidly irrelevant to its student's needs') was replaced by a 'modernist' one.[35]

Lucy Cotter argues that the failure of the national school of painting to acknowledge the postcolonial condition of Irish art undermined the project's success from the outset. In the absence of a process of recognition, deconstruction and analysis of the colonial legacy, the "customary" – 'a great art, which is universal, yet reflective of a national characteristic' –, was never incorporated within visual cultural discourse.[36] As a result, the distance and rupture necessary to the decolonisation process did not take place.[37]

Furthermore, Cotter proposes that an essential stage was missed that could have enabled a relationship between the customary and the national to develop, and upon which the national could base its attempts to be universal (or inter-national).[38] By leaving Irish art's failed relationship between the customary and the national unresolved the public attitude to, and perception of, visual art has remained negatively associated with colonialism, and seen by many as alien to the Irish heritage and sensibility.[39]

Tensions between the two notions of self, what O'Doherty termed 'the provincialism of the right (nationalism) and the provincialism of the left (modernism)', continue to surface in Ireland.[40] Benson contends that identity can only transmute when the means by which images and enactments of all sorts are constructed are clearly visible. A move away from the 'thematising of the field of what is represented to thematising aspects of the means by which images and enactments can be made to represent, to express and delight' can emancipate the subject/nation from the past, and enable the 'community of selves' that constitutes Ireland today to encompass the present reality of a multi-cultural state.[41] Thinking beyond the oppositional polarities of post-colonialism requires finding a process that will allow for the articulation of cultural differences, a reflexive process that actively and visibly negotiates the terrain between binary oppositions of tradition and modernity, rebellion and revolution, or self and other. This 'in-between' space, Homi Bhabha reminds us, can serve as a fertile ground for initiating 'new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.'[42]

My PhD research was directed towards re-configuring how artistic practice might now begin to represent the complexity of the rural West. This could neither replay the agrarian romanticism of the early years of the State, nor the international language of modernism, but rather navigate the terrain between the customary and the national that Lucy Cotter argues, is the developmental stage that was bypassed in the race to ditch traces of a colonial past. The

heterogeneous society that now exists in rural Ireland requires another perceptual form, one that might render visible the inclusions, exclusions, constructs and agendas through which identity and subjectivity are formed. The present economic collapse, and lack of an effective political opposition, has resulted in a public sense of alienation and impotence. A clientelist, hierarchical political system resulted in squandered opportunities to improve the crumbling social facilities during the boom period from 1995 to 2008 and has lent political urgency to reconfiguring the political landscape. In a review of author and journalist Fintan O'Toole's recent publication on the state of the nation, *Ship of Fools,* Terry Eagleton noted that 'the state is widely seen as "a private network of mutual obligations" rather than an impersonal body and dubbed Ireland, 'a country with a first-world economy and a third-world political system.'[43] Now more than ever, given the political impasse and the social and ecological fall-out from the boom years, there is an urgent need for artistic practices to interrogate the material and symbolic structures and landscapes upon which oppressive notions of national identity have been based.

This doctoral project aims to re-conceptualise an aesthetics of place that can interrupt and acknowledge the postcolonial effect on political subjectivities and reveal the cultural structures and systems underpinning the 'imagined community' written about by Benedict Anderson, that is the nation state. [44] The role of landscape now is not to lend form to a sense of national identity. It is no longer even a source of much food. The present social, agricultural and ecological reality is complex and fluid, shifting and changed utterly from the nostalgic projections of the tourist industry, or indeed the work of some artists who continue to represent it as a cultural anachronism. I will argue that it is only by taking into account the human, social and environmental resources and relationships within a rapidly changing world, that landscape can become an active mode of cultural reflection, rather than a nostalgic reminder of a purportedly purer past.

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1 W.J.T. Mitchell, "Introduction" *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, second edition, 2002) 2.

2 In her catalogue essay for the exhibition, *The West as metaphor,* Dr Yvonne Scott wrote:

> The purity of the national identity was authenticated by the landscape in which it was rooted in turn implying that the native character- untamed, independent, enduring - was both formed by, and analogous to, the environment which supported it.

Yvonne Scott, *The West as Metaphor* (Dublin: RHA Gallery, 2005) 7.

3 Gillian Rose, "Spatialities Of 'Community', Power And Change, the Imagined Geographies of Community Arts Projects", *Cultural Studies* 11(1) (Routledge 1997) 5.

4 Scott, ibid, 7.

5 Catherine Nash, "Embodying the Nation – The West of Ireland Landscape and Irish Identity." *Tourism In Ireland: a critical analysis*. Eds. Barbara O'Connor and Michael Cronin (Cork: Cork University Press, 1993) 89.

6 Nash, ibid, 103.

7 Nash, ibid, 86.

8 Sighle Bhreathnach-Lynch, "Landscape, space and gender: their role in the construction of female identity in newly independent Ireland." *The Gendered Landscape* (London: Routledge, 2003) 78.

9 Joep Leerssen, "The Burden of the Past." *Remembrance and Imagination*: Critical Conditions, Field Day Monographs, (Cork: Cork University Press/Field Day, 1996)

10 Leerssen describes the story as 'a mere thread on which Morgan strings the beads of her footnotes...the footnotes being the exclusive reservoir for antiquarian argument and informative digression.' 57

11 Leerssen, ibid 65.

12 Catherine Nash cites a traveller's account of a visit to Achill Island in the 1890's where the landscape provided 'feasts for the eye and soul'. The author lamented that the people of the island 'would be happy if they could live off such food.'

Nash ibid, 88.

13 Robin Flowers, *The Western Isles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, First Published 1944, Rpt 1979).

14 Sighle Bhreathnach-Lynch, "Landscape, space and gender: their role in the construction of female identity in newly independent Ireland", *The Gendered Landscape* (London: Routledge, 2003,) 76.

15 Bhreathnach-Lynch, "Painting the West: The Role of Landscape in Irish Identity." *Eire/Land* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) 100.

16 Bhreathnach-Lynch, "Landscape, space and gender" 77.

17 Catherine Nash, "Gender and landscape in Ireland. Re-mapping and Re-naming: New Cartographies of Identity, Gender, and Landscape in Ireland", *Feminist Review,* 44, 1993. Rpt. *Sources in Irish Art*, Ed. Fintan Cullen, (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000) 272.

18 J.M. Synge, *The Aran Islands* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) 14.

19 Luke Gibbons "Synge, Country and Western: The Myth of the West in Irish and American Culture", *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996) 30

20 'The image of Ireland and the Irish people projected by successive governments was that of a bleak but beautiful countryside, peopled by sturdy Gaelic-speaking people. This construct provided an instant recognisably different identity …The determination to be different in every way was further reinforced by projecting the Irish female as chaste, unsophisticated, even unworldly, whose sole role was that of mother and homemaker."'

Bhreathnach-Lynch, "Landscape, space and gender" 77.

21 Nina Lubbren, *Rural Artists' Colonies in Europe 1870-1910* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001) 39.

22 Gauguin wanted 'to immerse myself in virgin nature, see no one but savages, live their life, with no other thought in mind but to render, the way a child would, the concepts formed in my brain, and to do this with nothing but the primitive means of art, the only means that are good and true.' http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/gauguin_paul.html

23 Paul Henry, "An Irish Portrait 1951." *Sources in Irish Art* Ed. Fintan Cullen, (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000) 141.

24 Bhreathnach-Lynch, "Painting the West" 102.

25 Gibbons "Synge, Country and Western: The Myth of the West in Irish and American Culture", ibid 23.

26 McConkey, Kenneth. *A Free Spirit. Irish Art 1860-1960.* (London: Antique Collectors Club/ Pyms Gallery, 1990) 65.

27 Gibbons ibid, 23.

28 Gibbons ibid 23.

29 Tom Duddy, "Irish Art Criticism - a new provincialism of the Right?" CIRCA 35. July/August (1987)14 –18 Rpt. in *Sources in Irish Art* Ed. Fintan Cullen, (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000) 93.

30 Ciarán Benson, "Modernism and Ireland Selves" CIRCA Jan/Feb (2002) 20.

31 Benson, 20.

32 Benson, 21.

33 Jellett broadcast programmes on art and architecture on Radio Éireann in the late nineteen-twenties, and was an important advocate for modernism. She gave a series of public lectures in Dublin in the thirties and forties on both modernism and modern art in relation to art history.

34 Dorothy Walker, "The Neutral Hothouse." Modern Art in Ireland (Dublin: The Lilliput Press,1997) 18.

35 Brian O'Doherty, "The Irish Imagination 1959 -1971" (Dublin: Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, 1971) 10 – 11, 20. Rpt. *Sources in Irish Art* Ed. Fintan Cullen, (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000) 269.

36 Such a deconstruction of the colonial legacy most emphatically took place within the Irish literary discourse. James Joyce and Flann O'Brien both incorporated the 'customary' into their work.

37 Here Lucy Cotter refers to John Barrell's observation of a distinct shift in the conception of 'great' art, which occurred at the end of the eighteenth century. This was a shift from seeing 'the appearance of the local colour of one or another national school in a work of painting' as a failure to seeing this national element as 'a quality that would characterize, without diminishing the value' of the work in question.

John Barrell, "Sir Joshua Reynolds and the Englishness of English Art", *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha, Routledge, London and New York, 1990, 154–76; Lucy Cotter, "Art Stars and Plasters on the Wounds," Third Text 19.5 (2005): 583.

38 Cotter, 584.

39 Cotter, 584.

40 O'Doherty, 272.

41 Benson 23.

42 Homi Bhabha "Boarder Lives: the Art of the Present", *The Location of Culture*, (London and New York: Routeledge, 1994) 1. Rpt. *Art in Theory, 1900 – 2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas,* Ed Charles Harrison and Paul Wood 2nd ed. (Oxford/Malden, MA: Blackwell. 2003.) 1111.

43 'Local, cronyist and clientelist politics still thrive. Palms are greased, backs scratched and old pals promoted, often without much sense that this is anything other than the natural thing to do. The discrepancy between formal and informal codes in the country, between official behaviour and nods and winks, bulks large. Stretching a point or turning a blind eye is rife, in ways that would scandalise many a German or American. What may be agreeable in personal terms can prove lethal in public ones. It is the kind of thing that can happen in a country where everyone seems to have been at school with everyone else.' The Irish economy has since gone into meltdown and the country almost bankrupt at the time of writing.

Terry Eagleton, "Ship of Fools: How Stupidity and Corruption Sank the Celtic Tiger by Fintan O'Toole". *The Guardian Review*. (28 November 2009) Web.

44 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* Revised Edition ed. London and New York: Verso, 1991, 5-7.

Chapter 2. Contested Space: The Burren.

2.1 Topography.

Fig. 7. Mullaghmore Mountain. January 1993. Photograph Peter Rees.

The particular context of this doctoral project is the Burren region of North Co. Clare on the Irish Western seaboard. (Map, Fig. 1. Appendix 1) The Burren is a limestone desert, one of the finest examples of glaciated karst topography in Europe.[1] Although often described as a natural wilderness the landscape is actually a direct consequence of human interaction with the land. There is evidence of animal husbandry and farming since Neolithic times and the area possesses the highest density of field monuments in an upland area in Ireland, encompassing a record of human settlement spanning at least six thousand years.[2] Tree clearance and strip-grazing were practiced into the Bronze Age and it seems probable that excessive grazing or agriculture in prehistoric times led to the soil erosion which resulted in the characteristic limestone pavement.[3] The diversity of the Burren ecosystem and rich pockets of plant life between the limestone pavements lends itself to a particular form of husbandry known as inverse transhumance that is specific to the region.[4] Winter grazing has also kept the hazel scrub and high grasses in check and ensures the rich profusion of flowers in the springtime when the cattle are moved back to the

lower slopes. It is tough and sometimes unforgiving land and agricultural practices have evolved over many generations to make it productive. The distinctive combination of Alpine, Arctic and Mediterranean flora is a consequence of this confluence of people and place and the abundance of rare plants and flowers has attracted botanists for over 350 years.

2.2 Scholars and the Burren.

Fig 8. A group of antiquarians visiting the Cliffs of Moher. Clare County Library, The George McNamara Collection.

The Burren has a history of attracting outsiders and has been a destination for naturalists, archaeologists, artists, folklorists and anthropologists since the mid-nineteenth century. The extraordinary wealth of archaeological monuments has drawn visiting academics and scholars, most notably T. J. Westropp, who surveyed the many monuments of the Burren from the late nineteenth century until his death in 1922.[5] In the early 1930s, Ireland, and Co. Clare in particular, was the focus of an extensive archaeological and anthropological study of a modern nation conducted by academics from Harvard University.[6] Known as the *Harvard-Irish Survey,* it had three strands: an archaeological survey of burial mounds and social and physical early settlements, and two anthropological surveys – a physical survey based on measurements and photographs of the national population, and a social anthropological study of family and community in three rural districts of Co. Clare, including Rinnamona in the heart of the Burren adjacent to what was to become the Burren National Park in 1991.[7] The anthropological survey publications *The Irish Countryman*[8], published in 1937 by Conrad Arensberg, and *Family and*

Community in Ireland[9], first published in 1940 by Conrad Arensberg and Solon Kimball, are considered classic scientific texts and remain influential within sociological and anthropological academic spheres.[10] Photographer Dorothea Lange was inspired to visit Clare after reading *The Irish Countryman* and produced a body of photographs for *Life* magazine in 1956 based on scenes from the text.[11] The Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh's epic poem *The Great Hunger* is also said to have been influenced by *The Irish Countryman*.[12]

2.3 'The Field' Syndrome.[13]

The customary relationships chronicled by Arensberg and Kimball and practiced through a system of collective farming known as "cooring", were rendered obsolete in the 1950s and 1960s with the implementation of, first, national, and, later, European agricultural modernisation policies. Eileen O'Rourke's study, *Landscape Planning and Community Participation: Local Lessons from Mullaghmore, the Burren National Park, Ireland,* included detailed interviews with farming families in the Burren. O'Rourke maintains that the Burren region signified poverty, marginalisation and emigration for the vast majority of the indigenous pre-Celtic Tiger generation, a 'poor land and a poor living...the mantle of shame and...inferiority complex which until recent times cloaked its society, was mapped onto the landscape pixel by pixel.'[14] When the Irish Free State was formed in 1922, the government simply transposed existing colonial power structures to the institutions of the new State. Within Irish rural communities local development and decision making has traditionally been left to those with the 'right to speak': teachers, priests, state officials and farming representatives.[15] O'Rourke argues that '(R)eal power rests in the clientelistic and associated paternalistic relationships woven into the fabric of society and everyday life.'[16] An ambivalence on the part of the farming community towards the rural vernacular landscape can be traced to the deference encouraged by those in authority, agricultural agencies such as the Irish Farmers Association, towards 'experts' – academic and agricultural authorities brought in to explain to the indigenous community why the Burren was a unique place and how it

should be managed. The privileging of such outsider expertise and the disregard of local 'tacit' knowledge has been the cause of deep resentment in the area. This has been further complicated by top-down, hierarchical decision-making by national governments and state agencies such as the National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS), which is often dependent on clientelism, reinforcing clichés of 'cute-hoorism' – political patronage used to influence everything from planning permission to the repair of potholes in the roads.

2.4 Social Relations: The Burren and the "Blow-ins".

The landscape of the Burren also brought successive waves of artists and interested outsiders often driven by agrarian romanticism or *nostalgie de la boue* - utopian idealists with notions of ecological self-sufficiency and a deep affinity with the place. Anthropologist Jeremy MacClancy has tracked some of the different waves of outsiders, referred to by some long-standing residents as "blow-ins".[17] The first wave was in the late nineteen seventies, mainly "hippies" from the Netherlands, the UK and Germany. These were generally accepted and welcomed during a time when the West of Ireland was depopulating rapidly. MacClancy cites the main attractions of the area for these incomers as the kindness and hospitality they encountered, the slow way of life, the cheapness of the land and buildings and 'the romantic, if not patently mystical charms of the Burren.'[18]

Fig. 9. 'New Age' traveller's bus parked near Mullaghmore in the early 1990s. Photograph Peter Rees.

The second wave came from the UK in the 1980s and mid-1990's when legislation came into effect in the UK targeting squatters, New Age travellers and rave culture. These travellers were familiar with how to practice activist, DIY resistance to the erosion of the freedom to assemble in public spaces, and brought their knowledge of eco-protests to Ireland.[19]

In the early 1990s the demographic profile of those settling in the rural West changed once again. As the economy improved many who left Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s returned, and brought with them a more distanced perspective on place and identity that was informed by the diasporic experience. Until the early nineteen nineties social relations between the different waves of incomers and locals were good and the customary hospitality and neighbourliness associated with rural Ireland was still commonplace in the region.

2.5 Personal relationship with the Burren.

The Burren was a destination for countless Sunday drives in my childhood. I grew up in Limerick City approximately thirty miles from the region. I left Ireland in 1976 and eventually returned in 1992, settling in Kilnaboy, County Clare. Kilnaboy is a parish of about five hundred houses spread over fifty-two townlands in Northern Clare.[20] (See Map 2. Appendix 1) Landscape was not a genre that interested me during my years in London; returning to Ireland, however, I found myself compelled to reconsider my artistic practice in this new location and context. In his short text *Place, Art and Self,* Yi-Fu Tuan talks about meeting his geographical double – 'the objective correlative of the person I am, absent from the social façade' – in a particular place.[21] Expanding further on the relationship between place and identity, he writes about meeting the 'lineaments' of his psychological nature in the desert.[22] I identified with Tuan's experience. The Burren itself is often described in desert-like terms and was a place I had not only desired, and dreamed of, but also feared.[23] Lucy Lippard argues that 'some of us adopt places that are not really ours, except psychologically.'[24] Recognising myself in, and

relocating to, this place granted access to the invisible, unconscious, disciplining of subjectivity. This is addressed in depth in Chapter 6.

Modernism had shaped my art education and working in an urban, metropolitan context allowed me a sense of autonomy with regard to my practice. On returning to Ireland I applied this detached gaze to the formal elements in the landscape – the geology, flora and fauna – a perspective that corresponded with the literature I read about the Burren. On beginning my particular research into the Burren in 1992 I noted I was not alone. On reading accounts of the different aspects of the landscape – the accounts of flora and fauna by Gordon D'Arcy[25], the writings about paths and ancient tracks by George Cunningham[26], the work of naturalists, geographers and geologists in the Shell Guide to the Irish Landscape[27] - I gained some measure of understanding of the complexity of the place and was enveloped in a culture of inquiry and engagement through which my own work with the land developed (for a full account of the development of this practice see *Appendix 1*). One notable exception to the modernist perspective on place was that of artist, writer and cartographer Tim Robinson, who has produced seminal works on the Burren and the Aran Islands. In 1977 he published his map of the area, a testament to the tracks, tombs, boundaries, shrines, cairns, homesteads, plantations and turloughs: a living document of the natural history and human culture of the locality.

I brought with me a mode of art practice shaped by experience of many years studying and working as a practicing artist in London and this experience was re-focused in a practical and immediate way on the particular circumstances and requirements of rural life. (for a full account of this practice see Appendix 2) There were limited resources for visual arts in the area and I decided to establish monthly informal gatherings for artists in Ballyvaughan. This coincided with the opening of the Burren College of Art, which brought international artists to visit and work in the area.[28] I began to conduct regular informal meetings, which then developed into the North Clare Artists Group (NCAG), formed to address the isolation

experienced in what was then considered a marginalised context.[29] A collective discourse among some members of the group concerning the particular 'problem' of the rural as a site for artistic practice eventually led to the development of a nascent arts infrastructure in the region.[30]

The majority of visual artists in the Burren in the 1990s were landscape-based and modernist in orientation.[31] Tim Collins has observed that this kind of artistic practice deals with ideas of beauty and wonder which are reductive and 'let us see the work without the corrupting influences of socio-political or environmental conflict.'[32] That detached, some might say estranged, perspective on the Burren, was shattered by a conflict that erupted in the early 1990s which made it impossible to regard the landscape with such an innocent gaze.

2.6 Contested Perspectives on Landscape: The Mullaghmore Interpretive Centre.

W.J.T. Mitchell uses Lefebvre's dialectical triad to argue that 'space, place, and landscape are a conceptual structure that may be activated from several different angles. If a place is a specific location, a space is a "practiced place," a site activated by movements, actions, narratives and signs, and a landscape is that site encountered as image or "sight"'.[33] One can apply this conceptual structure to the Burren: the place/location, activated as 'site' through spatial practices, tourism/farming/leisure development, which can then become the object of symbolic renderings – artworks, souvenirs or in this case, an interpretive centre. The National Office of Public Works (OPW) had responsibility for the state's heritage and established the Burren National Park in the late 1980s. Local politicians were aware that EU funding was available for 75% of the cost of construction of interpretive centres, and in 1991 made a decision, without local consultation, to construct an interpretive centre in the park near the base of a mountain called Mullaghmore, four miles from Kilnaboy.[34] (Map 2, Appendix 1) The OPW were not subject to normal planning regulations and conducted no Environmental Impact

Assessment – a standard procedure in other EU regions with fragile habitats like the Burren. 'DAD' (Decide – Announce – Defend) was a term coined by Phillips and Kelly-Quinn for the behaviour of the OPW at that time.[35] The lack of local consultation was considered the normal way of doing business at that time.[36] For many of the 'blow-ins', and indeed some of the 'local' locals, the idea that an interpretive centre could be contemplated in such a pristine landscape was greeted with stunned disbelief.[37] It seemed to fly in the face of best practice across the globe where the standard procedure is to place such developments on the edge of national parks and no environmental assessment was carried out into the effect of the proposed development on the sensitive ecology of the region.

2.8. The Idea of Community: A Contested Site.

The decision to construct the centre activated an environmental and rural development conflict at international, national and local level that lasted more than ten years and brought into public view issues of community, belonging and local and national political authority. Within the immediate vicinity of Mullaghmore the conflict was not interpreted as a matter of being for or against the interpretative centre, but rather of being for or against the 'community', and the fact that North Clare consists of many diverse communities was ignored. Lines were drawn very quickly and those against the development were accused of working against local, community interest. Who constitutes the 'community', and how to define 'belonging', were questions that were articulated but not openly addressed during the conflict. As the dispute escalated, loyalty to a singular, 'fortress' notion of community – a concept elaborated by Doreen Massey in her writing on the relationship between space, place and politics – superseded the private fabric of neighbourliness.[38] 'Community' interests were deemed to be fully represented by the existing local social and political hierarchies. Dissent meant that one no longer had a place within that structure.[39] O'Rourke notes that:

> Community is a problematic concept when applied to the Burren; it is difficult to disassociate it from control, hierarchy, manipulation and personal agendas. The term "neighbourliness" has far more resonance here. It is within the boundaries of neighbourliness that things like hospitality, friendship and mutual aid are to be found. However, the term "community" still seems to imply internal cohesion and the ability to reach consensus.[40]

The actors in the dispute were polarised. Opposition to the proposal prompted virulent and sometimes violent responses characterised by issues of 'control, identity and power relations.'[41] Dissenting voices were labelled 'outsiders' and those who claimed authority to speak for the community demanded that their priorities take precedence, asserting 'the right to self-determination.'[42] In this context, 'community' was delineated by a symbolic boundary, hostile to what was positioned without and based on a presumption of consensus within – in Stuart Hall's words, 'an expensive and sometimes violent and dangerous illusion.'[43]

Fig 10. Rally in support of the Interpretative centre Corofin 1992. Photograph Peter Rees

MacClancy noted that 'precisely because they were *not* hobbled by a lifetime entanglement in the local community outsiders were able to be vocal in their opposition in a way that locals were not.'[44] With hindsight it is fair to say that the majority of 'born-in' locals were in favour of the centre and the prospect of increased tourism revenue and employment at a time when the only alternative was to emigrate. It should also be noted that local organisations were actively encouraged to galvanise support for the centre. Local development

associations in Kilnaboy and Corofin, sports organisations and local GAA groups, party political groups and farming organisations and associations were rallied to support the development – at one event the twelve elected Dáil and EU local and regional deputies were assembled on a stand facing a mass rally of local protesters in the nearby town of Corofin.[45]

A lobby group formed to oppose the development and put forward alternative proposals to have it relocated to one of the gateway towns of the Burren. This group, known as the Burren Action Group (BAG), was primarily, although not exclusively, made up of new residents, many of whom were artists, and environmentalists with links to media and international conservation organisations with knowledge of EU environmental legislation including Habitat Directives and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) regulations. Artists, musicians and writers donated works to fundraise, promote events and draw attention to the development. Reaction to the BAG was later described by local writer and activist Lelia Doolin, one of the seven who challenged the state.

Fig. 11. Poet Michael Longley reads to the crowd at the Burren Action Group New Year walk in 1993. Photograph Deirdre O'Mahony.

> 'It consisted of some boycotting, occasional threats, anonymous poison pen letters, insults hurled from passing cars: yuppies, hippies, outsiders etc, - the usual list. A placard during one of Burren Action Group annual Mullaghmore walks on New Year's Day read: "UCG and D4 vandals will not be let destroy our parish!"' [46]

The BAG alliance was able to generate a formidable presence within the media and cultural sector to argue against the

development. However, efforts to propose alternative sites for the centre were ignored. The construction of the centre began in December 1992. Planning permission was not required as the OPW were exempt from normal planning law.[47] Beginning construction in the middle of winter was a formidable display of power and under lights, working late into the night, the groundworks were prepared in a very short period. Many local men were employed on the work at a time when there was little employment in the area. Seven individuals, all locals, took a collective legal action against the State in an attempt to prevent the development.[48] They were vilified as 'traitors' and told that they had 'lost their place in the community'.[49] The seven who took the cases had to find the funds to take the cases to the courts and also risked losing homes and livelihoods if made liable for the costs. In February 1993 they took an injunction in the High Court to stop the construction work, challenging the constitutionality of the OPW exemption from the Planning Act. In May 1993 the Supreme Court upheld the ruling. Further actions were taken in the High Court, Supreme Court and European Court of Justice.

Fig. 12. Protest sign painted by Peter Daffy at Kilnaboy cross opposite the Post Office. Photograph Peter Rees.

The conflict lasted ten years, cost several million Euros in legal fees, trial and appeal costs, and resulted in the construction and destruction of two car parks and a sewage system on the site. The decision not to develop the site was finally reached in the Supreme Court in 2000. The OPW had to agree to all the BAG requirements to restore the site to its

original state and all costs were awarded to BAG. The action resulted in all State Agencies, including the OPW, coming under the remit of the Planning Acts and meant that the general public had the right to object and/or appeal against State Agency development.[50]

2.9 Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices.

The North Clare Artist's Group organised several events including two exhibitions to raise funds for the Burren Action Group. The second exhibition, *Ancient Landscape Revisited,* was billed as an exhibition of work 'inspired by the Burren' and much of the work reflected Kenneth Clarke's conceptualisation of an idea of landscape as 'part of a cycle in which the human spirit attempted once more to create a harmony within its environment.'[51] This detached, aestheticised perspective mirrors the language used by many of the supporters and artists at the time. Mullaghmore was a 'sacred' transcendent space, 'whose essence and magic lay in its remoteness and undisturbed atmosphere.'[52] W.J.T. Mitchell calls this the 'contemplative' approach, one which privileges 'the presentation of an image designed for transcendental consciousness – whether a "transparent eyeball", an experience of "presence", or an "innocent" eye.'[53] The difficulty with framing the landscape in such terms has been well observed by Pat Cooke in relation to

Fig. 13. Gerritt Van Gelderen's postcard sold to raise funds for the BAG campaign. Collection Deirdre O'Mahony

another “sacred”, and contested, archaeological landscape, that of the Tara-Skryne valley. Cooke argues that the rhetoric of sacredness and spirituality is a form of ‘aesthetic bullying’ and helps to reify landscape as relic: ‘the deep attraction of asserting landscape as an *a priori* value is that it facilitates the avoidance of difficult questions of choice and prioritisation by casting a sacred spell over the lot.’[54]

Ancient Landscape Revisited included work by fifty artists, established and unknown, including two of my own works. It is telling that only one work in the exhibition directly alluded to what Mitchell refers to as ‘the moral, ideological and political darkness that covers itself with precisely the sort of innocent idealism Clarke expresses.’[55] Tom Molloy’s painting of Mullaghmore was a detailed rendering of a panoramic sequence of photographs of the mountain in which one of the images has slipped. This commentary on ownership and spectacle was in sharp contrast to the work of most of the artists in the exhibition, including my own. O’Rourke’s research interviews suggest that the exhibition reinforced a perception that artists allied to BAG were ‘only concerned with the environment and the aesthetics of the landscape, rather than the communities who had to make a difficult living there.’[56]

Fig. 14. Tom Molloy. *MullaghMor* Oil on Canvas 30 x 90 cm. 1993. Private Collection. Photograph Tom Molloy

One of the seven individuals who took the OPW to court was local priest John O’Donohue, the author of several spiritual guidebooks based on his interpretation of Celtic wisdom.[57] O’Donohue’s books are very popular in the US and in

Ireland and his writing about the landscape of the Burren contributed significantly to the projection of sacred and spiritual values on to the landscape. This reflected the arguments of many of the BAG supporters. Mullaghmore mountain was a place 'whose essence and magic lay in its remoteness and undisturbed atmosphere.'[58] It was also reflected in the national media. The influential *Irish Times* columnist Fintan O'Toole mused that 'when you were there, when you were looking at the mountain, you would have felt it as something in itself, a thing outside of the world of reflection and meaning and interpretation that we live in all the time.'[59] The polarised perspectives on place are exemplified by Eileen O'Rourke's paper; in her interviews she argues that those who worked the land saw it as 'a whore of a mountain' representing poverty and marginalisation.[60] Others described it as something mystical and feminine and the construction of the Interpretive Centre as a desecration, 'prostituting the mountain for short-term economic gain.'[61]

Fig 15. Postcard in aid of the Burren Action group campaign with a photograph by Ilsa Tielen. Collection Deirdre O'Mahony

J.B. Jackson speaks of an inevitable tension between the two perspectives on landscape – the aesthetic viewer (or tourist) and the cultivator – and reminds us that the conflict between the social landscape and the 'natural' landscape is not simply confined to groups: it is also within each of us. We enjoy the experience of nature yet we crave the social contact of community; therefore, he argues, 'no landscape can be exclusively devoted to fostering one

identity.'[62] The unconscious, often violent, responses by the various actors in the Mullaghmore conflict were a clear indication of the taboos and prohibitions governing individual subjectivities. Each became the other's Other. One group represented a 'fortress' idea of community, while the other was allied to a universalistic concept of modern society. The conflict clearly indicated the power of cultural actors, representations and signifying practices, and strongly suggested that cultural representations of the West amount to a potent symbolic legacy in Ireland. Subsequent to the conflict there has been a marked reluctance in the local community to publicly discuss the controversy. It was divisive and deeply traumatic for all, "winners" and "losers", and had significant effects on local relationships. The issues arising from the conflict formed the basis of my subsequent practice-led research into how to make some kind of "common sense" of the individual, social and natural relationships affecting space, place and landscape.

Gillian Rose argues, after Lacan, that images have a kind of agency, serving to 'tutor' us into particular kinds of subjectivity.[63] Following her logic, the Mullaghmore conflict reinvigorated the polarised perspectives on the cultural meaning of place, space and landscape in the Burren. On the one hand, the landscape embodied a social construction of difference based on idealised notions of a (pre-modern) authentic, traditional community or *gemeinschaft*. On the other hand, it represented a contemporary modernist/post-modern, cosmopolitan discourse that also validates the role of knowledge elites in addressing environmental problems because of their wider global importance. The impact of such a potent mix of global/local expectations and its effect on the social unconscious in rural areas is considered in Chapter 6 and 7 in a body of paintings, photographs and found objects, *Viscqueux*, and a public artwork, *Cross Land*. The power-relations inherent in the practice of landscape (in its pre-modern and modernist forms) and their effect on the natural land/scape changed the trajectory of my practice and set in train a reflexive process that indicated a different and expanded idea of the relationship between arts practice and cultural activism.

One way of overcoming the cultural expectations of landscape as a genre is to work from inside the *radharc* (Gaelic for spectacle/vision/view) aware of the past, engaging with the present and actively re-imagining the future. The writer Thomas Pynchon considered this problem in his novel *Against the Day*: 'everything that we imagine is real, living and still ... is all on the way from being one thing to being another, from past to future, the challenge to us is to show as much of the passage as we can.'[64] Navigating and mapping that space between one place – temporal, physical or imaginative – and another, must, in Miwon Kwon's terms, bear 'the burden of the necessity and impossibility of modelling new forms of being in-place, new forms of belonging.'[65] Formalising and critically defining such a form of belonging became the focus of my doctoral project.

1 The dissolution of underlying limestones by water is characteristic of "karst" landscapes, so named after the Kras region in Slovenia where the landscape is dominated by this type of weathered and eroded limestone. Ronan Hennessy, Maria Mc Namara and Zena Hoctor, *Stone Water and Ice, A Geology Trip Through the Burren* (Burren Connect Project/Clare County Council: Ennistymon 2010) 16.

2 Aalen, Whelan and Stout Eds*. Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997) 287.

3 Cilian Roden, "The Burren Flora", *The Book of the Burren* 2nd ed. (Kinvara: Tír Eolas Press, 2001) 41.

4 Cattle are put out to graze on the upland slopes in the winter and require no shelter or additional feed as the absence of frosts, and the heat-retentive quality of the limestone ensured the continuous growth of grass in sheltered areas. Burren cattle also have a reputation for being healthy and strong due to the high level of calcium in the vegetation and the absence of diseases and parasites in the well-drained soil. David Drew, "The Burren County Clare," *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape* 292/3.

5 T.J. Westropp's research and field notes on the archaeology of the Burren remain in use today and J.W. O'Connell makes the argument that virtually all modern archaeological research in the Burren 'consists of a series of footnotes to the work of Thomas James Westropp.' When the *X-PO* opened as a public art project one of the primary intentions was to create an archive of local knowledge of the locality of Kilnaboy parish in North Clare. One early document brought to be scanned and added to the archive was a drawing by Westropp of the court tombs on Roughan Hill, and given to the owner when he was a child by a Russian emigrée, Luba Kabkavakov, who lived for a time in Kilnaboy. A copy of the drawing is now at the *X-PO.* J.W. O'Connell, "T.J. Westropp- The Father of Burren Archaeology", *The Book of the Burren* 2nd ed. 92.

6 Ernest Hooton, who directed the Harvard Irish Survey, described the survey as follows: 'The object of this research is to attempt a scientific interpretation of a modern nation, the country of origin of more than one-fifth of the population of the United States. Social Anthropologists have investigated the social, political, economic and industrial institutions of a large, typical sample of the Irish people. Archaeologists have excavated their prehistoric and historic monuments to discover the background to Irish civilisation. A physical anthropologist is now measuring and observing the bodily features of thousands of Irish to determine their racial affinities and their constitutional proclivities. Ultimately all of this material will contribute to a single unified anthropological history and analyses of this gifted and virile nation'. Ernest Hooton, "The Harvard Anthropological Survey of Ireland", unpublished manuscript n. d. Manuscripts Box 1.54, p. 1. E.A. Hooton Papers 995-1, Peabody Museum Archives, Harvard University. Qtd. In Anne Byrne, Edmondson, Ricca and Varley, Tony, "Introduction to the Third Edition," Conrad Arensberg and Solon Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland* (Ireland: CLASP, 2001. Previously Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940, 1968) XIX.

7 The anthropological study by Arensberg and Kimball was examined by some of the descendants of those described in *Family and Community in Ireland* at X-PO. See Chapter X.

8 Conrad Arensberg. *The Irish Countryman: An Anthropological Study* (New York: American Museum of Science Books, The Natural History Press, 1968. Previously The MacMillan company 1937).

9 Arensberg and Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland* .

10 'It is difficult, if not impossible, to think of another ethnography from a different country which so profoundly affected the analysis of that country's society that all subsequent research for a generation had as its central focus, the testing of the ethnographic model of the original.' Thomas Wilson, quoted in Byrne, Anne, Edmondson and Varley, "Introduction to the Third Edition", LIX.

11 These photographs were later published in book form in Dorothea Lange, with Daniel Dixon, Gerry Mullins, *Dorothea Lange's Ireland* (California: Roberts Rinehart 1998).

12 Kavanagh had no sentimentality about the harsh reality of rural life. *The Great Hunger* is regarded as one of the most important modern Irish poems in terms of its use of Famine imagery and was written in 1941. 'His heart is pure,/His mind is clear,/He can talk to God as Moses and Isaiah talked/The peasant who is only one remove from the beasts he drives./ The travellers stop their cars to gape over the green bank into his fields./There is the source from which all cultures rise.' Patrick Kavanagh, "The Great Hunger", *Collected Poems* (USA: The Goldsmith Press/Peter Kavanagh Hand Press, 1972) 100.

13 In his play *The Field* Irish playwright John B. Keane distilled the obsessive and destructive passion of a farmer for a field, which he rented and farmed. The play was also made into a 1989 film by director Jim Sheridan and the term 'Field Syndrome' is sometimes used to describe the irrational passions evoked by land disputes.

14 Eileen O'Rourke published an important study that examined the role of community participation and manipulation in relation to landscape, planning and management in the Burren region, including the Mullaghmore conflict . Eileen O'Rourke "Landscape Planning and Community Participation: Local Lessons from Mullaghmore, the Burren National Park, Ireland," *Landscape Research* 30. 4 (2005) 486.

15 One of the drivers of EU funded LEADER rural development policy is the development of participatory, "bottom-up", governance models where the design and implementation of development action is handed over to local stakeholders. How effectively this transpires remains to be seen. As mentioned in Chapter 2 this policy is failing with traditional small-scale farmers who are choosing to opt out of potentially lucrative schemes, perhaps as a result of regulation fatigue or simply due to cultural estrangement. See Áine Macken-Walsh, *Barriers to Change: A Sociological Study of Rural Development in Ireland.*

16 O'Rourke, 487.

17 MacClancy refers to 'blow-ins' as 'blows', a term I have never heard used locally or in a wider context in Ireland.

Jeremy MacClancy, "Fear and Loving in the West of Ireland. The blows of County Clare", ed. J. MacClancy, *Alternative Countrysides. Anthropological approaches to the study of contemporary rural Western Europe* (Oxford: Berghahn) (forthcoming).

18 MacClancy 8.

19 The Glen of the Downs' protests at the destruction of the woodlands in County Wicklow were informed by the tactics used by the Freedom Network in the UK but were largely unsuccessful in Ireland. The popular support for infrastructural improvements in Ireland has made it difficult to galvanise the kind of social and demographic mix of protesters achieved at similar protests in the UK.

20 The smallest sub-division of land in Ireland is known as the "Townland." Irish counties are divided into Parishes and Parishes further sub-divided into townlands. These small areas of land can vary in size from a few acres upwards, and were originally formed for Sir Richard Griffith's Valuation of 1848-1865.

21 'A man can fall in love at first sight with a place... The first glimpse of a desert through a mountain pass or the first plunge into a forested wilderness can call forth not only joy, but, inexplicably, a sense of recognition as of a pristine and primordial world one has always known.' Yi-Fu Tuan, *Place, Art and Self* (New Mexico: Centre for American Places, 2004) 19.

22 Tuan 21.

23 'The Burren looks a most un-Irish place. It has variously been described as a 'barren stony place' (cf the Gaelic *boireann*), a limestone desert and a moonscape, and to some degree it is all of these. But perhaps 'fertile rock' is most apposite. It is on the one hand flat and ostensibly bare while on the other it is unbelievably productive and rich.' Gordon D'Arcy, *The Natural History of the Burren.* (London: Immel Publishing Ltd. 1991) 7.

24 Lippard, Lucy. "Looking Around: Where We Are, Where We Could Be",*Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, ed. Suzanne Lacy (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995) 117.

25 'The Burren looks a most un-Irish place. It has variously been described as a 'barren stony place' (cf the Gaelic *boireann*), a limestone desert and a moonscape, and to some degree it is all of these. But perhaps 'fertile rock' is most apposite. It is on the one hand flat and ostensibly bare while on the other it is unbelievably productive and rich.' D'Arcy, *The Natural History of the Burren* 7.

26 George Cunningham, *A Burren Journey* (Shannonside Mid-western Regional Tourism Organisation: 1974) Rpr. 1993.

27 Frank Mitchell, *The Shell Guide to the Irish Landscape* (Dublin: Michael Joseph/Country House, Revised Edition. 1990).

28 One of the first Visiting Professors at the Burren College was John Baldassari. Links between the college and the Royal College of Art, London and the Art Institute of Chicago have maintained the flow of artists to the area and the college has a policy of giving all locally based artists access to talks and lectures by visiting artists.

29 I started *NCAG* in 1994 as a social and professional network for visual artists in North Clare. Informal gatherings were held monthly in Ballyvaughan. NCAG organised Ancient Landscape Revisited benefit exhibition for the Burren Action Group defence fund in 1994. It was through the NCAG that I first met Fiona Woods who initiated the *Ground Up* public art programme and with whom I co-organised the *Shifting Ground Conference* in 2006.

30 In 1995 I was approached by the Old Ennistymon Heritage Society as they were interested in the regenerative effect of artists in an economically depressed area. Citing the "Temple Bar effect" of the then newly developed cultural quarter in Dublin the Heritage Society was interested in establishing studios in the former Courthouse in Ennistymon. Four members of NCAG decided to take on the project: Fiona Woods, Veronica Nicholson, Joan Hanrahan and myself.

31 James Elkins spoke about the attachment to such romantic modernist landscape practices at a conference on *Landscape Theory* at the Burren School of Art in 2006, proposing that there is a popular cultural bias, a 'not-so-secret addiction…to ideas of landscape articulated by the romantics, and more directly to second and third generational regional, local and belated romantic Western landscape painters, filmmakers and photographers.' Commenting on the publication that followed the conference, artist Blaise Drummond proposed that 'the fuzzy-edged misty blurring of the semi-abstract expressionist landscape mode is a myopic vision that avoids the uncomfortable realities on the ground… (and) actually enables us to continue to dwell in the self-destructive way we currently still do.' The *Landscape Theory* seminar took place on 17 June 2006 at the Burren College of Art, Ballyvaughan Co Clare. Citation from emailed proof of the text from James Elkins, 18 Sept. 2008, later published as *Landscape Theory*, eds. DeLue, Rachel Ziady, and James Elkins (Oxon: Routledge, 2008); Blaise Drummond, "Assessments" *Landscape Theory* (Oxon: Routledge, 2008) 221.

32 Collins, Tim. "Catalytic Aesthetics", *Artful Ecologies, Art, Nature, Environment Conference,* (Falmouth: RANE Research Cluster, UC Falmouth 2006) 26.

33 Here Mitchell is referring to Lefebvre's conceptual triad of 'conceived', 'perceived' and 'lived' space. Lefebvre argues that 'abstract space tends towards homogeneity, towards the elimination of differences or peculiarities' arguing that 'a new space cannot be born (produced) unless it accentuates differences.' Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991) 52.

W.J.T. Mitchell, "Preface to the Second Edition, Space, Place and Landscape", *Landscape and Power* 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002) xi.

34 O'Rourke "Landscape Planning and Community Participation: Local Lessons from Mullaghmore, the Burren National Park, Ireland", *Landscape Research* 30. 4 (2005) 490.

35 W.E.A. Phillips & M. Kelly-Quinn, "From Conflict towards partnership - testing landscape management systems in County Wicklow", *Politics and Priorities for Ireland's Landscape: Conference Papers* (Tullamore: The Heritage Council, 1999) 87 – 102. O'Rourke 488.

[36] The interviews and research conducted by O'Rourke led her to conclude that the paternalistic 'right to speak' of the local TD (parliamentary representative) on behalf of the local community, was the reason local people were not surprised they were not consulted about the development - it was considered standard practice. O'Rourke 488.

[37] The term "local local" implies a particular type of relationship and sense of belonging with a place and was used as the title for in an exhibition I curated to coincide with the *Shifting Ground* conference in 2006. (See Appendix 1) In Ireland it is often used to imply a particular historical connection with place spanning hundreds of years. A significant proportion of the population in Kilnaboy can trace familial connections with the area over hundreds of years. Although the area has always attracted outsiders it is only in the past twenty years that the kind of demographic changes and fluid population bases being experienced elsewhere in the world have been experienced in North Clare. The most obvious example of this is the population of Brazilian farm workers living in Gort who work as farm labourers for many of the farmers in the Burren.

[38] Doreen Massey, from 'Spatial Delights: an engagement with the work of Doreen Massey", *Space, Place and Politics.* Open University iTunes U. Accessed May 2010.

[39] Personal interview with local informant who wished to remain anonymous. 4 Feb. 2008.

[40].O'Rourke 488.

[41] Brien McGrath, "Environmentalism and property rights: The Mullaghmore interpretive centre dispute", *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 6, (1996) 46.

[42] From an interview with the local schoolteacher. O'Rourke 490.

[43] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Difference", *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990) 186, qtd. in Rose, Gillian, "Spatialities Of 'Community', Power And Change, the Imagined Geographies of Community Arts Projects", *Cultural Studies* (11(1) 1997:1-16) 3. Later published in revised form in Gillian Rose, "Performing Inoperative Community", *Geographies of Resistance*, eds. Steve Pile and Michael Keith, (London: Routledge, 1997).

44 MacClancy 15.

45 The Dáil is the Irish parliament. TD's are local parliamentary representatives. Photographs of this event were shown as part of the Peter Rees Archive exhibition at the *X-PO* in July 2008. See Chapter 10.

46 UCG stands for University College Galway. D4 is the postal code of one of the most expensive residential areas in Dublin, associated with the media. The use of both terms as insults signals the depth of resentment against academic and media based authorities.

Leila Doolin, "Ordinary People and the Mountain." *The Book of the Burren* 240.

[47] As they are responsible for the construction of Army and Garda barracks the OPW was exempt from going through a Planning Application process, as it requires making plans public and is a security risk. The remit of the OPW was so broad however, that it allowed the application of the exemption to projects such as the interpretive centre at Mullaghmore. After Mullaghmore, the heritage services were transferred to a new Dept of Arts, Heritage, the Gaeltacht and the Islands.

[48] It should be noted that the seven who took the action were all locals whose families could trace connections to the area going back many generations and included two local farmers.

49 Personal interview with local informant who wished to remain anonymous. 4 February 2008.

50 Interestingly, the government eventually changed the law governing the planning process in response to the High Court decision, resulting in the liberalisation of the planning process, which allowed some of the worst excesses of the economic boom period in Ireland to take place.

For a full account of the legal challenges see Emer Colleran, "History Of The Proposed Mullaghmore Visitor Centre/Gortlecka Entry Point For The Burren National Park." Accessed 21 December 2008 <http://www.iol.ie/~burrenag/hist72000.html>

51 Mitchell, citing Kenneth Clarke, *Landscape into Art* (1st published 1949; repr., Boston, MA: Beacon Press 1963) viii.

52 Eileen O'Rourke 493.

52 Mitchell 1.

53 The deep attraction of asserting landscape as an *apriori* value is that it facilitates the avoidance of difficult questions of choice and prioritisation by casting a sacred spell over the lot. It manifestly refuses to recognise terrain as a palimpsest, ceaselessly scratched over with the graffiti of dead generations, and subject to the interventions and exigencies of the contemporary moment. Pat Cooke, "Tara: Re-Routing the Debate", *The Irish Times*, (28th July 2007).

55 Mitchell 6.

56 O'Rourke 492.

56 John O'Donohue was one of the seven locally born activists who challenged the OPW on the construction of the interpretive centre at Mullaghmore. At the height of the conflict he published *Anam Cara, A Book of Celtic Wisdom* in 1997, which made his reputation in progressive Catholic circles and drew wider attention to the conflict and the Burren.

58 O'Rourke 493.

58 Fintan O'Toole. "Tourists In Our Own Land", *Black Hole, Green Card: The Disappearance of Ireland* (Dublin: New Island Books, 1994) 34.

60 From O'Rourke's interviews with local informants who observed that the proposed centre was being built on an old quarry site and that the mountain was only fit for the goats; 'as solid as a rock, as rough a spot as God ever made, and the rougher one is with it the better'. O'Rourke, 494.

60 Fintan O'Toole wrote 'for one it is a means of making a living... For the other it is a means of escaping the means to make a living'. O'Toole, *Black Hole, Green Card* 35.

61 John Brinkerhoff Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984) 12.

62 Rose, *Visual Methodologies An introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2007) 111.

63 Thomas Pynchon, *Against the Day* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2006) 586.

64 Miwon Kwon "The Wrong Place" *Art Journal* 59 No 1 Spring 2000 32-43.

PART 2: Community, Art and Site.

The Mullaghmore conflict raises questions about definitions of 'community', ideas of belonging and democratic decision-making that remain pertinent to rural places, particularly beautiful landscapes carrying excessive cultural baggage. The problematic fact remains that the Burren, like rural places around the world, has many communities and is challenged by the affect and effect(s) of the fragmented, de-territorialised fluidity of contemporary life. How might one activate a *praxis* of community that can respond to the particular social divisions and commonalities amongst actors in the rural West and activate a discourse on the challenges presented by this change? This question led me to ask whether a different form of aesthetic representation might catalyse a participative democratic process that could better acknowledge the fragmented, multiple 'publics' who all have a stake in the rural landscape and begin an ongoing, open discourse on sustaining places like the Burren into the future. My enquiry focused on three areas: reconceptualising 'community' in the light of contemporary critical and philosophical thought; the changing roles of art and aesthetics and new thinking on relational and dialogical aesthetics; and examining these issues with specific reference to ideas of place/context-specific art practices. Concepts of community, aesthetics and politics are examined through contemporary philosophical, political and aesthetic critical texts in Chapter 3. Aesthetic processes and collaborative methodologies are discussed in Chapter 4; and Chapter 5 is a detailed survey of site, community and place-based art practices with particular reference to Miwon Kwon, Lucy R Lippard and Suzanne Lacy.

Chapter 3: Ideas of Community, Politics and Aesthetics.

3.1. Jean-Luc Nancy and 'Inoperative' Community.

A reluctance to acknowledge the collapse of mythical notions of rural 'community' has been traced by Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City;* he notes that, throughout history, the past has been repeatedly used as a 'stick to beat the present.' He examines those persistent complaints 'in which a happier past is explicitly invoked', and links them to periods when the rural economy has been undergoing periods of exceptional change.[1] Such nostalgic refrains are particularly evident in Ireland today as the collapse in the economy plays out in tandem with EU agricultural reform, bringing with it radical changes to the rural landscape.

The Inoperative Community is Jean-Luc Nancy's contribution to re-thinking an understanding of 'community' when it is no longer the basis for the foundation of society or the origin of nations. Nancy deconstructs the cry for a 'return' to an organic, tradition-based rural *gemeinschaft*, arguing that it represents a longing for the most ancient and persistent myth of the Western world; that of a 'lost' community.[2] The community desired by Rousseau, Hegel and then Marx, 'bound together by its organic communion with its own essence', reflects 'the altogether modern thought of humanity's partaking of divine life; that of a human being penetrating into pure immanence'.[3] Ignaas Devisch notes that, for Nancy, 'the longing for an original community is not a reference to a real period in our history. It is rather a mythical thought, an imaginary picture of our past. As such, this nostalgia is innocent, but used as the starting point for a politics of community the innocence disappears.'[4] Thus, a desire for 'community' may well be a belated invention

to alleviate the harsh reality of modern existence. We are living in a world where we are exposed to a 'naked' existence – without a possibility of falling back upon a preceding, fundamental cause of the world. For Nancy, the condition of our naked existence is not a moral problem; it is an ontological question.[5]

Nancy proposes another understanding of community, which he terms 'inoperative community'. 'Inoperative' community 'constructs difference differently, in its unworking of social identities.'[6] The longing for a closed and undivided national identity that is so deeply embedded in the West of Ireland represents his idea of 'immanentism'; an uncomplicated and transparent idea of 'being-together'.[7] For Nancy there is no universal 'we'; rather, 'with' is at the heart of Being.[8] 'Inoperative' community means that 'we are contemporaries of ourselves, contemporaries of the stripping bare of being-in-common.'[9] Suzanna Milevska usefully describes Nancy's idea of sharing the world as a 'co-implication of existence' that requires a continuous, reflexive unworking of the idea of a singular community.[10] Nancy thinks of this co-existence as a mutual abandonment and exposure to the difference of the other – a 'like-being', which, he argues, is ultimately made explicable in the face of death.[11] Death reveals community by presenting to its members their mortal truth. Community appears 'as nothing' - as finitude - neither a ground, nor an essence, nor a substance: '*Community does not sublate the finitude it exposes. Community itself, in sum, is nothing but this exposition*.'[12] 'Community is *inoperative.* Therefore 'in "communication", what takes place is *exposition:* finite existence exposed to finite existence, co-appearing before it and with it.'[13]

We have to attain knowledge and/or praxis of the "we", where '"we" says "one" in a way that is singular-plural, one by one and one with one.[14]... 'Being' only comes into play in the presence of another singular being - "*Being"* ex-poses itself, then, as the *between* and the *with* of singularities[15] ... We are always being-with, but this "being-with" is not based on notions of shared identity or race, an inoperative community is always *in the process* of becoming ... it is not, most

specifically, the product of any work or project; it is *not* work, nor a product of projected labour, nor an *oeuvre* but what is un-worked, *dés-oeuvré.*[16]

3.2 Performing Inoperative Community.

In her essay *Performing Inoperative Community, the Space and the Resistance of Some Community Arts Projects* Gillian Rose provides a useful reflection on her understanding of inoperable community in relation to community art and radical politics in Scotland in the 1990s.[17] Questions of identity, belonging and hegemonic discourses of community have been examined within cultural studies since the 1980s and theorised by many, notably Stuart Hall, Iris Marion Young and others. Rose argues that they have made the term 'community' deeply problematic, dependent on a 'myth of rational, transparent, transcendent subjects denying difference from themselves.'[18] In her analysis of some of the sociological critiques of the term 'community' Rose cites Iris Marion Young,

> Community represents the ideal of shared public life, of mutual recognition and identification ... the ideal of community also suppresses differences among subjects and groups. The impulse to community often coincides with a need to preserve identity and in practice, excludes others who threaten that identity.[19]

Rose applies her reading of Nancy's 'inoperable community' to community art projects in Edinburgh, in order to understand how strategies of silence and performance used by community groups and artists have critiqued essentialising discourses of disadvantage and marginalisation. She suggests that the most challenging and subversive aspect of her interviews with community arts workers was what they left unsaid, or said to excess. Narratives representing an idea of 'community' dependent on calcifying definitions based on marginalisation and deprivation are resisted by the arts workers in their refusal to speak, or in speaking to excess, to the stories of others. 'To be named is to make sense, to be made sense of; it

is to be positioned in the realm of the legible, the knowable, the translatable. It is to be made vulnerable to knowledge: to be produced through discourse; to be produced.'[20] Rose argues that such a conscious, reflexive, calculated, intentional deployment of the language of representation is a performative act of resistance, corresponding with Nancy's idea of inoperative community in that it unworks social identities.[21] The arts workers argue against reductive attempts to define and classify them beyond the reality of performance and process, thus giving space for contingent connections beyond the constraining positions of discourse; the 'possibility of communicating something else, beyond the positions power consigns us to.'[22] Such a community of performed connection is an iteration of inoperative community: 'its spatiality is not the "there" of territorialising, mythical community but is instead a coming together of excess to discourse.'[23] This provides a useful premise for a collective artistic *praxis*, one that does not prescribe or describe community but comes to a provisional understanding of community, as a continuous process of 'un-working'. As Miwon Kwon proposes, 'only a community that continuously questions its own legitimacy is legitimate.'[24]

3.3: Politics, Aesthetics and Democracy.

The second part of this philosophical triad is Jacques Rancière, whose writings on aesthetics as a mode of political articulation are of particular relevance to re-thinking art, politics and democracy. For Rancière, 'equality is a presupposition, an initial axiom—or it is nothing.'[25] From the time he broke with Althusser after the events of May '68, he has written and reflected upon history, politics and aesthetics, making forays across disciplines and demonstrating an overriding concern with equality and what Kirstin Ross calls 'a particularly disruptive version of democracy.'[26] After '68 Rancière spent over a decade immersed in the archives of nineteenth-century proletarian history, reading the diaries, philosophical writings and journals of artisans – philosophical and aesthetic musings written in 'dead time' outside working hours. In his subsequent book, *Nights of Labour,* he set out his emancipatory principles by unpacking precisely what the archive represented – the

worker's 'right to think, the right to occupy the terrain the bourgeoisie had carefully preserved for itself: the terrain of aesthetic pleasure.'[27] For Rancière the emancipation of the workers in the nineteenth century meant having the capacity to break out from the normal forms of everyday experience – the normal intellectual and sensory equipment of the worker. That moment of rupture produced the aesthetic dimension in politics, the 'activity which those who have no time take the time that they have not, where those who are not supposed to speak prove able to speak, those who are supposedly enclosed in private life prove able to deal with common affairs.'[28] Kirstin Ross argues that, for Rancière, this refusal to be contained within the confines of what one is supposed to be, do, or say, lies at the heart of all of his subsequent reflections, permeating his books and writings on the relationship between art, politics and democracy.[29]

For Rancière, aesthetics does not mean the theory and experience of art and beauty but rather a formalisation of experience that frames a certain 'common sense' – 'a system of relations between sense, sensuous experience and meaning, and also the possible community framed by that conjunction.'[30] It appears almost self-evident that in order to shift the partition lines of the sensible art must, in and of itself, enjoy the highest coefficient of artistic visibility possible: it must be not merely visible, but be visible as art *per se*. It is the framing of art as "Art" that lends it the critical space necessary to function effectively, and allows the 'tensions and contradictions, which at once sustain the dynamic of artistic creation and aesthetic efficiency, and prevent it from ever fusing in one and the same community of sense'.[31] Politics and aesthetics are not autonomous; rather, Ranciere proposes, they are two spheres that inherently belong to one another.[32] In her lucid explication of Ranciere's writing Sophie Berrebi unpicks the threads of Rancière's ideas, tracking the way that he reworks the notion of aesthetics, defining it not as a discipline, but rather as a particular way in which, in a given historical or social context, art is identified as art.[33]

"Art" is neither autonomous of nor subordinate to the political but gains power from an uncertain and ambiguous location between the two states, highlighting what is otherwise invisible or disregarded – how the system is 'policed' within the social, political and cultural public spheres, and offering a possibility of challenging what Rancière calls, 'the distribution of the sensible'.[34] This is defined as

> a bodily order that defines the partition between means of doing, means of being and means of saying, which means that certain bodies are assigned, by their very name, to such and such a place, such and such a task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable, which determines that some activities are visible and that some are not, that some speech is heard as discourse while others are heard as noise.[35]

This suggests an aesthetic understanding of politics as a process of declassification, of abandoning the identity one is given in the policing of the social order.[36] In his criticism of *Politics as Aesthetics,* Stuart Martin proposes that, for Rancière, art creates the possibility for making displacements in the configuration of the sensible precisely because it cannot control the effect of its practice. The period of transformative flux between the destruction and reconfiguration or reconstitution of a social order, is where politics takes place; the events or episodes where parts or objects first become visible and become objects of experience that then require re-configuring within the existing order.[37]

Put more simply, politics exist in the moment when any given order of domination is interrupted by the appearance of a part that is impossible. This, he argues, is the 'metapolitics of aesthetics' – "Art" can hold out the promise of political accomplishment that it can never satisfy, but nonetheless thrives on that ambiguity.[38] Both politics and aesthetics can disrupt the 'harmonious fabric of the community that had everybody in place, performing in its own function, with the sensory and intellectual equipment geared up to that place and that function.'[39] Rancière insists that the spectator is not

passive, but always negotiating propositions put forward through the aesthetic experience as art or as beauty, or as what the image invents, and it is in that negotiation that the political appears and a *dis*-identification with the sensible occurs.[40]

3.4: Towards a Politics of Dissent.

Chantal Mouffe's idea of 'agonistic pluralism' is based on a model of politics and democracy that is opposed to the notion of a rational, liberal, 'third-way' consensus. She insists on acknowledging the dynamic of rivalry between adversaries and argues that a truly radical democratic society is one in which relations of conflict are sustained, not erased.[41] Mouffe proposes that we need to acknowledge the affects and effects of an 'Us – Them' dynamic on subjectivities, arguing that the problem with liberal rationalism is 'the failure to take into account that there can only be an identity; personal or political, when it is constituted as difference and social difference is constituted through acts of power.'[42] We have to learn to live with the ineradicability, the ever-present possibility, of antagonism.[43]

Mouffe suggests that the erosion of difference between left and right has left a dangerous political void in most Western liberal democracies. The lack of space for antagonisms has made politics impotent in the face of the 'passion' aroused by the power of right-wing populism. Mouffe insists that the 'passions' engendered by conflict and struggles must have a political form of expression; otherwise they will find other more extreme and violent antagonistic forms of expression.[44] Without a pluralist, democratic discourse, the ground is laid for various forms of essentialist identities, nationalist or parochial, to emerge – which is precisely what happened during the Mullaghmore conflict.[45] The sensitivities, passions and discontents engendered by the lack of access to political decision-making mechanisms, further complicated by the legacy of post-colonialism and conflicts around identity, community and belonging in the West of Ireland, (the so-called 'Field' syndrome referred to in the notes to Chapter 2) is a case in point. Like Nancy, Mouffe argues that a boundaried and

exclusionary vision of identity and community is 'an impossible vision' – 'community as an organic unity can never be attained'.[46] The Mullaghmore conflict demonstrated the lack of open space in which to 'practice' disagreement and engage in a political discourse that might adequately acknowledge the subject positions, polarised perspectives, resentments and antagonisms that regularly erupt in conflicts over land management and regulation.

Mouffe's response to the political antagonisms is to proactively recognize the utility of an agonistic model based on an idea of 'a struggle between adversaries whose ideas can be fought against, even fiercely, but whose right to defend those ideas will never be put into question'.[47] Grant Watson puts forward his reading of agonistic democracy as 'not a dialogue between wholly rational partners or the frontal encounter of two complete entities at total war with one another, but instead a multifarious negotiation of partial, and often unstable, subject positions.'[48] In thinking through the affect of passions upon subjects her position is close to Félix Guattari's in relation to the pivotal role of subjectivity.[49] Guattari argues for a production of subjectivity that is not defined by oppressive regimes like capitalism, and similar to this is Mouffe's theorisation of agonism as that which forces a defence of the subject position and a critical reflection that has an immediate political effect. Guattari's writing on subjectivity is further discussed in relation to Nicolas Bourriauld's writing in *Relational Aesthetics* in Chapter 4 and in relation to psychoanalytic theory and my subjective, personal practice in Chapter 6.

Mouffe remains an advocate of the need for institutions that will allow other forms of grass-roots democracy, and agonistic participation, where one can make a decision between real conflicting alternatives.[50] She calls for a model of the public sphere that can keep a democratic ideal alive and reveal the positions prompted by an adversarial, us/them, confrontation.[51] She argues that critical artistic practices have an important role to play in the public sphere, acknowledging, like Rancière, that there is an aesthetic dimension in the political and a political dimension in art.[52] The role

of the artist is not to produce the grand rupture of the *avant-garde* or indeed the radical critique, but in contributing to the construction of new subjectivities through the paradox of conflictual consensus.[53]

3.5: Conclusion.

The symbolic essence of Nancy's idea of inoperable community rests in the hyphen: 'a mark of union and also a mark of division, a mark of sharing that effaces itself, leaving each term to its isolation *and* its being-with-the-others'.[54] *Inoperative Community* usefully conceptualises a framework for an artistic *praxis* that can neither prescribe nor describe community but one that might allow provisional understandings of 'community' as a continuous process of 'un-working'. Such a process can be construed as an emancipatory action, freeing subjects from positions defined by social, historical or economic circumstances. Rancière's egalitarian vision of communality is one that allows 'any body' to imagine and perform community. His analysis of politics, aesthetics and the relational dynamic between the two presents a possibility for challenging and examining the unacknowledged systems and structures of power relations and hegemonic cultural representations. He offers the dual proposition of the possibility of revealing a 'common sense', however provisional, whilst simultaneously revealing underlying difference, suggesting the possibility of an aesthetic that might actively disrupt notions of what constitutes identity and community in Ireland and the static, tired, polarised narratives of modernity and nationalism. In this respect Rancière's discourse of politics and aesthetics is similar to Nancy's idea of inoperative community; one that is dedicated to on-going, continuous unworking. Chantal Mouffe's concept of agonistic democracy offers a potential system for adversarial conflict that might navigate the polarities between national/modern, incomer/local and the cultivator's/aesthete's perspectives on place, space and landscape. All three writers have helped me to think through the wider political, social and conceptual parameters of this PhD and are reflected in Part 3 of the thesis.

1 Williams, Raymond *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973) 349.

2 Here Nancy refers, like Williams, to the idea of 'a lost age in which community was tight and bound to harmonious bonds in which above all it played back to itself.' Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Micael Holland and Simona Sawheny, (Minnesota: UMP, THL Vol. 76, 1991) 10.

3 'Through God or the gods, communion – as substance and act, the act of communicated immanent substance – has been indefinitely withdrawn from community.' Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* 10.

4 Ignaas Devisch, "Jean-Luc Nancy", *The Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Accessed 18 June 2010) Web.

5 Nancy, "Biography", *The European Graduate School*, (Accessed Jan 2012) Web.

6 Gillian Rose, "Performing Inoperative Community", *Geographies of Resistance* 200.

7 Devisch.

8 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural,* trans. Anne O'Byrne, Robert Richardson, Orig. *Etre singulier pluriel* Editions Galilee 1996. (San Francisco: Stanford UP, 2000) 95.

9 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* 63.

10 Suzana Milevska *Participatory art. A paradigm shift from objects to subjects*. Eurozine 2006. Accessed March 2010. Web .

11 Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* 32/3.

12 Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*. 26.

13 Community is revealed in the death of others; hence it is always revealed to others. Community is what takes place through others and for others. It is not the space of the *egos* – subjects and substances that are at bottom immortal - but of the *I's* who are always *others* (or else are nothing). If community is revealed in the death of others it is because death itself is the true community of *I's* that are not *egos*

Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*. Ibid 14.

14 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* 75/76.

15 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* 86.

16 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* 153/4.

17 Rose "Performing Inoperative Community", 187.

18 Rose make extensive reference to the writings of Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey, Iris Marion Young et al, all of whom have problematized the use of the term 'community'. Rose 185/6.

19 Rose, “Performing Inoperative Community”, 185, cit. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) 12.

20 Rose, “Performing Inoperative Community”, 186/7.

21 Rose 200.

22 The political disposition of such a community is one that ‘orders itself to the unworking of its communication, or (is) destined to this unworking: a community consciously undergoing the experience of its sharing.’ Rose, “Performing Inoperative Community.” 202, citing Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 40.

23 Rose, “Performing Inoperative Community”, 200.

24 Miwon Kwon, “The (Un)sitings of Community”, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2004) 155.

25 Ruitenberg, Claudia, “What If Democracy Really Matters?” *Journal of Educational Controversy*, 3, no. 1, 2008, citing Kirstin Ross, “Introduction”. In Jacques Rancière, *The ignorant schoolmaster: Five lessons in intellectual emancipation*, trans. K Ross (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1991) xix.

26 Kristin Ross, “Kristin Ross on Jacques Rancière”, *ArtForum.* 2007. Accessed June 20th 2011, Web.

27 Ross, “Kristin Ross on Jacques Rancière”, cit. *The Nights of Labor: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France* (*Les Nuits des proletaires: Archives du reve ouvrier*, 1981).

28 Jacques Rancière, “On Ethics and Aesthetics”, Jacques Rancière and Peter Sloterdijk debate *Aesthetics and Modernity Warwick University* iTunes U, transcript.

29 Ross, “Kristin Ross on Jacques Rancière”.

30 Rancière and Peter Sloterdijk, debate *Aesthetics and Modernity*.

31 Kristin Ross puts this argument simply. ‘Generic habits--stereotypical representations that congeal in the writing of even the most progressive social scientists or political activists--create a world of unshakable facts. They reinforce categories that lead to a kind of digestive perception of only the most familiar of affects. Shifting the generic frame can constitute a political act: Nothing "real" seems to happen, and yet the new language, the new configuration, permits us to see a real event in place of the mere atmospheric swamp of earlier descriptions.’ Ross, “Kristin Ross on Jacques Rancière”.

Rancière, “Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art.” *ART&RESEARCH* Volume 2, No. 1 Summer 2008 14.

32 What the artist does is weave a new sensory fabric by tearing precepts and affects out of the perceptions and affections that constitute the fabric of ordinary experience. Weaving this new fabric means creating a common expression…The human beings are tied together by a certain sensory fabric, I would say a distribution of the sensible, which defines their way of being together and politics is about the sensory fabric of that “being together”. Rancière, “Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community” 4.

33 Sophie Berrebi, “Jacques Rancière: Aesthetics is Politics”, *ART&RESEARCH* Volume 2. No. 1. Summer 2008. Web. Aug. 2009.

34 Art’s ambiguity thus described parallels Homi Bhabha’s ideas of another aesthetic process that allows for the historical ‘recognition’ that ‘refigures it through a temporal distancing or ‘lag’ and must be distinguished …from a Kantian aesthetic, which is a mediatory process that brings existence to its fullest

being in a revelation of self-reflection. Nor do I subscribe to that tradition of a materialist aesthetic that sees art as the displaced or overdetermined symptom of social reification - a fetishism of phenomenal forms that conceals "real" ideological contradictions. Both these approaches to the aesthetic involve transcendent schemes of thought and art where the progressive movement of the dialectic at once poses the problem of difference, alienation, negation - at the ontological or epistemological level - and sublates or disavows it in the process of representation. Homi Bhabha, "The World and the Home" *Social Text Ni.* 3*1/32, Third World and Post Colonial Issues* (Duke University Press) 1992) 141-153 Accessed 10/09/2009.

35 Stephen Wright's translation of 'the distribution of the sensible', which differs from that of Gabriel Rockhill in *The Politics of Aesthetics*. Stephen Wright, "Behind Police Lines: Art Visible and Invisible", *ART&RESEARCH* Volume 2. No. 1. Summer 2008. Aug. 2009, citing Rancière, *La Mésentente* (Paris: Galilée, 1995) 52. Also Rancière, *The Politics of* Aesthetics, trans. Gabriel Rockhill, (London: Continuum, 2004) 12-13.

36 Sudeep Dasgupta, "Art is going elsewhere and politics has to catch it. An interview with Jacques Rancière", *Krisis*, Journal for Contemporary Philosophy, No. 1, 2008, 50.

37 Stuart Martin, "Cul-de-sac", *Radical Philosophy 131*, (May/June 2005) Accessed July 17 2009, 40.

38 Rancière, "The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes, "*New Left Review* 14 March-April 2002, 133-151.

39 Rancière, "The Misadventures of Critical Thinking", Aporia: Dartmouth Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy, Spring: Volume XXIV, Issue 2. Jan 2010, 30.

40 "An Exchange with Jacques Rancière", Panel chaired by Sophie Berribi between Stephen Wright, Jonathan Dronsfield and Jacques Rancière. *ART&RESEARCH* Volume 2, No. 1 Summer 2008. Accessed July 8, 2009 Web.

41 'While antagonism is a we/they relation in which the two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground, agonism is a we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents. They are 'adversaries' not enemies.' Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political,* (New York: Routledge, 2005) 20.

Maria Lind, "The Collaborative Turn" 19.

42 Here Mouffe acknowledges Henry Straten's notion of the 'constitutive outside' to refer to a number of themes developed by Derrida through the idea of the 'supplement', 'trace' and 'difference'. Chantal Mouffe, "Democracy in a Multipolar World", *Millennium – Journal of International Studies,* (SAGE, 2009), Accessed July 25, 2011, Web, 550.

43 Mouffe, "Politics and Passions. The Stakes of Democracy", Centre for the Study of Democracy, University of Westminster. 2002. Web July 8th 2009.

44 Mouffe, "From Antagonistic Politics to an Agonistic Public Space", *Re-Public Reimagining Democracy*, Accessed July 18th 2011 Web. NP.

45 Mouffe, "Democracy in a Multipolar World" 552.

46 Julian Brigstocke, *Review Three: Aesthetics, Authority and the Performance of Community*, Accessed July 22nd 2011, Web, citing Mouffe, *Dimensions of radical democracy : pluralism, citizenship, community*. (London: Verso, 1992).

47 Mouffe, "Democracy in a Multipolar World" 551.

48 Grant Watson, "Response to Claire Bishop's paper on Relational Aesthetics." *CIRCA Art Magazine,* (No 114, 2005) 37.

49 Although this idea of singularities working in consort is similar to that of Deleuze and Guattari's in *A Thousand Plateaus,* it should be noted that Mouffe persistently argues against the interpretation of their ideas and applied by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri to the concept of the 'multitude'; a set of

singularities in which each individual retains its difference, acting in concert in the face of globalisation and deterritorialisation. Hardt and Negri advocate a politics of exodus, a withdrawal from the political institutions that is based on communication – what they call the 'common' – between singularities. Their argument is that globalisation and deterritorialisation has led to the creation of a 'smooth' space and that we need to liberate ourselves from all belonging, abandoning the state, the nation and the family. For Mouffe, this idea of smooth space is a dangerous one, and she argues that we need to work within the political institutions to create change. This is discussed further in Chapter 5.

50 Although Mouffe acknowledges that the intrinsic logic of agonistic pluralism is to evade formal structure, the Left-Right distinction is one of the most crucial conditions for the existence of agonistic politics. It is a way of recognising that society is divided. And this is precisely what has been disappearing with the blurring between Left and Right and the Third Way idea of the centre, as the latter does not allow the possibility of choice between different alternatives. Chantal Mouffe, "From Antagonistic Politics to an Agonistic Public Space". NP.

51 Mouffe, interviewed by Rosalind Deutsche, Brandon W Joseph, and Thomas Keenan, "Every Form of Art has a Political Dimension," *Grey Room* 02, Winter 2001. Web.

52 Mouffe, 'Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces', *Art & Research* (Volume 1. No. 2, Summer 2007) 4.

53 Mouffe, 'Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces' 5.

54 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* 37.

Chapter 4: Towards Collaboration.

4.1 Art, Community and Rural Ireland.

In *Wild Country: Art, Community and the Rural*, John Mulloy writes about community arts in the West, where traditional and 'unofficial' cultural practices have a long history of playing an active part in social and cultural life up to the late 1980s.[1] Mulloy links their decline with the rise in 'official', state-funded culture in the early 1990s when an increase in expenditure on the arts at local, county and national level was further augmented by the development of regional arts centres and the employment of county arts officers. This brought with it a new emphasis on access to the arts and a particular focus on cultural citizenship.[2] Local authority arts development was also supported by the Arts Council and national institutions such as the Irish Museum of Modern Art and this was seen as a way of expanding and opening up new contexts, audiences and partnerships within the Irish cultural sphere.[3] Outside the social and community development sector, Per Cent for Art public art schemes guided by policy set by the Arts Council are directed towards engaging with different communities, contexts and audiences.[4] Direct support for artists is also available through Arts Council Project funding for public artworks, generally for one-off projects. Artist Ailbhe Murphy argues that the effect of this development in Irish community arts activity has been twofold: 'In the first, there is an emphasis on the use of art as a tool for individual and social transformation, to be placed in the service of the greater social good. In the second, it is the question of extending the boundaries, relevance and reach of art as a domain of practice that motivates the artist.'[5] Within social and community development, art was seen as a way of overcoming social disadvantage and exclusion and to assist marginalised and disadvantaged communities to overcome poverty.[6]

Mulloy argues that a singular notion of 'community' is reinforced by the Community Development Programme, which is designed to address inclusion amongst marginalised groups: 'part of the State's ongoing creation of identity, a process that happens through recognition and exclusion'.[7] Rather than acknowledge the complexity of multiple 'communities' that make up the reality of present-day rural Ireland, he argues that community arts development has produced what Lauren Berlant calls a 'taxonomy of difference'.[8] Tom Duddy also questions the 'missionary' or ameliorative effect of 'liberal-humanist paternalism' within the community-arts sector in Ireland, and argues that 'arts policy must not allow the *image* of community to obscure the workings of society'.[9] Both authors point to the need for the kind of radical democracy proposed by Chantal Mouffe – discussed in the previous chapter – to actively overcome the lack of cultural democracy in rural Ireland.

Taking this frame as a context, three key texts relating to community-based, dialogical, social/relational art practices are analysed: *Mapping The Terrain: New Genre Public Art, Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art* and *Relational Aesthetics.* All are relevant to thinking through ideas of community, difference, and social and environmental change. The texts are set alongside the arguments they have produced, and are considered in relation to a situated, activist, engaged art practice in the West of Ireland.

4.2: Mapping Collaborative Perspectives.

Suzanne Lacy was a keynote speaker at the *Shifting Ground* conference that was held in Ennis, Co. Clare in 2006. (See Appendix 3 for an account of *Shifting Ground Conference*)[10] A key figure in the development of community based art practices in the USA, Lacy edits and contributes key essays to *Mapping The Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, an important publication that examines and theorises forms of process-based, collaborative, ethically-framed practices.[11] The text marks

a shift in public art away from what Judy Baca calls the 'cannon in the park' model towards what Mary-Jane Jacobs terms 'audience-generated and audience-responsive' public interventions.[12] The book was co-written with artists, curators and writers and includes case studies and essays by figures such as Lucy Lippard and Mary-Jane Jacob. Lacy is a key figure in the book, providing a critical analysis of contexts and methodologies for artistic interventions in the public sphere and challenging the nature of public art in the USA in the 1990s, including the way that the cultural sphere engages with discourses taking place outside and beyond institutions. Publishing the book was strategic, a way of opening up a critical discourse around an art 'whose processes of engagement are an important part of its aesthetic language and the relationship *itself* is the artwork.'[13] It was also a way of drawing attention to the need to develop a critical language 'through which values, ethics, and social responsibility can be discussed in terms of art.'[14]

Lacy analyses the psychodynamics of power governing relationships between communities and artists, unpacking how they intersect with both political and social life.[15] Her background in psychology and her decades of feminist political activism have given her a deep understanding of the politics of subjectivity. She insists on rigorous self-awareness around personal and political intentionality when working with different 'publics'. The various roles of the artist – experiencer, reporter, analyst, activist – are examined and the ethical responsibilities inherent to sustaining durational public art projects are considered in relation to different contexts and situations.[16] When considering the role of the artist as 'experiencer', she makes a case for on-going self-examination and reflection on the internalised agendas that unconsciously govern the impulse to intervene in the public domain, citing her mentor Allan Krapow: 'It's not only the transformation of the public consciousness that we are interested in, but it's our own transformation as artists that's just as important. Perhaps a corollary is that community change can't take place unless it's transformative within us.'[17] An awareness of how one is positioned by the constant disciplining of subjectivity and the challenge of accommodating and acknowledging the artist's

interiority and unconscious is of particular importance here and discussed at length in relation to psychoanalytic theory and my 'personal' practice in Chapter 6. As 'reporter', the artist focuses not only on the experience but also on bringing attention (without commentary) to a particular situation, leaving the audience to draw their own conclusions. Moving from reporter to 'analysist' requires critical reflection –not the self-reflection of the 'experiencer' but rather the broader intellectual discourse of the public sphere, often entailing a shift away from the use of visual imagery. Building on conceptual art from the 1960s Lacy carries through this legacy into the dematerialisation of the art object and its re-materialisation in the expanded field of social practice, from analyst to 'activist'. Here artists reposition themselves as 'citizen-activists and 'catalysts for change' and, for Lacy, this implies working collaboratively across disciplines, social systems and institutions.[18] It is interesting to observe that it is only in recent years and in the light of current trends in social and relational art practices that her importance as both artist and writer has been critically re-evaluated.[19] She writes with a rare mix of experience and authority about the dynamics governing collaborative practice and the need to 'share the power inherent in making culture with as many people as possible'.[20] This is discussed in depth with specific reference to one of her projects, *Beneath Land and Water - A Project for Elkhorn City*, in Chapter 5.

Suzi Gablik, another contributor to *Mapping The Terrain,* builds, too, on the idea of connective aesthetics that she outlines in *The Reenchantment of Art.* Gablik predicted the move towards a social turn in 1991 when she wrote:

> It seems clear that art orientated towards dynamic participation rather than towards passive anonymous spectatorship will have to deal with living contexts and that once an awareness of the ground or setting is actively cultivated, the audience is no longer separate. The meaning is no longer in the observer, nor in the observed, but in the relationship between the two. Interaction is the key to move art beyond the aesthetic mode: letting the audience intersect with, and even form part of the process, recognising that when observer and observed merge, the vision of static autonomy is undermined.[21]

She makes the case for a 'healing' process that can ameliorate the 'alienating effect of the modern epoch by dissolving the mechanical division between self and the world.'[22] Gablik's identification of a relational aesthetic that is situated, listener-centred and empathetic, pre-empted Grant Kester's conceptualisation of a dialogical aesthetic based on active listening, intersubjective dialogue and empathetic insight.

4.3: Grant Kester: Community + Communication.

Grant Kester theorises and historicises what he calls 'dialogical aesthetics' in *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art* and, more recently, collaborative art practices in *The One and the Many: Contemporary Critical Art in a Global Context*. Kester's goal is twofold: to understand community arts practices as a specific and new form of cultural production, and to develop a critical methodology and relevant and appropriate criteria for its evaluation.[23] He begins by tracing modern art's function as a mode of communication, pointing to the 'critical lineage' from Clive Bell through Clement Greenberg that has privileged the 'antidiscursive orientation of the avant-garde artwork', noting the connection they make between semantic availability and commodity status: abstraction, opacity and inscrutability are presented as a defence against 'banal' mass culture and the 'kitsch-sodden' viewer.[24] Equally, the shock-based movements of the avant-garde, from Dada through to recent work by artists like Santiago Sierra, are, he argues, designed to challenge and force the 'hapless' viewer into a new awareness.

Kester draws on Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action as the intellectual basis and methodological frame for a 'dialogical aesthetic' founded on communication and intersubjective exchange which is capable of addressing and moving across boundaries of difference. Habermas's theory is social rather than political, and does not prescribe remedies but rather ways of understanding the ontology of society.[25] He makes a critical distinction between

communicative and instrumental actions. Put simply, communicative, discursive, 'speech-acts' are open to view and help to establish and maintain social integrity within the public sphere, whereas instrumental forms of communication are opaque, 'the steering media' of the system's economic, religious and political networks. Habermas argues that the sedimented power structures of state and capital are 'parasitic', training and directing human beings into patterns of instrumental behaviour.[26] Although deeply embedded in the lifeworld, the tendency of the political and economic system to 'colonise' and become 'de-coupled' from social and cultural life causes 'social pathologies' to arise, leading to a decrease in shared meanings and mutual understanding (anomie), fragmentation, demoralisation, alienation and social instability.[27] Habermas's communication and discourse theory is designed to address this problem. It is based on the mutual recognition of 'validity claims', relying on speakers to bracket material and social difference, exercise self-reflexive awareness and give way to the compelling force of superior arguments.[28] Agreements are provisional and directed towards social integration. It is not surprising that Habermas's arguments draw fire from Chantal Mouffe and other social and political theorists who see his ideas as foundational to a deliberative and consensus- driven vision of democracy. However, to my mind this fails to take into account the provisional nature of any validity claims or indeed to distinguish, as Kester argues, 'enforced consensus from the forms of shared experience necessary to act both creatively and collectively.'[29]

4.4: Dialogical Aesthetics.

Kester sets out his premise for a dialogical as distinct from a conventional aesthetic by beginning with Kant's idea of aesthetic experience as a form of 'free play'. The Kantian aesthetic idea requires an object that functions as a kind of catalyst, to provide the unique liberatory pleasure, 'setting in motion our cognitive operations without the practical considerations that are forced upon us by the real world.'[30] To perceive things aesthetically we must think beyond the borders of our specific identities as subjects and set aside our 'normal' cognitive relationships and desires in order to

experience a point of view that is universal.[31] The freedom from instrumental intent provided by the aesthetic experience is not, Kester argues, limited to the contemplation and perception engendered by the aesthetic object but can also take place within a dialogical model of aesthetic experience. This shift represents an idea of artmaking where the role and meaning of art shifts from 'something that speaks for itself, to an art which must speak with others throughout its production as well as at its moment of reception.'[32] Habermas's social theory allows Kester to think through this proposition of a dialogical aesthetic experience that goes beyond the 'objective' universal standard of Kant and Hume, a site of production with its own structures and strategies that can be situated in parallel and productive tension with the avant-garde tradition of museum-based art.[33]

Referring to Emmanuel Levinas's concept of responsibility, and Mikhail Backtin's model of 'dialogical' experience, Kester outlines a methodological framework for such an aesthetic as a process that allows identity to unfold and change over time. 'It is in the nature of dialogical projects to be impure, to represent a practical negotiation (self-reflexive but nonetheless compromised) around issues of power, identity and difference, even as they strive towards something more.'[34] He identifies the artists that best exemplify such an approach in their practices, including Suzanne Lacy, WochenKlausur, Helen and Newton Harrison, Stephen Willats, Littoral and Jay Koh and Chu Yuan, and looks at their practice over a range of projects.[35] Kester points to two interrelated areas that frame a dialogical aesthetic: speech acts and dialogue, and intersubjective ethics and identity formation. Although communicative actions depend on the power of argument to arrive at provisional agreement, Kester points to criticisms of Habermas's model, noting that Habermas underestimates the extent to which the ability and competency to participate in discourse is governed by subjective identity.[36] The theory of communicative action presumes that an individual has the capacity and desire to set aside deeply ingrained notions of difference, and Kester has no illusions about the limitations of the process, especially in projects that involve forms of class-

based or race-based political resistance or where there are manifest differentials in power relations.[37] For example, this is problematic in Irish culture as speech is used in a multitude of ways – to confuse, tease, deceive, obfuscate, divert, elude – and discursive exchanges need to take cultural difference and the situational context into account. Post-colonial theorists such as Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha argue, like Gillian Rose, that the refusal to make everything available to discourse – the 'sly civility' of the subaltern – is a strategy of resistance.[38] Recognising this problem, Kester proposes two further necessary steps in a dialogical aesthetic process: connected knowing, which takes into account the social context from which others speak, judge and act; and empathetic insight.[39] This can be produced upon a series of axes; in the rapport between artists and their collaborators, among the collaborators themselves, and between the collaborators and the community of viewers.[40] Thus, Kester presents a way of reconsidering a situated enquiry into place, space and landscape as a form of dialogical aesthetic that could address the instrumentalising effects and affects of the post-colonial legacy as replayed in conflicts around power and representation. As Kester observes, 'art since modernism has possessed the capacity to open space within contemporary culture in which certain questions can be asked and critical assessments articulated, that would not be accepted or tolerated elsewhere.'[41]

4.5: Operative Communicability.

Kester returns to the avant-garde, community, and communicability, reconsidering poststructuralist challenges to collective forms of identification and conventional notions of a coherent community. Rose's reading of Nancy's 'inoperable community', discussed in Chapter 3, is relevant to his thinking on collective artistic praxis. He points to *Inoperative Community* as a way of thinking through a proposal of community that acknowledges that we have no 'substantial identity', and our consequent recognition that this lack of identity must be shared by others. This, he argues, turns 'Kant's "*sensus*

communus" "inside-out" (as Nancy would say); instead of common sense, we intuit a common lack of identity.'[42] Inter-subjective dialogue, (subject-to-subject, being-with-being) can therefore be taken as transformative, and Kester cites WochenKlausur's 'boat colloquies', Lacy's parking garage dialogues and Stephen Willats's tower block collaborations as examples of projects that share Nancy's idea of 'being-outside-self'.[43]

Kester points to incompatibilities between Nancy's proposition of inoperative community and the conditions of dialogical practice, arguing that 'Nancy is insistent that an ethical community is one that cannot be realised through communicative interaction.'[44] Furthermore, if community can only be ethically constituted through a moment of "unworked" epiphany, this precludes any durationally extended process of intersubjective, discursive exchange.[45] However, to my mind, Kester places too much emphasis on Nancy's invocation of what he terms 'Manichean oppositions' such as rupture versus stasis, or coherence versus incoherence. Nancy speaks in a highly authored, often poetic style, offering fragmentary texts like *Inoperable Community,* upon which he subsequently elaborates in his later books.[46] In *Being Singular Plural*[47] Nancy presents an idea of intersubjective experience which I understand as other to the 'essentially specular' experience which, Kester argues, conflicts with the conditions of dialogical practice.[48] Indeed, Nancy offers a nuanced reading of communication well suited to the conditions of an alterior, post-colonial experience:

> It is not enough then to set idle chatter in opposition to the authenticity of the spoken word, understood as being replete with meaning. On the contrary it is necessary to discern the conversation (and sustaining) of being-with as such within chatter: it is in "conversing," in the sense of discussion, that being-with "sustains itself," in the sense of the perseverance in Being. Speaking-with exposes the *conatus* of being-with, or better, it exposes being-with as *conatus,* exposes it as the effort and desire to maintain oneself as "with" and, as a consequence, to maintain something which, in itself, is not a stable and permanent substance, but rather a sharing and a crossing through. In this conversation (and sustaining) of being-with, one

> must discern how language, at each moment, with each signification, exposes the with, exposes itself as the with, inscribes and *ex-scribes* itself in the with until it is exhausted, emptied of signification.[49]

With Kester, I accept that dialogical encounters seldom involve a complete suspension of identity; however, an on-going process of intersubjective dialogue between subjects – 'it is the closeness, the brushing-up against or the coming across, the almost-there of distanced proximity' – allows the meaning of 'with' to become tangible.[50] And that corresponds, for me, with both inoperative community and Kester's dialogical aesthetic; intersubjective dialogue in conjunction with active listening and empathetic insight (also implicit in Nancy's excerpt on conversation) offering a way of understanding how identity might change over time – not through some instantaneous thunderclap of insight but 'through a more subtle, and no doubt imperfect, process of transformation, passing through phases of coherence, vulnerability, dissolution, and recoherence.'[51]

4.6: Relational Aesthetics.

A central tenet of new genre public art was the dematerialisation of the art object: 'what exists in the space between the words public and art is an unknown relationship between artist and audience, a relationship that may *itself* become the artwork'.[52] In most respects this is precisely what Nicolas Bourriaud's idea of *Relational Aesthetics* sets out to articulate using galleries, institutions and museums rather than the public sphere. For Bourriaud the role of artworks is no longer simply to inform imaginary utopian realities.[53] Instead, as Stuart Martin observes, it is 'a refusal of commodity fetishisation: a reassertion of social relations between "persons" *against* social relations between commodities'.[54] Taking as a theoretical and practical point of departure 'the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space', his curatorial experiments with Rirkrit Tiravanija, Liam Gillick, Pierre Huyghe, Georgina Starr, Philippe

Parreno and others put the viewer centre stage.[55] The contemporary artwork serves as the 'bonding agent' for 'moments of subjectivity associated with singular experiences, be it Cézanne's apples or Buren's striped structures.'[56] The material object has been replaced by the relational form, which only exists in the encounter between productive, participatory strategies: 'form is the *representative* of desire in an image ... producing a form is to invent possible encounters; receiving a form is to create the conditions for an exchange.'[57] Bourriaud's relational experiments are not simply social models but can be seen as constructed spaces for encounter or, as Tim Collins puts it, 'laboratory experiments in the discursive forms.'[58] The relational artwork represents a social *interstice*, a 'space in human relations which fits more or less harmoniously within the overall trading system, but suggests other trading possibilities than those in effect in the system.'[59] For Bourriaud the most pressing thing is 'no longer the emancipation of individuals, but the freeing-up of inter-human communications, the dimentional emancipation of existence.[60] *Relational Aesthetics* theorises a post-minimalist critique of commodity fetishism. Moreover, Bourriaud insists that relational art is not a watered-down form of social critique, not conviviality, but the *product* of this conviviality.[61] The 'constructed situation' points to the slippages and contradictions within an art of social exchange and Stuart Martin notes that the very stripping away of the object reveals not so much a micro-utopia as the capitalist exchange relations within the institutions of the artworld.[62] For Martin, the pivitol problem with Bourriaud's account is 'his undialectical affirmation of the social contra objects as the key to art's resistance to capitalist exchange.'[63] The object does not represent a medium of capitalist exchange value; rather, as is all too evident in the globalised marketplace, it is the commodification of labour ('buyable time' in Bourriaud's words) that constitutes the value of 'objective' labour.[64] For Martin, Bourriaud's utopianism is a form of Romanticism - art reframed as a version of a non-commodified life – and he argues that the political project of anti-capitalism requires erradicating the causes *and* critiquing the dialectics of social exchange within capitalist culture.[65]

4.7: Claire Bishop and the Collaborative Turn.

In her essay *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics* Claire Bishop proposes that Bourriaud 'wants to equate aesthetic judgement with an ethicopolitical judgement of the relationship produced by the work of art.'[66] Bishop is deeply sceptical of claims made about the intrinsic value of open-ended, interactive, artworks, often resistant to closure: 'the curatorial modus operandi' of contemporary art institutions like the Palais de Tokyo ... The *quality* of the relationships in "relational aesthetics" are never examined or called into question...if relational art produces human relations then the next logical question to ask is what *types* of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?'[67] The latter half of *Relational Aesthetics* addresses this question through Bourriaud's analyses of Félix Guattari's writings on subjectivity. Bourriaud argues that Guattari's vision of 'Ecosophy' aims to re-form ideas of globalness and interdependence based on 'operational methods of subjectivity hitherto painstakingly underplayed.'[68] It is curious that though Bishop places great emphasis on an idea of antagonism grounded in Mouffe and Laclau's theory of subjectivity, she fails to mention Guattari or Bourriaud's analysis of Guattari's relevance to contemporary political and ecological thought. She cites Mouffe and Laclau's argument, after Lacan, that subjectivity is not fully transparent and rational but is 'irremediably decentered' and incomplete.[69] As Grant Watson observes in his critique of Bishop's text, 'it seems only fair to take Guattari's ideas on the individual subject and its relation to the political into account, particularly as Bourriaud cites them as important to his practice.[70]

With Rancière,[71] Claire Bishop insists in *The Social Turn and Its Discontents*[72] that aesthetic autonomy is necessary in order to provoke the revelatory shock and rupture associated with the avant-garde. For Grant Kester, the anti-discursive modes of the avant-garde – referred to respectively as a 'modality of indifference' and a 'modality of engagement and theatricality' – share a common scepticism about collaborative/dialogical art practices where individual autonomy risks being subsumed.[73] Kester argues that collaborative art practices have generated critical, counter-normative insight outside

the 'conventional, dyadic structure in which the avant-garde artist engenders consciousness in an unenlightened viewer.'[74] In recent years critical exchanges between Kester and Bishop have played out this opposition as a kind of battle of the ethical versus the aesthetic.[75] Kester points to Bishop's consistent support for the aesthetic as a zone of remediation and punishment, one that treats 'the consciousness of the viewer, the Other, as a material to be '"exposed", "laid bare" and made available to the artist's shaping influence'.[76] Bishop points to the discursive criteria of socially engaged art as one that demands that 'art should extract itself from the "useless" domain of the aesthetic and be fused with social praxis', questioning the conceptual authority and aesthetic significance of participative artworks where the critical value resides solely in authorial renunciation and the ameliorative function of strengthening the social bond.[77] While declaring herself 'broadly sympathetic' to this *political* task, Bishop cannot see a case for equating collaborative practices ('good intentions') directed towards a social effect (which she equates with New Labour's rhetoric on social inclusion) with *artistic* quality.

Here, to my mind, Bishop misses the point of Kester's, and indeed Bourriaud's, arguments for a dialogical aesthetic – namely that it is able to produce new forms of subjectivity out of social relations and dialogical interactions and is therefore potentially transformative. At a time when effects of systemic alienation require art's intervention in the lifeworld, relational and dialogical art practices offer a possibility of revisiting ideas of collectivity. It is interesting that both Kester and Bishop come to similar conclusions. Bishop makes a case for thinking of the political and the aesthetic together, rather than subsuming both within the ethical.[78] In locating dialogical art practices within art history, Kester tries to redress the imbalance caused by the near invisibility of collaborative/relational practices in the cultural sphere until recent years.[79] This does not mean that he necessarily advocates the ethical over the aesthetic, but rather, as already noted, in 'parallel and productive tension with the avant-garde tradition.'[80]

Maria Lind observes that it is difficult to ignore the similarities, albeit with different shades of emphasis, between Bourriaud's arguments in *Relational Aesthetics*, Lacy's writings in *Mapping The Terrain* and Grant Kester's descriptions of dialogical aesthetics in *Conversation Pieces* – even if the curator, artist and writer see themselves as occupying very different positions.[81] They have all tried to re-frame the social in contemporary art and have made significant inroads in bringing an ethical dimension to art practice within the broader social sphere. Their writings have been central to understanding and evaluating my own ideas and critical practice and represent a further expansion and contextualisation of the field of process-based rather than object-based approaches to making artworks.

Ruth Barker (with Suzanne Lacy) makes an important point, writing: 'As a definition, however, the dialogical within aesthetic language must be seen alongside the visual in order to discuss a multiplicity of practices using a multiplicity of tools. The visual (as distinct from the beautiful) undeniably retains a place within discussion of the field of fine art so long as it is not the only aspect of a work that is discussed.'[82] I will discuss this further in relation to Lacy's project *Beneath Land and Water - A Project for Elkhorn City*, in the following chapter. A dialogical aesthetic, based on conversation and collaboration process set alongside visual forms of representation, might, in Kester's words, 'help us speak and imagine beyond the limits of fixed identities, official discourse, and the perceived inevitability of partisan conflict' and offer the best possibility for addressing the particular issues around belonging and 'community', and place, space and landscape in the West of Ireland.[83]

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1 Mulloy "Wild Country: Art, Community and the Rural", *Blue Drum*, accessed 19 July 2009. Web.

2 At the ESAI conference in Dublin Mulloy further argued that 'as states themselves come under pressure with globalisation, they are rerouting anger at exclusion, promoting homogeneity and assimilation, creating ambivalence and ambiguities about the causes of inequality and developing 'uncritical celebration of the

multicultural', amounting to "superficial appropriation", while seeking to reproduce the national identity through the articulation of race, gender and class. John Mulloy, *Making a Show of Ourselves: Globalisation, national identity and community arts.* ESAI Conference: NCAD March 30th-April 1st 2008.

Mulloy, "Wild Country" 20.

3 Mulloy, "Wild Country" 22.

4 The operative term is guided; there is no onus on local authorities to follow the recommendations, and the implementation of public art policy varies widely across the country. See Appendix 3 for Gavin Murphy's account of Per Cent for Art funded public art projects in Mayo given as part of the *Shifting Ground* seminar series at GMIT.

5 Mulloy, "Wild Country" 22, citing Ailbhe Murphy, "People, Place and the Promise of Art",ed. Lisa Spillane-Doherty, *Drawing a Balance; A Journey in Art, Education and Community.* (Artlink, Buncrana, 2000).

6 Mulloy, "Wild Country" 22.

7 Mulloy, "Anything- as long as it's not a sculpture", *VERGE* magazine, published by a consortium of Arts Offices and the GMIT/Clare County Council Arts Office and funded under the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíonn Local Authority Partnership Programme, 2010, 20.

8 Rose 185, citing Laurent Berlant,"68 Or Something", *Critical Inquiry* 21(1), 155.

9 Duddy proposes 'either an openly radical politics of creativity which seeks in the long term to democratise society through and through, or a more pragmatic, reformist piecemeal approach which is grounded in a critical social history of art and in a critical sociology of culture.' Duddy, "The Politics of Creativity", *Circa* 64, (1997) 31.

Mulloy, "Wild Country" 31.

10 The *Shifting Ground Conference* and Seminars were part of a partnership project which was run by Fiona Woods and Deirdre O' Mahony and which was an examination of the role of contemporary art in rural landscapes.

11 Suzanne Lacy ed. *Mapping The Terrain*.

12 Mary-Jane Jacobs, "An Unfashionable Audience", *Mapping The Terrain* 58.

13 Lacy, "Introduction", 19/20.

14 Lacy, "An Unfashionable Audience", 43.

[15] The unproblematic use of the term 'community' is an indicator of the particular time it was written; I suspect it would be different today. An exception is Guillermo Gómez-Peña observation that despite the fact that the word 'community' has now taken on myriad meanings, it is still used by some as 'the demagogic banner of a mythical and unified community to infuse their actions with moral substance.' Guillermo Gómez-Peña, "From Artmageddon to Gringostroika: A Manifesto against Censorship", *Mapping The Terrain* 109.

16 Lacy, "Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for a Public Art", 174.

17 Lacy, "An Unfashionable Audience", 33.

18 Diametrically opposed to the aesthetic practices of the isolated artist, consensus building inevitably entails developing a set of skills not commonly associated with art making. ... Entirely new strategies must be learned: how to collaborate with people, how to develop multilayered and specific audiences, how to cross over with other disciplines, how to choose sites that resonate with public meaning, and how to clarify visual and process symbolism for people who are not educated in art. In other words, activist-artists question the primacy of separation as an aesthetic stance and undertake the consensual production of meaning with the public. Lacy, "Debated Territory" 176.

19 At the time of this thesis' completion Lacy's work is the subject of major exhibitions at the Tate, the Liverpool Biennale, and forthcoming articles in Frieze Magazine and Art in America.

20 Lacy, "Introduction" 31.

21 Suzi Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991) 151.

22 Suzi Gablik, "Connective Aesthetics: Art After Individualism", *Mapping The Terrain* 86.

23 Kester speaks of dialogical artworks that replace the 'banking' style of art, where the artist deposits a creative expressive content into a physical object to be later withdrawn by the viewer. Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004)10.

24 Kester *Conversation Pieces* 38.

25 In Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action*, the public sphere is made up of the lifeworld, the practical, tangible, unregulated practice of everyday life, and the social system. The lifeworld is the locus for the transmission of all kinds of knowledge including cultural and moral knowledge. Since the lifeworld embodies patterns of communicative action, and the social system embodies patterns of instrumental action, then communicative action takes precedence over instrumental action and the lifeworld must be prior to the system. James Gordon Finlayson, *Habermas. A Very Short Introduction,* (Oxford: OU Press, 2005) 51.

26 Gordon 55.

27 Gordon 57.

28 Kester, *Conversation Pieces* 109.

29 Kester, "The Sound of Breaking Glass, Part II: Agonism and the Taming of Dissent", *e-flux* Journal, Issue # 31, January 2012. Accessed March 2012, 11.

30 Kester, *Conversation Pieces* 108.

31 Kester, *Conversation Pieces* 108.

32 Paul O'Neill, "Creative Egremont", *Locating the producers: Durational Approaches to Public Art,* eds. Paul O'Neill & Claire Doherty, Antennae Series No 4, (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2011) 87.

33 'This [the dialogical aesthetic] involves an investigation of the emergence of the aesthetic in early modern philosophy. In a range of Enlightenment-era writings, aesthetic experience is associated with a potentially utopian capacity for exchange and communication. This capacity is established, however, through a philosophical system that makes problematic claims for its transcendental authority. To resolve this impasse I draw upon the work of Jurgen Habermas, who has developed a model of human interaction that retains the emancipatory power of aesthetic dialogue without recourse to a universalizing philosophical framework... Dialogical practices require a transition from a model of art criticism based on the perception of physical objects to an evaluation based on what Habermas terms "discourse ethics".' Kester, *Conversation Pieces* 14.

34 Kester, *Conversation Pieces* 123.

35 Jay Koh was based in Ireland working for City Arts in Dublin from 2007 – 2010. He came to the *Cross Land* Gathering in 2007 and I asked him to evaluate the *X-PO* project. He subsequently invited me to present on my work in a symposium in Kuva, Finland, with Grant Kester, Ray Langenach and others.

Kester, *Conversation Pieces* 123.

36 Kester, *Conversation Pieces* 112.

37 Kester, *Conversation Pieces* 182.

38 Homi K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994). 99.

39 Kester, *Conversation Pieces* 113/4.

40 Kester, *Conversation Pieces* 115.

41 Kester, *Conversation Pieces* 68.

42 Kester, *Conversation Pieces* 155.

43 Kester, *Conversation Pieces* 156.

44 Kester, *Conversation Pieces* 156.

45 Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Art in a Global Context* (Durham and London: Duke U. P. 2011) 105.

46 Devisch argues that Nancy 'launches a few theses, offers fragments and traces of thinking, which he then develops further in later texts. This fragmentary character of his work sometimes makes it difficult to come to grips with, but on the other hand, you get in every book or text a lot of new perspectives and stimulating insights on contemporary political, philosophical and ontological problems.' Devisch. Web.

47 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*.

48 Kester, *Conversation Pieces* 157.

49 "Emptied of signification": that is returning all signification to the circulation of meaning, into the carrying over *(transport)* that is not a "translation" in the sense of the conversation of one signification (however modified), but "trans-lation" in the sense of stretching or spreading out *(tension)* from one origin-of-meaning to another. Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* 87.

50 There is an emphasis on touch in Nancy's writing; on the senses and making sense; on the 'with' of meaning and the meaning of 'with' as a way of addressing communication, language, the way that we stand in relation to each other and to the world, and how this can be the basis for thinking about 'community'. Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* 98.

51 In committing to a durational critical process there is also a risk that such an investment of time, and critical energies, might compromise Kester's criticality. However, it is clear that he is self-reflexive, except, perhaps, when it comes to responding to Claire Bishop who clearly prompts his undisguised ire. Kester, *Conversation Pieces* 123.

52 Lacy, "Introduction", 30.

53 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics,* trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods with the participation of Mattieu Copeland. (Les Press du Réel, 2002) 14.

54 Stewart Martin, "Critique of Relational Aesthetics", *Third Text*, 21:4, 2007, 376.

55 Bourriaud 16.

56 Bourriaud 20.

57 Here Bourriaud references Daney; *'All form is a face looking at us.'* Daney maintains that form, in an image, is nothing other than the representation of desire. 'The work tries to catch my gaze, the way a new-born child "asks for" its mother's gaze'. Serge Daney, *Perséverance,* (Éditions de la Différence, 1987). Bourriaud 23.

58 Tim Collins, "Catalytic Aesthetics," *Artful Ecologies, Art, Nature, Environment Conference,* (Falmouth: RANE Research Cluster, UC Falmouth, 2006) 36.

59 Rirkrit Tiravanija's *The Land,* is an example of such an interstice, a locus for collaborations across media and disciplines, culture and agriculture, and presenting its 'unworking' through the utopian but failed experiments in new forms of energy, social experiments, while consciously continuing to function as an experimental space. Bourriaud 16.

60 Bourriaud 60.

61 Bourriaud 83.

62 Martin, "Critique of Relational Aesthetics", 382.

63 Martin 378.

64 Martin 378.

65 Martin 386.

66 Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics", *October,* Fall 2004, 65.

67 Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics" 65.

68 Bourriaud 101.

69 Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics" 68, citing Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis.* (London:Routeledge, 1996),195 – 6.

70 Grant Watson, "Response to Claire Bishop's paper on Relational Aesthetics." *CIRCA Art Magazine,* No 114, 2005, 38.

71 Rancière argues that it is impossible for art to compensate for the lack of politics, for the lack of active political collective, but that it is possible for art to contribute to political sensibilities – an important distinction when thinking through his ideas on art, politics and autonomy. Rancière, "Art, Politics and Popularity", transcript, interview with Brian Dillon, Frieze Podcasts. Accessed 15 April 2011.

72 Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn and Its Discontents", *Artforum* Feb 2006.

73 Kester, *Conversation Pieces* 87.

74 Kester, *Conversation Pieces* 10.

75 What Bishop seeks is an art practice that will continually reaffirm and flatter her self–perception as an acute critic, "decoding" or unravelling a given video installation, performance, or film, playing at hermeneutic self-discovery like Freud's infant grandson in a game of "fort" and "da". Kester, "Response to Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn and Its Discontents"", *Artforum* May 2006.

76 Kester, "The Sound of Breaking Glass, Part II" 10.

77 Bishop, "The Social Turn and Its Discontents" 183.

78 Bishop, "The Social Turn and Its Discontents" 183.

79 Early pioneers of this kind of dialogical practice such as Artists Placement Group have recently garnered critical scrutiny. APG are the subjects of an *Artforum* article (Oct, 2010) by Claire Bishop and the group's archive is now in the Tate. There is increasing interest in documentation of artist-led organisations; for an example of this see the Irish Artist Led Archive Project, a project initiated and curated by Megs Morley, which is now housed in *NIVAL* Dublin.

80 Kester, *Conversation Pieces* 14.

81 Maria Lind, "The Collaborative Turn", *Taking the Matter into Common Hands: On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices* , eds. Johanna Bhilling, Maria Lind and Lars Nilsson (London: Black Dog Publishing 2007).

82 Barker, Ruth, "Any Rules However Were Made To Be Broken: Questions of Aesthetics and Ethics in Contemporary Public Art Practice", in collaboration with Suzanne Lacy, *On the Edge Research* (Aberdeen: Gray's School of Art, 2007), Accessed Aug. 2009 Web. NP.

83 Kester, *Conversation Pieces* 8.

Chapter 5: Multicentered Perspectives on Place and Space.

5.1 Miwon Kwon: The '(Un)Siteings of Community'

Miwon Kwon, in her book *One Place After Another : Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*[1], critically examines site specificity as a '"problem-idea", 'a peculiar cipher of art and spatial politics' that requires rethinking.[2] She identifies three basic paradigms of site specificity – phenomenological, social/institutional and discursive – that occur and overlap in both past and current site-orientated art.[3] Kwon tracks the changing nature of art-site relationships from the 1960s, when a link between artwork and site was established. The authority of the work resided in its material presence in a particular place, a built-in resistance to the work's assimilation and relocation into the marketplace.[4] In the 1970s and early 1980s modes of critical practice led by Hans Haake, Mierle Laderman Ukeles and others shifted the focus onto the networks of power relations within art institutions, their self-presentation, and the systems supporting and governing socio-economic relations.[5] More recently, the preoccupation with cultural operations and the confinement of art within gallery and museum institutions gave way to a more intense engagement with everyday life and the relational specificity of singular and collective spatial experiences, corresponding with the de-aestheticisation and dematerialisation of the art object. 'The "work" no longer seeks to be a noun/object, but a verb/process.'[6] Influenced by Pierre Bourdieu, the third generation practitioners of institutional critique – Andrea Fraser, Renée Green, Mark Dion, and others loosely associated with 'Kontext Kunst' (context art) – further advanced the idea of site-specificity, critiquing, in Fraser's words, 'aspects of culture that have largely been naturalised'.[7] Project-based and 'predominantly an intertextually coordinated, multiply located, discursive field of operation'[8], the artwork/research/process, by its very nature, resists commodification by the art market.[9] By providing 'critical-artistic' services, practitioners of institutional critique made visible the changing conditions of artistic production and

reception in museums, galleries and the wider cultural sphere, inverting the idea of an 'aesthetics of administration' – coined by Benjamin Buchloh to describe conceptual practices in the 1960s – to the 'administration of aesthetics', adopting, and sometimes parodying, the managerial functions of art institutions (curatorial, educational, archival) as an integral part of their practice.[10]

Jeff Kelley aligns the term 'site' with an abstract location associated with previous models of public art, and 'place' with 'an intimate and particularised culture that is bound to a geographical region' (particularly associated with New Genre Public Art).[11] This was an important moment in public art commissioning in the USA, signalling 'the dramatic redescription of site-specificity's aesthetic necessity, its conceptual parameters and its social and political efficacy ... The move marked a 'crucial shift in which "site" is displaced by notions of an "audience".'[12] Kwon uses the *Culture in Action* programme, curated by Mary Jane Jacobs in Chicago in 1993, as a case study to examine the emergence of 'community' engagement that has been put forward by many as a criterion for 'good' public art.[13] She classifies the *Culture in Action* commissions under four categories based on the kind of interactions between the artists and their respective community partners – Community of Mythical Unity,[14] Sited Communities, Invented Communities (Temporary) and Invented Communities (Ongoing). In her analysis she points to the many pitfalls in such practice: the danger of exoticising 'community' and the instrumentalising potential of cultural production, akin to Lauren Berlant's 'taxonomy of difference'. Kwon reflects upon two projects by Haha and Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle and *Street-Level Video*, both Chicago-based artists/artist groups who maintained sustained, extended engagements with 'invented' communities. These projects provided the impetus to activate a sustainable community organisation that lasted, in Manglano-Ovalle's collaboration with *Street-Level Video,* far beyond the life of *Culture in Action*.[15] Given the social turn in contemporary art practice, durational sitedness has become an important marker of critical visibility, aided by Grant Kester's iteration that it is a central part of a creative praxis between

participants.[16] At a very basic level, this extended relationship can be read as an indicator of success, a kind of survival of the most attached. The artist's status rests with her/his position as sited insider (=success) or unsited outsider (=failure). Kwon does not underrate the advantage of living in a particular community and location with prior networks of communication; however, she cautions against presuming that it is a gateway to understanding, noting that quite often it is the outsider that can contribute interventions and insights into community based issues. As an insider/outsider in the Burren I am acutely aware of locational identity, which in turn has shaped the map of my subjective understanding of the dynamics of exclusion and belonging.

The nomadic artist, bestriding the globe like a cultural colossus, has become a familiar figure at biennales, city and regional cultural festivals, and artfairs. Kwon suggests that the presence of the artist conjuring a response (and adding cultural value) to particular locations might well be part of a nostalgic move that seeks to 'mobilise and expedite the erasure of difference, via the commodification and serialisation of places.'[17] Criticising the manner in which artists are used to authenticate the singularity of a site, while acknowledging the role that they can play in unearthing the hidden and repressed histories,[18] Kwon cautions against assuming what Hal Foster calls 'the quasi-anthropological role' that can 'promote a presuming as much as a questioning of ethnographic authority, an evasion as often as an extension of institutional critique.'[19] Foster astutely notes 'these *flâneries* of the new, nomadic artist' and the ease with which they provide consolatory responses that satisfy the desire for easily assimilated, 'authentic' histories and identities, while ignoring the fragmented global culture in which the concept of a fixed place or community has all but disappeared.[20]

The appropriation of what Pierre Bourdieu termed the 'delegate's' authority is also noted and discussed by both Kester and Kwon.[21] Kwon points to a kind of reductive identification between collaborators during some of the *Culture in Action* programme; 'matchmaking mediation' that presumes an *a priori* interest in particular types of community.[22] The

isolation of single points of commonality (such as race or generational connection) as a way of defining 'community' corresponds with the hegemonic readings of 'community' discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Reflecting on the problem, Kwon takes her cue from Nancy, seeing his conceptualisation of *Inoperative Community* as a way of thinking through the impossibility of community.[23] In contrast with 'community'-based art:

> A collective artistic practice is a *projective,* rather than a *descriptive* process. It involves a provisional group, produced as a function of specific circumstances by an artist and/or cultural institution, aware of the effects of these circumstances on the very conditions of the interaction, performing its own coming together and coming apart as a necessarily incomplete modelling or working-out of a collective praxis.[24]

Kwon's conclusion reflects upon the trajectory taken with the dissipation of the site in site-specific art in favour of discursivity and community, and asks: what place for 'place' in a de-territorialised, alienated, fragmented world? She suggests that the 'nature of the tie between the subject/object and location', and efforts to re-think the relationship between art/site/community can be seen as 'both a compensatory symptom and critical resistance' to post-modern conditions.[25] Kwon puts forward the idea of finding a terrain *between* mobilisation and specificity as a way of de-coupling place from identity, of being consciously and precisely 'out-of-place', as a form of resistance to the places we occupy becoming undifferentiated and serialised.[26] Foucault proposes that heterotopias are 'like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.'[27] This corresponds with Kwon's idea and it is interesting to note that Paul O'Neil is critical of the 'suspicious absence of any reference to Foucault's Heterotopia as an example of a "wrong place" that has become a representative of a kind of place that, through its very cultural displacement, produces its own sense of location in a world over time.'[28]

5.2 Lucy R. Lippard: Towards A Relational Hybridity.

Kwon also rejects Lucy R. Lippard's notion of the 'lure of the local' as a nostalgic conceptualisation of place, a 'therapeutic remedy' for the 'homelessness' of the modern condition.[29] However, I think Lippard's reading of the relationship between place, history, memory and 'tacit' embodied knowledge is more complex that Kwon credits. Lippard's writing is notable for the far-sighted and important contribution she makes in thinking through the relationship between place, space, landscape and rurality, and her on-going reflections remain deeply pertinent to our current moment. From *The Lure of the Local* to *On the Beaten Track, Tourism, Art and Place* and *Peripheral Vision* she has tried to think beyond her connection to the local places that have drawn her throughout her life to what she calls a 'multicentred' theoretical frame. This conceptual structure is based on her practice as a writer, educator, critic, curator and political activist. Lippard argues that '(L)ike tourism, painting formalises place into landscape.'[30] Recognising this, at an early stage in my PhD research my focus changed from 'landscape', what Lippard terms 'place at a distance', to the idea of 'place as a record of hybrid culture.'[31] This practice was in certain senses site-specific, and, as the complexity of competing perspectives on the land/landscape unfolded, it became increasingly context-specific.

The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society is of particular relevance here. Lippard acknowledges the central role of her lived experience to both her writing and understanding of place. She gives a subjective narrative of her connection to Georgetown Island in the state of Maine from childhood, when it was an uncomplicated source of delight, through to adulthood when it became a kind of litmus test for her critical and cultural understanding of place. This narrative is juxtaposed with a broader critical account of socially-engaged, community-based, activist art practices dealing with space, place and landscape from the 1960s to the 1990s. Lippard maps her connection to local places that have drawn her throughout her life and, like Li Fu Tuan, she uses that personal experience to examine the

way that places, and the histories they embody, shape and mirror subjective identities. She proposes a 'multicentred' idea of 'place as a record of hybrid culture' as a counterpoint to the binary dialectic of rural/urban or local/global.[32]

Lippard places particular emphasis on the kind of visual art practices that can serve as a catalyst for social change and make visible 'an existing hybridity, which is really all "local places" consist of'.[33] She puts forward the idea of a symbiotic exchange between outsider and born-in that inevitably alters both people and place.[34] A place-specific public art that is grounded within what she terms the 'social multicentre' is neccessary to effect change, rather than 'an elite enclave, sheltered and hidden from public view or illegibly representing privileged taste in public view.'[35] The idea of a relational process between 'outsider' and 'local' – exchange-based, mutually affective and able to animate, mediate and reflect multiple perspectives on place – was of direct relevance to re-thinking my practice in the Burren.

5.3 The Rural Particular.

For a contemporary art writer, Lippard is unusual in her readiness to examine the particular issues of public art in *rural* contexts. Like J. B. Jackson, she understands the importance of farming to the narrative landscape; the voices 'rarely articulated from the inside', of those with deep connections to the land 'complicated by a sense of the land as both friend and enemy.'[36] Lippard insists that '(T)o change the power relations inherent in the way art is now made and distributed, we need to continue to *seek out new forms of social energies not yet recognised as art.'* [37] Mapping out some of the commonalities encountered in artworks that affect perceptions of and engagements with the specificies of places and publics, she presents an eight-point 'place-ethic' for artworks: Specific; Collaborative; Appealing; Simple and Familiar; Layered; Complex and Unfamiliar; Evocative; Provocative and Critical. She argues that the connection of people with places, with the artist as medium or catalyst, is a step in the right direction.[38] This is particularly relevant in rural Ireland in

order to disarticulate the hegemony of existing cultural representations of landscape and openly acknowledge the postcolonial effect on how the rural landscape is percieved, received and worked.

Miwon Kwon has criticised the 'nostalgia impulse' in *The Lure of the Local,* arguing that 'despite her disclaimers, hers is a vision that favours the 'return' to a vernacular, non-urban sociality of small-scale spaces and face-to-face exchanges'[39] Kwon argues that cultural authenticity and local specificity add value to the marketplace appeal, particularly when located in picturesque sites. Moving the frame from public spaces to local cultures does not necessarily displace the 'ideology of unity' that has prevailed in public art and the tendency to reify and commodify local cultures.[40] A global tendency towards the 'heritagisation' of landscape raises questions about the future of places such as the Burren where, Kwon correctly observes, the 'desire for difference, authenticity, and our willingness to pay high prices for it only highlight the degree to which they are already lost to us (thus the power they have over us).'[41]

Lippard addresses this argument in her subsequent book *On the Beaten Track, Tourism, Art and Place*, acknowledging the danger of "bad" nostalgia that 'creates a past that is merely a refuge from the present rather than inherited significance.'[42] She makes a thoughtful and convincing case for reviewing the relationship between radicalism and nostalgia that can be applied to the tropes of national cultural reflection already discussed in Chapter 1. Perhaps there might be a case for revisiting a revived idea of rural collectivity in the face of the global crises in food production and the unsustainability of an agricultural system dependent on dwindling supplies of oil and in many regions, water? 'Utopia, too', she argues, 'is a necessary and authentic goal, the object of a longing that may never be fulfilled but functions positively and authentically for just that reason.'[43] In a recent lecture Lippard further argues that nostalgia is inseparable from memory, arguing that whilst 'postmodern theorists have dismissed the notion of nostalgia…I'll stand up for it as distinct from sentimentality (which can be all too easily manipulated for ideological motives).'[44] She makes a case for 'emotive

retrospection', balanced by local knowledge and critical curiosity.[45] This quality is best understood via a quotation from Homi Bhabha used in *The Lure of the Local*: 'Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present.'[46]

It is Lippard's persistent and reflexive enquiry into the kind of intercultural conflicts around place and space, such as those discussed in the first chapters in this thesis, that make her writing so refreshing. She has no fear of criticism of her passion for place, relishing incidental encounters, the 'sideshows or side-of-the-road shows', and the socio-political issues that are inextricably linked with place.[47] Her compassionate empathy and 'painfully focused vision of a fragile landscape and its bewildered inhabitants' makes her texts critically important to understanding and navigating local terrain.[48]

5.4 Suzanne Lacy *Beneath Land and Water - A Project for Elkhorn City .*

Suzanne Lacy's presentation on her public art project *Beneath Land and Water - A Project for Elkhorn City* raised several pertinent issues around a dialogical methodology for my own practice and was an important critical benchmark during the early stages of this research. Lacy's understanding of the ethical implications of collaborative practices, the psycho-dynamics of power relations and the constraints and responsibilities that come with aesthetic representation both in the public sphere and within art institutions are discussed in an anthology of her texts, *Leaving Art Writings on Performance, Politics, and Publics, 1974 – 2007*.[49] Of particular relevance is her analysis of a public artwork that forms a chapter in the anthology 'Hard Work in a Working Class Town'. The project touches on many issues pertinent to contemporary relational/dialogical projects: the regeneration of marginalised and economically depressed regions through cultural interventions; the ethics of engagement when embarking on open-ended, durational projects; the politics of collaboration both within groups of artists and with communities; the contradictory pull between autonomy and social

intervention; and the representation and reception of the artwork. In the case of *Beneath Land and Water - A Project for Elkhorn City* the desired outcome was the regeneration of a former mining town, Elkhorn City (population 1000), through the creation of a tourist trail and the rejuvenation of the river and surrounding area. Situated in the Appalachian Mountains, the project was initiated by the Heritage Council in 2000, and is a collaborative work between Lacy, Susan Steinman, Yataska Kobayashi and the Elkhorn City Heritage Council.[50] Above the town there is a 'world-class' river run and the city is marketed as the *Gateway to the Breaks,* a nearby national park. The town has also been ecologically and economically devastated by the mining industries; the surrounding mountains and trees mask strip mines, gas drilling, erosion and contamination of the water table and the residual devastation of decades of mineral fuel exploration and extraction.

The work began when the American Festival Project at Appalshop brought a variety of artists together in 2000 to work at a local level with individual rural communities. The artists had not previously worked with one another collaboratively and had an initial week-long period to get to know the context, the communities and one another.[51] Lacy describes herself returning without quite knowing why, although Lippard's ideas on place as a trigger for memory are echoed in her description of her insights into her father's 'Tennessee hillbilly' roots. The artists and Elkhorn City Heritage Council worked out the parameters of the engagement, setting in train a process that still, to a degree, remains unresolved.[52] Soon after the initial research phase she was interviewed about the problems facing the project and she spoke of her political interest in the dominant industries of coal and gas mining in the town and her dawning realisation 'that every piece of land...is extremely vulnerable because almost nobody owns the mineral rights to their land.'[53] Rather than focus on provocative measures to highlight environmental issues, Lacy concentrated on the more complex and problematic issue of working within the community; 'maybe one that doesn't uniformly believe that strip mining is that much of a problem.'[54] Her conversations with the various stakeholders made it clear that their priorities were to 'focus on

the community's beauty not its blight.'[55] 'They didn't have clear art ideas that they expected us to do, but they had some agendas that they wanted to see us address. And some agendas that they didn't want us to address.'[56]

The artists' initial expectation was that they would assist in the creation of eco-entrepreneurial businesses and sculptures made from waste materials. The eco-businesses they expected to generate with the enthusiasm and energy of the town's youth failed to materialise as most young people had left for jobs in the city. The Heritage Council believed that civic pride in the regenerated town would produce the experience in which 'people will want to protect their environment and feel enough ownership so that they will stand up together to protect their land if or when it ever becomes threatened.'[57] Of particular interest was the way the artists began to peel away the layers of defensive obfuscation and get to the core issues affecting their relations with the town: '[I]t's our culture. We are proud of it. We don't want outsiders coming in and telling us who we are but we do want to welcome people in.'[58] Lacy sums up the dilemma for artists working collaboratively in the public sphere, one I understood from my own public work on *Cross Land* at the time. (See Chapter 7): 'Our politics struggled with our imagery and desires as artists, and the politics won out. ...We just could not justify spending a lot of time and money here on something that might not advance the very real goals and needs of the area...We spotlighted what was positive, vibrant and unique to the community, trying to ignore more compelling exposés.'[59]

Lacy described a tenuous process of 'entering' the town's social fabric – the game of looking and being seen, noted and acknowledged – that played out during the cultural courtship of this Southern, working-class, mountain community.[60] It took years of visits, returning a minimum of once a year, cementing the connections and friendships that drew them stubbornly back again and again. They negotiated the political hierarchies in the town, consciously using their position as 'idiosyncratic' outsiders to articulate and extend the notions of what art is and what could be done in the name of art.[61] Factionalism ran deep; the political powers in the town ignored the artists until their 'interference' (painting a blue line

through the town to mark a trail, dumping half-ton granite boulders along the highway) made their actions impossible to ignore. They demonstrated their commitment to the process:

> We worked like spiders weaving connections between ravaged natural resources and their restoration, between the town's economy and the arts, between pride of heritage and "branding" for tourism. We helped strengthen bonds between the social organization and the natural one. We brought old residents to work together and new outsiders to donate energy. Over time, we made it clear that we would take nothing out of the community except our pleasure, memories and experience; that we would bring as much as we could — money, connections, labour, people and talent — to the civic table.[62]

This dogged determination to see the project through was to affect the subsequent development of my *X-PO* project (described in the concluding chapters of this thesis). Lacy's words resonated as I spent days working, often alone, to reactivate the former post office, her phrase 'we worked like spiders' echoing as meetings took place, rubbish was cleared and projects carried out within very tight timelines. Moira Roth asked Lacy why she chose such a 'remote and small stage' upon which to focus so much of her time and she responded that it is 'a way of wrestling with the complexity of scale – of the world's problems, of art and its impacts... (projects) taking place at grassroots level in local communities...offer metaphors and practices of local resistance important in an era when government and corporate actions seem unstoppable.'[63] This, too, was at the core of my practice, making visible the relational connections between the local place and global space.

5.5 Evaluating 'Effectiveness': The 'Value' of Symbolic Experience.

To date, the outcome of the Elkhorn process has been a 'blue-line' trail that connects the different communities on both sides of the river running through the town; a mosaic tile mural designed by Steinman about the natural and cultural assets of the site; a riverside park and seating, and a tourist map of the features and visitor attractions. The 'blue line' connected a town divided by factionalism and, in what she describes as her 'personal historic moment in the project', Lacy engineered a meeting of the civic organisations and City Hall who agreed to collectively market the town under the statement *Adventure in Elkhorn City, where Nature meets Culture.*[64] One difficulty with this kind of localised and place-specific art is that 'most of the experience remains behind in the spaces where relationships occur.'[65] Lacy acknowledges problems framing *Beneath Land and Water* as a formal work. As a conceptual performance artist, it was completely at odds with her practice to facilitate town murals and tourist maps – yet she does it. She is an observer of her own discomfort, pushing her subjective boundaries, unpacking her artistic identity and openly examining her desire for performative closure in what Moira Roth calls the 'analytically self-aware and speculative artist-theorist voice' of her writing.[66] In her written description of an (as yet) unperformed work she draws attention to the (necessary) shift in artistic approach from 'use' value to symbolic experience that, in my opinion, in and of itself completes the project (though I doubt Lacy would agree).[67]

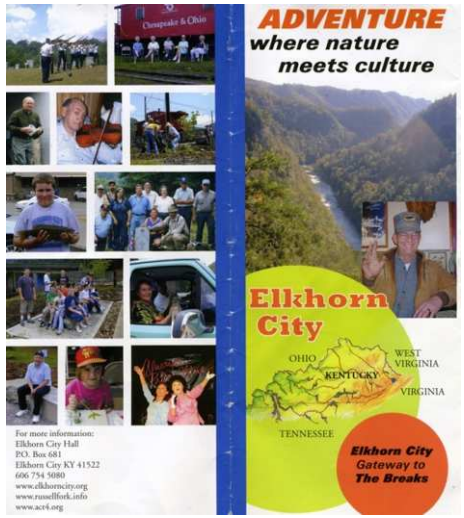

Fig. 16. Suzanne Lacy, *The Blue Line Trail* Brochure, 2009.

The dialogical and durational nature of the process prioritised space and time for the active interpretation and translation of the community's idea of 'self-presence' to take hold. It took precedence over Lacy's performance (should it ever take place) – the aesthetic representation. This was an important marker for my own public art practice at the *X-PO*. Writing about the 'effectiveness' of process-oriented public art in 1995 Lacy argues that it is 'at its most powerful when, as with most visual

art forms, it operates as a symbol. The relationship of demonstrable effects to the impact of a metaphor must be grappled with as this work attempts to function simultaneously within both social and aesthetic traditions.'[68] The symbolic existence of this "performance as text" exerts a kind of relational tension between the social and the aesthetic. As an idea, in all its potentiality, it offers a singular and subjective vision of a possible community that the actual performance, I suspect, could never communicate.

Lacy writes with great authority about the power dynamics governing collaborative practice. She speaks of a need 'to find ways not to educate audiences for art but to build structures that share the power inherent in making culture with as many people as possible'.[69] A key question with this kind of public art is how to maintain fidelity to the process and intention when shifting from collaborative process to some form of public outcome. If the idea/artwork remains specific to its own context there is little chance to affect the wider socio-cultural sphere which is also part of the frame. A work has several 'publics'; its own social public, policy makers, cultural institutions and the wider artworld. To 'perform' effectively across all spheres requires a balancing act between political, ethical, and aesthetic priorities. By choosing *not* to perform, but leaving the performance-as-text in the public domain, attention is drawn to the complexity of agendas at play (including her own), and the decision to withhold the final aesthetic representation functions as a kind of free-play, a politics of aesthetics, in a Rancièreian sense. Lacy raises important questions considering a place for the visual (as distinct from the beautiful) alongside the dialogical within aesthetic language – an important but not exclusive part of the field of fine art.[70]

Lacy understands the 'value' of symbolic experience. However, at times in "Hard Work in a Working Class Town", her assumption of the position of 'subjective anthropologist', or of artist as ethnographer in Hal Foster's terms, when making character descriptions of some individuals, makes for uncomfortable reading.[71] By including a reflexive analysis of her own actions in this scrutiny, Lacy (just) manages to avoid objectifying her collaborators, indicating the dangers inherent in a

'reporting' on dialogical processes and the implicit pitfalls of 'ethnographic self-fashioning' indicated by Foster.[72] That aside, the Elkhorn project was directly relevant to my experience and indicated a potential discursive methodology for setting boundaries and negotiating relationships between artist and communities.

5.6: Geometries of Power: Space, Place and Publics.

Lacy's efforts to address the particular context of a contemporary rural place, with all its attendant problems of environmental and economic sustainability, spoke to my own experience. The effects of the recent economic and social changes in Ireland, resulting from a mix of global and local forces, highlight the importance of understanding and decoding the relational dynamics between the local and the global. Doreen Massey puts forward a cogent argument for unpacking and tracing the actors, the legacies, the relations and the institutions that form the 'geometries of power' governing place and space, arguing that 'space is not smooth, but striated with histories and meanings.'[73] We need to recognise that space is always in process, always under construction; it is a 'simultaneity of stories-so-far'.[74] For Massey a reading of place and space must, rather like Lippard's notion of 'multicentredness', address the interconnectedness between the global and the local; the relationship between the local place and the global is a central part of what constitutes a place.[75]

Simon Sheik also argues for site-specific responses to the complex, heterogeneous contexts, spaces and publics of post-modern life.[76] He argues for a more complex reading of 'public' and 'community', arguing that, given the fragmented nature of the public sphere, it is more accurate to speak of 'publics' than 'public'.[77] Instead he puts forward a proposition of 'counter-publics' that mirror the institutions of the normative public, 'particular parallel formations…where other or oppositional discourses and practices, can be formulated and circulated', and which imply a spatial idea of politics.[78] A 'conscious mirroring' of public space is deployed to unhinge stable categories and subject positions relating to the specific

parameters of site and context, whilst creating spaces of experience that allow differing, potentially agonistic perspectives. 'Relational publics are also always specific ones requiring particular definitions and responses and a constant vigilance to, and interrogation of, art's spaces, institutions, and "publics".[79] Sheik's ideas suggested a mode of re-thinking the singular idea of 'community' as 'counter-publics' and set in motion the notion of how a speculative, experimental, counter-institution or heterotopian space might function in the micro-context of the West, providing a locus for critical reflection and pointing to 'other' publics within the political and cultural landscape.

This idea is easily transposed to the Burren, where the place no longer houses a single 'community' in the sense of a coherent social group, and the use of 'publics' is a way of signposting this shift. The economic boom from the mid-nineties until 2008 meant that for the first time in living memory there was full employment in the West – a blip that has now returned to the default setting of emigration. The boom also brought with it a significant increase in the number of guest workers to Ireland due to labour shortages. These workers in turn supported the economies of towns from Poland to Brazil, an example of the spatial geometries of economic power. The construction of new housing estates radically altered rural populations, often as a result of tax-incentives that helped to fuel the economic boom. Many of these estates now lie empty.[80] The arrival of multi-national food companies in rural towns like Ennis in Co. Clare has decimated business in small towns and villages.[81] Opportunities to meet socially have diminished with the closure of public spaces like post offices and pubs, that allowed incidental, casual, social exchange between newcomers and local people. This is a problem playing out across the globe as populations shift from rural towns to urban cities.

A reflective consciousness of local and global relations and interconnections of a given site and situation can reflexively animate the kind of pragmatic and critical activism necessary to counter the pressures exerted by neo-liberal capitalism on places like the Burren. My reading of Lippard, Kwon, Lacy, Kester and Bourriaud, alongside the many

arguments that took place amongst many other writers and critics, was of key importance in evaluating both my own ideas and critical practice and as a further expansion and contextualisation of the field of process-based rather than object-based approaches to making artwork. Thinking through how one measures or quantifies such a practice, Allan Kaprow makes the case that 'ethics, representing a diversity of special interests as well as the deep ones of a culture, cannot easily be disentangled from the nature of the artwork. Success and failure become provisional judgements, instantly subject (like the weather) to change.'[82] Suzanne Lacy, too, argues that 'in the studio of the public sector, in the culture of visibility, such conventions of practice are challenged'.[83] This resonated with my own reflection on the function and role of my individual practice: the paintings and photographs I was making in the early stages of this research and which I discuss in Chapter 6. A journey described as just the first process of change for an artist, a letting go of the singular focus on a 'personal' practice, was necessary, which, while providing reflective and indeed aesthetic space for thinking through subjective connections with landscape, is now practiced in tandem with a public dialogical practice focused on creating new understandings of the relational nature of place, space and community within the rural West.

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1 Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another.*

2 Kwon 2.

3 Kwon 4.

4 However, Kwon goes on to discuss the 'unhinging' of site-specific works led not so much by aesthetic imperatives but by pressures of the museum culture and the art market, so that recent re-stagings of site specific events and performances have become relatively commonplace. Kwon 12.

5 Kwon argues that Ukeles' 'maintenance art' performances forced 'the domestic tasks usually associated with women' into the public domain as 'aesthetic contemplation', revealing the extent to which the pristine, 'neutral' façade of the art institution is structurally dependent on hidden, devalued labour and highlighting the 'gendered, hierarchical system of labour relations within which art and its institutional programming find their possibilities of being.' Kwon, 19.

6 Kwon 24.

7 Andrea Fraser cites Yilmaz Dziewior, "Interview with Andrea Fraser" in Dziewior, ed., *Andrea Fraser: Works 1984 – 2003* (Cologne: DuMont Literatur und Kunst Verlag, 2003) 93.

Andrea Fraser, *Museum Highlights: The Writings of Andrea Fraser*, ed. Alexander Alberro (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005) xiii.

8 Kwon 159.

9 Fraser xxiii.

10 Citing Benjamin Buchloh's "Conceptual Art 1962 – 1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions", *October* 55, (Winter 1991).

It is interesting to note Kwon's observation that at the time that artists were adopting managerial/administrative/curatorial roles the managers saw themselves as authorial figures (through the curation of exhibitions and events etc.). Kwon 51.

11 Kwon 108.

12 Kwon 109.

13 Kwon quotes Dan Cameron, for whom Culture in Action exemplified a transformation of sculpture away from site-specificity to 'post-site sculpture' 'in favour of activities and interventions which take place directly in the community away from the museum's watchful eye ... The work in "Culture in Action" set out to navigate that murky zone where social activism and post-site sculpture have begun to intersect.' Kwon 110.

14 'Community of Mythical Unity' is used in Suzanne Lacy's project. Kwon argues that the artist's celebration of an 'abstract set of service-orientated characteristics subsumed the women's individuality' and 'orchestrated a conceptually coherent unity' based on a 'transhistorical, transcultural and gender-specific "sensibility"'. From my reading, the work was more conceptually challenging and complex than observed in Kwon's critique; for example, the monumental nature of the boulders, the shock of their appearance and their memorial-like presence would suggest an indication of the power relations at play in civic life in the city and a not-so-subtle critique of whose histories get commemorated within the public sphere. Kwon 119.

15 *Street-Level Video* is now formally established as a not-for-profit foundation running on-going educational programmes and committed to engaging and training urban youth. Accessed Dec 2011, www.street-level.comabout/history, Web.

16 Grant Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Art in a Global Context (*Durham and London, Duke U. P. 2011) 226.

17 Kester, *The One and the Many* 55.

18 One recent example of this that served to engage effectively with the repressed history of a site is Paul Chan's production of 'Waiting for Godot', which is now part of MOMAs collection in New York. It continues to draw attention to the failure of the US state to effectively redress the housing crises in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. It could also be argued that David Simon's TV series *Treme* was a more effective engagement with the city, as it draws on the city's living musical heritage.

Kester, *The One and the Many* 112.

19 Hal Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer", *The Return of the Real: The End of the Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996) 197.

20 Foster 180.

21 Pierre Bourdieu, "Delegation and Political Fetishism," 206. Cited by Kester, "Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art", *Afterimage* 22, (January 1995). Cited in Kwon 139.

22 Here Kwon refers to Renée Green's experience. By invitation, she was invited to Chicago to discuss her possible participation in *Culture in Context.* Without consultation, prior to her visit a biography and press release was drawn up which emphasised her African-American background. She withdrew as she felt she was being directed towards a collaboration with black communities.

Foster 140.

23 Kwon 154.

24 Kwon is referencing Heiddeger's diagnosis of the modern condition as one of existential homelessness. Kwon 158.

25 Zigmund Bauman uses the term 'liquid' life to illustrate the precarious, fast-moving, de-stabilised and dislocated condition of post-modernity characterised by looseness of attachment and revocability of engagement of modern life. Zigmund Bauman, "Introduction", *Liquid Life,* (Cambridge: Polity Press) 4/5.

26 Here, Kwon cites James Mayer's idea of 'functional-site' - 'an open unfixed constellation, porous to contingencies'. Kwon 160, citing Mayer, "The Functional Site", *Documents 7* (Fall 1996) 20 – 29 and "Nomads", *Parkett* 35, (May 1997), 205 – 214.

27 Michel Foucault. "Des Espace Autres,"/"Of Other Spaces", trans. Jay Miskowiec, Lecture 1967, *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité*, October 1984, Accessed 30 March 2010. Web.

28 Paul O'Neill "An Observer's Response/The Wrong Place: Rethinking Context in Contemporary Art". *Situations Papers Online* (Bristol: University of the West of England). Accessed 10th Feb 2010, Web, 2.

29 O'Neill 154.

30 Lucy R. Lippard, "Introduction: All Over the Place," *The Lure of the Local - Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: The New Press 1997) 20.

31 Here I am referring to the painting I was making prior to this PhD research. The *Visqueux* paintings made from 2005 – 2008 are a self-conscious and critical reflection on the ideological role of landscape painting.

Lippard, *The Lure of the Local* 6.

32 Lippard, *The Lure of the Local* 6.

33 Lippard, *The Lure of the Local* 6.

34 'Each time we enter a new place, we become one of the ingredients of an existing hybridity, which is really all "local places" consist of. By entering that hybrid we change it; and in each situation we may play a different role. A white, middle-class art type without much money will have a different effect on a mostly Latino community than on a mostly white upper-class suburb with more money. S/He remains the same person, and may remain an outsider in both cases, but reciprocal identity is inevitably altered by the place, by the relationship to the place itself and the people who are already there.' Lippard, *The Lure of the Local* 7.

35 Lippard, *The Lure of the Local* 286.

36 Lippard, *The Lure of the Local* 141.

37 Lucy Lippard, "Looking Around: Where We Are, Where We Could Be", *Mapping the Terrain* 126.

38 Lippard, *The Lure of the Local* 287.

39 Kwon159.

40 Kwon 153.

41 Kwon, citing Lefebvre: “What Lippard’s thinking misses are Lefebvre’s important insights on the dialectical rather than the oppositional relationship between the increasing abstraction of space and the “production” of particularities of place, local specificity, and cultural authenticity- a concern that informs many site-orientated art practices today. Production of difference, to say it in more general terms, is itself a fundamental activity of capitalism, necessary for its continuous expansion.” Kwon 159.

42 Lucy R. Lippard, “Taken Aback, or the Nostalgia Trap”, *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art and Place*. (The New Press: New York. 1999) 164.

43 Svetlana Boym distinguishes between a ‘restorative’ and ‘reflective’ nostalgia, the former linked to the sentimental, ‘lost’, tradition-based, rural *gemeinschaft*. Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, dwells on the ambivalence of a human longing and desire to belong. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001) pp 43-45, rpt. Willinger, Isabella, “Nostalgia and Longing The Politics of Sentiment vs. a Poetics of Sentiment.” Sept 2010. Net.

Lippard, *The Lure of the Local* 164.

44 Lippard, “Imagine Being Here Now: Towards a Multicentered Exhibition Process.” Keynote lecture given in Falmouth, Cornwall on 20 May 2010. *The Falmouth Convention*. Accessed July 12 2010. Web.

45 Lippard, *The Lure of the Local* 291.

46 Homi Bhabha, “What Does the Black Man Want”, *New Formations,* Spring 1987, qtd. in Lippard 61.

47 Lucy R. Lippard, “Peripheral Vision” (New York Foundation for the Arts, Accessed 21 Jan 2011). Web.

48 Lippard, “Peripheral Vision”.

49 Suzanne Lacy, *Leaving Art :Writings on Performance, Politics, and Publics, 1974 – 2007,* (Durham/London: DUP 2010).

50 Lacy is ambiguous in *Leaving Art* about whether the project remains to be completed and describes in detail the performance she would like to make in the town. Lacy, “Hard Work in a Working Class Town”, 17.

51 The American Festival Project has now closed. Accessed Jan 2009 <http://www.appalshop.org/afp/>

52 Lacy, “Hard Work in a Working Class Town” 308.

53 “I got the sense of this little town, almost floating on this great sea of uncertainty, with incredible mountains all around it. Natural beauty. But, at any moment the mineral industries could say. "Oh, we like what is under your feet" and start digging the hell out of it.’ Nic Paget-Clarke, “Art and Advocacy: Interview with Suzanne Lacy.” *In Motion* 31, October 2000. (Accessed December 2008) NP.

54 Lacy, “Groundworks”.

55 I had a similar experience during the initial phase of the *Ground Up 2* project. See Appendix 2.

Lacy, “Hard Work in a Working Class Town” 306.

56 Paget-Clarke.

57 Paget-Clarke.

58 Lacy <http://www.suzannelacy.com/2000selkhorn.htm>

59 Lacy "Hard Work in a Working Class Town" 307.

60 Lacy "Hard Work in a Working Class Town" 302.

61 Lacy argues in her interview that 'the seeds of boundary breaking, and form creation, on a populist level are to be found in idiosyncrasies.' Paget-Clarke.

62 Lacy, *Suzanne Lacy Website* Accessed September 2008 <http://www.suzannelacy.com/2000selkhorn.html>

63 Moira Roth "Introduction. Suzanne Lacy: Three Decades of Performing and Writing/Writing and Performing", *Leaving Art: Writings on Performance, Politics, and Publics* xxxix.

64 Lacy, "Hard Work in a Working Class Town" 314.

65 Lacy, "Hard Work in a Working Class Town" 315.

66 Roth xxii.

67 Lacy described the unrealised project to Lucy Lippard as follows: 'Near sunset on a mild evening, Main Street of Elkhorn City, Kentucky, will become a stage. Storytellers in rocking chairs and fiddlers in doorways create an intimate and multi-vocal telling of river-related lore. Next, 200 church choir members pass through the street, walking toward the trestle bridge that spans the river. As they file onto the bridge, their all-white clothing forms a solid band on the horizon, separating the twilight sky and verdant trees overgrown with invasive kudzu from the white-tipped river below. This white line is bisected with a vibrant blue line painted on the bridge railing. In an expectant silence the sounds of frogs, insects, birds and river almost imperceptibly deepen.' Lippard, "Imagine Being Here Now".

68 Lacy, "Debated Territory"184.

69 Lacy, "Introduction" *Mapping The Terrain* 31.

70 Barker, Ruth, "Any Rules However, Were Made To Be Broken". Accessed Aug. 2009.

71 'The artist enters, like a subjective anthropologist, the territory of the Other, and presents observations of people and places through an awareness of her own interiority. In this way the artist becomes a conduit for the experience of many others, and the work a metaphor for relationship.' Lacy, "Debated Territory" 174.

72 It is quite possible that given the increasing critical importance given to Lacy's work that the performance may indeed take place at some point in the near future – in which case, my point is irrelevant.

73 Massey, '…space isn't just this flat surface of dead things like Foucault said – you know also Foucault (is) also criticising the notion that it's the fixed and the dead. Space is …a cut through the myriad of stories that are going on at any one moment. What I call it in 'For Space', is simultaneity of stories so far.' Doreen Massey, "Doreen's response to the Panel" *Space, Place and Politics.* (Open University iTunes U) Accessed 10 May 2010.

74 With Mouffe and the Hegemony research group, Massey makes a case for 'thinking space relationally, thinking power relationally, and - and locking them together.' Massey, *For Space,* (London: SAGE Pub., 2005), 89.

75 Massey insists that the specificity of place comes from the 'fact that each place is the focus of a distinct mixture of wider and more local social relations…this very mixture together in one place may produce effects which would not have happened otherwise.' Massey, "A Global Sense of Place", *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) 8.

76 Simon Sheik, *Countering the Public? On the Conditions of Art Production in a World in Fragments.* Accessed 10 September 2007. NP.

77 Like Chantal Mouffe, Sheik refutes Jürgen Habermas' conceptualisation of the 'normative' and idealist 'public sphere', which posits the rational subject as capable of public speaking and argumentation 'outside of itself *in* society and *of* society'. Furthermore, he argues that we have to think of the public sphere as fragmented, consisting of spaces and/or formations that sometimes co-exist, overlap and compete with one another. Sheik, *In the Place of the Public Sphere? Or the World in Fragments.* Accessed 29 Aug 2009, 3.

78 During the *Shifting Ground* conference Sheik points to the use of public parks as cruising areas in gay culture to illustrate the way that a counter-public can subvert and reverse existing spaces into other identities, reframing oppositional discourses and practices. Sheik, *In the Place of the Public Sphere?* 3.

79 Sheik, *Countering the Public,* NP.

80 The duration of this PhD has covered the so-called 'Celtic Tiger' period to the collapse of the Irish economy and the IMF/EU bailout in 2010. The period from the mid-1990s to 2008 marked a period of full employment in rural areas. One of the drivers of the economic boom was the construction of housing estates in rural areas and seaside towns, which attracted large tax-incentives. This has resulted in so-called 'ghost estates' in many counties, and a post-PhD project curated by Gregory McCartney and realised as a body of photographs and a publication in 2011, *Abridged 0 – 20: Abandoned Clare.* See http://www.deirdre-omahony.ie/abandonedclare/

81 The recent report by Kathy Walshe noted that the closure of local businesses and a lack of resources have significantly contributed to social isolation in rural communities, particularly amongst older farmers and further exacerbated by changes in agricultural life in the Burren. Dr. Kathy Walshe, *The Voice on the Ground: A survey of the needs of Burren farm families*. (Carron:The Heritage Council/BurrenBeo Trust Ltd.) 25.

82 Allan Kaprow, "Success and Failure When Art Changes", *Mapping The Terrain* 157.

83 Lacy, "Debated Territory", 184.

PART 3: Being-In-Common: A New Ecology of Visual Art Practice

My research in the early stages of the PhD, and the *Shifting Ground* seminars and conference held during 2006, helped build up a critical discourse around public art and rural culture in Ireland. (See Appendix 4.) A re-configuration of my practice was necessary in order to begin to address the 'problem' of sustainability in the rural landscape in all its complexity and engage all its various 'publics' within this specific socio-political context and location. Part Three of this thesis is a full account of my research into a transdisciplinary art practice, appropriate to the physical location and the subjective psychodynamics of the Burren.

The paintings and photographs produced in the early stages of this research are discussed in Chapter 6. A space for critical reflection was necessary for thinking through my personal subjective identification with the Burren landscape. A public art commission, *Ground Up* (2005/6), informed and redirected my public projects towards a transdisciplinary enquiry into the changing face of the 'natural' landscape which led in turn to a durational dialogical engagement with multiple publics in the Burren. This project led to a self-initiated project *X-PO* and is discussed in Chapters 8 and 9.

Appendix 1 contains maps and the timeline of the various strands of this research. Fig 3 is a detailed map of the Burren giving the locations of the various projects, and Fig.4 is a plan of the former Post Office in Kilnaboy, the *X-PO* and Figure 4 is a timeline of this theoretical and practice-based research.

Chapter 6: Re-reading Landscape: Representation, Subjectivity and Place.

This chapter describes the ideas explored in a body of work, *Viscqueux*, which references psychoanalytic theory to analyse the relational dynamics between place, identity and subjectivity. This work was produced in the early stages of the doctoral project from 2005 to 2007, while researching and making a public art commission, *Cross Land,* which is considered in Chapter 8 of this thesis.

6.1: Strangers to Ourselves: Representation and Subjectivity.

Jacques Lacan argues that 'what we "see" never fully explains how we "know" despite the modernist notion that to see is to know.'[1] The unconscious effect of visual representations is difficult to pin down and may, Stuart Hall contends, be 'immediate and powerful while remaining vague – suspended – numinous.'[2] Hall proposes that a proper understanding of the ways in which we are positioned in and by the narratives of the past can be understood only when the means through which the subject is made to see and experience herself as 'other' is made evident.[3] Hall places particular emphasis on visual representation, arguing that representation is the first 'key' moment in 'the circuit of culture'.[4] Thus, the viewer and the viewed are 'mutually constitutive'; visual discourses already have possible positions of interpretation (from which they 'make sense') embedded in them. The subject brings her own subjective desires and capacities to the 'text' which enables her to identify her position in relation to its meaning.[5] In this way, emotional, non-rational ways of seeing and making meaning are as important as the rational in the formation and the production of subjectivity. Gillian Rose argues that psychoanalysis has a dual emphasis, drawing attention to the constant disciplining of subjectivity, while stressing the instabilities of the unconscious which always threatens those disciplines with disruption. Always in process and never fully achieved, 'subjectivity must constantly be reiterated

through its various structures of meaning including visual images.'[6] The particular emphasis on the role of subjectivity in an agonistic, democratic public sphere has already been discussed in relation to Mouffe and Laceau's ideas, and, in the context of this PhD research, it is necessary to reflect upon the affect of subjectivity in relation to my own identity.

6.2: Abjection, Identity and Subjectivity.

My personal experience of 'otherness' – as a woman growing up in Ireland, in my years in London, and as a 'blow-in' on moving to Co. Clare – was the subject of much of my work produced in the 1990s.[7] I was a stranger in Clare. I 'belonged' as a citizen but 'belonging' is a problematic concept in this rural community. For some, it implies a relationship going back centuries and little appeared to have changed since Conrad Arensberg wrote about the manner in which 'a particular ancestral line is inseparable from a particular plot of earth. All others are strangers to the land.'[8] Certainly post-Mullaghmore, I felt I would never be other than a stranger in the place. The notion of the "stranger", a central feature in the writing of Julia Kristeva, is of direct relevance to my understanding of difference, and the starting point for this research was a quote from Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves*:

> Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity flounder...The foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my difference arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, unamenable to bonds and communities.[9]

Two strands of Kristeva's writing helped me to identify the underlying concerns and motivations in my practice; her work on the abject in *Powers of Horror* and on co-existing with difference in *Strangers to Ourselves*. Noëlle McAfee argues that in Kristeva's texts the foreigner represents and performs 'the necessary function for subjectivity and political identity.'[10] Furthermore, the confounding power of abjection – 'the state in which one's foothold in the world

of self and other disintegrates' – has the potential to function as an active dynamic possibility in the transformation of both individual and collective identity.[11]

This notion of 'abjection' is pivotal to Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic theory of subjectivity and was a useful tool in understanding and identifying the psychodynamics of oppressive notions of identity formation. In *Powers of Horror* Kristeva describes abjection as an operation of ambiguous disruption, what 'disturb(s) identity, system, order, what does not respect borders, positions, rules.'[12] Subjectivity is always a tenuous accomplishment, at risk from the unconscious, instinctive impulses of our semiotic selves. The hovering presence of the abject threatens to collapse the distinction between subject and object or between self and other.[13]

> The subject finds the abject both repellent and seductive thus his or her borders of self are, paradoxically, continuously threatened and maintained. Threatened because the abject is alluring enough to crumple the borders of self; maintained because the fear of such a collapse keeps the subject vigilant.[14]

Norma Claire Moruzzi, proposes that recognising 'that we live with strangers in our midst, and are strangers to ourselves, we are faced with the task of recreating an international community composed of mutually reciprocating strangers.'[15] It is not difficult to see the relevance of such a perspective at a micro-level in rural Ireland; the struggles faced by "publics" in the Burren to re-define the idea of community in a post-agricultural, contemporary context. Kristeva argues that in the absence of a new community bond:

> A paradoxical community is emerging made up of foreigners who are reconciled with themselves to the extent that they recognize themselves as foreigners. The multinational society would thus be the consequence of an extreme

> individualism, but conscious of its discontents and limits, knowing only indomitable people ready-to-help-themselves in their weakness, a weakness whose name is *radical strangeness*.[16] (My emphasis)

If the struggle of abjection was to delineate self from "other", the recognition and acceptance of such a 'radical strangeness' might create new understandings of community as a 'place of interaction and connection'.[17] Thus, Kristeva's text opened up a possibility for reworking notions of space, place and communities/publics,in rural Ireland that was of particular relevance to my later public art projects.

6.3: *Viscqueux*.

Fig. 17. Deirdre O'Mahony,*Surfacing 2*.
Inkjet Print, 48" x 48", 2008.

Applying a reading of Kristeva and the abject to the material evidence of the deterioration in water quality, waste management and land use in the West, it was possible to visualise unconscious attitudes to landscape. In *Formless* Rosalind Krauss equates Kristeva's conception of the abject with Sartre's characterisation of the 'Viscqueux' (slimy) and, for me, the passage articulated the unresolved relationship between place, space and identity which is playing out in the West today.

> Solids, Sartre reasons, are like tools; they can be taken up and put down again, having served their purpose. But the slimy, in

> the form of the gagging suction of a leechlike past that will not release its grip, seems to contain its own form of possessiveness. It is, he writes, "the revenge of the In-itself".[18]

Freud identified the source of 'das Unheimliche', (uncanniness) as 'something familiar and old established in the mind...a memory of the self prior to its entrance into the symbolic realm, prior to becoming a subject proper.'[19] Or, as Kristeva wrote, 'uncanniness occurs when the boundaries between *imagination* and *reality* are mixed.'[20] The casual dumping of rubbish, poor water quality and polluting agricultural practices suggest a form of 'acting out', an assertion of power over place that can be read as a subjective reaction to the spatialising of the West as a signifier of national identity and alterity. This unconscious ambivalence is made visible through residual traces of human interaction with the landscape, often uncanny and ambiguous in nature. I was drawn to the slimy residues of algae in the water system, the eutrophication of local water due to excess nutrients from agricultural fertilisers and septic tanks, which are the cause of *Chlorophyta* algae in lakes and rivers.[21] Slime, as Sartre suggests, compromises the autonomous subject, sticking, yielding, cloying, a metaphorical residue that clings to the murky corners of the psyche, oozing into visibility whenever stresses and cracks appear.

6.4: Photographs, Grids, Paintings.

The early stage of my research was situated on the Fergus river basin and Lake Inchiquin, between the townlands of Kilnaboy and Corofin in North County Clare, and took place from 2005 to 2006.[22] (See Map 3) Limestone is porous, and rapidly absorbs surface water. This combines with ground water in Kilnaboy to form the Fergus River, which then flows into Lake Inchiquin. In warm weather the *Chlorophyta* forms a dense fibrous scum which reduces light penetration to the water column, leading to oxygen depletion in the deeper layers as the dead cells sink to the

bottom and decay.[23] As the surface algae rots it becomes a slimy congealed mass on the shores and beds of lakes and rivers. Contamination of groundwater from domestic septic tanks, animal waste and excess phosphates and nitrates from fertiliser use have resulted in recurring incidents of eutrophication in the lake since the 1970s.

Fig.18. Deirdre O'Mahony, Viscqueux 5. Inkjet Print on Diebond. 150 x 150 cm. 2005

EU measures such as Rural Environmental Protection schemes (REPs), and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), have been introduced in the Burren to conserve or improve the quality of the natural environment, including the water quality. In 2007 the Nitrates Action Programme was put in place on a statutory basis under the European Communities (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) regulations, and this has resulted in an improvement in the quality of the river and lake water. The REPs scheme was taken up by most of the farmers in the region, resulting in a significant decrease in other forms of pollution, from discarded silage wrappings and excess nitrates to groundwater contamination by slurry. However, as the agricultural pollution was reduced, other problems became evident. The impact of domestic water waste on water quality – notably the effect of the recent boom in construction of new houses, all with separate septic tanks – is yet to be assessed.[24] Furthermore, the cessation of REPs presents the prospect of an uncertain future for the good management practices incentivised under the scheme.

The local catchment area for the Fergus river basin was photographed from 2005-2008 as an indicator of the ecological difficulties arising from waste disposal and land management in the Burren.[25] The photographic images were used to initiate paintings and used as works in their own right, and the dried algae was incorporated into grids. The image-making processes, – here, photography – the manipulation of physical materials found on site, together with painting, provided a space for reflection on all aspects of my practice and its search for appropriate visualisation. The unsettling ambiguity of the contoured limestone was rendered more unfamiliar and strange by the cloying, decaying, discarded waste matter found in the landscape. *Viscqueux* is a form of matter that was full of potential as a conceptualisation of the 'dark side' of Irish landscape, and the use of photography allowed space to examine what Laura Mulvey calls 'a poetics of the unspeakable'. For Mulvey:

Fig 19. Deirdre O'Mahony, *Surfacing 2*.
Inkjet Print, 50 x 50 cm, 2008.

> This process carries the spectator into his/her psychic structure. The image itself only works if its mystery or enigma generates introspection, or, indeed, an equally telling resistance. Decipherment is demanded, clues are offered, but the reveries and associations of ideas are specific to the individual. However the shared psychic structures that trigger off the individual response bring the pleasures and anxieties of reverie back inexorably to problems of repression and desire as shared and social.[26]

The *Viscqueux* photographs are taken from an aerial perspective using a medium-format camera. The images are ambiguous; the fleshy, rotting, fertiliser bags and glistening plastic are the post-agricultural equivalents of Robert Smithson's post-industrial detritus. Smithson argues

that such material, '(P)recisely because it is a nondescript indescribable, an "other" which is between the usual linguistic or visual representations of any usual categories ... becomes available and provides a space for avant-garde artists, and a place for historical insight.'[27] The scale and perspective dislocated the images from conventional landscape representation, suggesting the possibility of reading the surface of the image as one would the body: the flesh, skin, hair, genitals. This echoes Kristeva's description of the horror of the 'corporal link to the mother...the site of an unspeakable and unpayable debt of life, of existence, that the subject (and culture) owes to the maternal body.'[28] In drawing a parallel between Kristeva's 'maternal body' and nature, I was aware of the tired, often-repeated arguments about the treatment of nature and culture as if they were two separate domains, which are often identified with gender politics. In the contemporary ecological context Kate Soper argues that 'any eco politics, in short, which simply reasserts the claims of a feminised space/being of nature against its human dominion is at risk of reproducing the implicit identification of the human species with its male members in its very denunciations of "human" abuse of "nature".'[29]

Fig. 20. Deirdre O'Mahony, *Local News* Installation Siamsa Tíre Gallery Tralee January 2008.
Photograph: Ben Geoghegan.

The ambiguous nature of the algae when dried has the potential to disrupt the process of visual perception and interpretation. It was applied as a medium directly to squares of canvas which, when re-assembled, resembled minimalist grids. The utopian aspirations of modernism could thus be reconsidered in this living material through the grid structure,

which is of course also a mechanism to render the social order intelligible, - the unit of measurement of colonialism and symbolic of both internal and external otherness – a sign/map to both personal history and crises in nature today. The dried algae have a distinctive, inescapable, musty smell, which eventually fades. These units are then assembled, allowing the growth over pre-defined periods to determine the ultimate size of the piece, transforming it into a time-based ecological barometer.

Painting remains important to this re-negotiated practice as an active mode of reflective contemplation, the focus of an aesthetic alertness to a rapidly changing environment. In choosing to render these works in a self-conscious, almost hyper-real way, and using a skill that was far removed from my initial experience or training, the intention was to call into question the role of Irish landscape painting by re-framing and making visible the 'poetics of the unspeakable' referred to by Mulvey. The photo-paintings became a site to create an 'ambiguous tension', as Siri Hustvedt calls it, 'between icon and anti-icon', one that no photograph could possibly achieve.[30] In his writing on the relationship between photography and painting, Gerhard Richter has said that the photograph 'provokes horror and the painting - with the same motif - something more like grief.'[31] Richter's belief in the condition of doubt, of uncertainty and scepticism, as counteractions to the absurdity of ideologies – political, social and cultural – helped to clarify my thinking in developing this practice. The ambiguous, painstaking construction of the work would, I hoped, demand a certain attention on the part of the viewer. Underpinning this was the idea that painting could disrupt the indexical power of the image and produce the effect of alienation – in Nicholas Royale's words, 'turning the ...object from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking and unexpected' and 'free(ing) socially conditioned phenomena from the stamp of familiarity which protects them against our grasp today.'[32]

The subject matter hovers between abstraction and reality, uncannily conflating image and illusion and '*disturbing* in the very scenery of the sensible', to use Rancière's words.[33] The paintings conflate Caoimhin Mac Giolla Léith's description of 'landscape's twin termini in modernism…abstract painting and photography or photorealism.'[34] They are made on dark, pigmented gesso boards, the surfaces sanded and polished to a smooth and slightly glossy surface. The photographic transcriptions are rendered monochromatically, further disrupting the legibility of the image. The paintings intentionally challenge the relationship between what Rancière calls 'sensible presentation and forms of meaning'.[35] This disturbance or reconfiguration of experience forces a degree of reflexivity on the part of the viewer and is a reminder of Lacan's warning that in 'this matter of the visible, everything is a trap'.[36] Although such disturbance is not of itself a form of political mobilisation, the effect is always going to be uncertain because of the ambiguity between meaning and the withdrawal of meaning. The effect is not quantifiable; thus, Rancière argues, it allows for a redirection of the field of subjectivity as an 'impersonal' field: '[I]n a certain way the political interpretation of the uncanny in terms of effects is always a kind of negotiation. Art is going elsewhere. And politics has to catch it.'[37] This conceptualisation of the possibilities of art to redirect subjectivities coincides with Félix Guattari's idea of an 'ecosophy', also discussed in this chapter.

6.5: Practice: *Viscqueux*: Exhibition.

In 2006 I exhibited some of the *Viscqueux* photographs and paintings in the Fishery Tower, Galway, for the annual Arts Festival. The tower is located in the heart of the city, on the river Corrib, and was built in 1852/53 by the Ashworth family as both a draft netting station and as a look-out tower for Fishery personnel monitoring fish stocks and illegal fishing activity along the river. The tower was used to exhibit two large-scale photographs, the *Viscqueux* paintings and new smaller photographs and drawings of Lake Inchiquin made in 2006. By placing the work within

what Mary Jane Jacob calls an 'issue specific' context, the exhibition directly addressed the ecological health of the River Corrib and the water quality in Galway City.[38] Salmon are clearly visible from the bridge over the river feeding on raw sewage flowing into the river at the base of the tower. The intention was to bring visitors face-to-face with the inadequacies of waste treatment in the city, using the Arts Festival, a prime driver of the region's tourism economy, to highlight successive city council's failure to address the problem.[39] The festival is officially promoted and evaluated on the basis of revenue generated by tourism, and regarded by many as a cultural spectacle rather than a discursive or interrogative cultural event. However, any discursive potential was confined to the arts sector and, critically, the exhibition failed to engage effectively with the wider social and political context. In *Mapping The Terrain,* Suzanne Lacy posited the idea of an 'effective' art that can function simultaneously within the aesthetic and social spheres. In a fluid, mobile, post-agricultural society, as resources continue to be consumed with ever accelerating rapaciousness, it is no longer enough to simply witness the effects of environmental damage on local places.[40]

Fig 21 Deirdre O'Mahony, *Viscqueux* installation. The Fisheries Tower, Galway, 2006. Photograph Deirdre O'Mahony.

Kristeva's articulation of the 'confounding powers' of abjection as an <u>active</u> dynamic in the transformation of both individual and collective

identity gave a conceptual frame for reworking my relationship with landscape by reconsidering my subjective understanding of self, identity and alterity – including the post-colonial effect – on nature and social relations in rural Ireland. The *Viscqueux* strand of this practice was a necessary 'private', reflective, critical space from which to consider how to structure a more public, discursive engagement with the landscape and ecology of the West. This was a necessary shift, as I was becoming sceptical of what role such a personal practice, particularly painting, could have in relation to landscape today. Kate Soper argues that a 're-sensitisation towards nature might be achieved less by the application of new forms of awe and reverence of nature but rather to extend to it some of the more painful forms of concern we have for ourselves.'[41] Such a subjective identification is a way of overcoming 'the sense of rupture and distance which has been encouraged by secular rationality...not by worshipping this nature that is "other" to humanity but through a process of re-sensitisation to our combined separation from it and dependence upon it.'[42]

Deirdre O'Mahony. *Viscqueux* Painting No. 13.
Oil/Gesso Board, 20 x 20 cm. 2005.

That re-sensitisation to my subjective connection with, and distance from, nature, was the focus of the initial stage of my practice-based research. My practice became, as Nicolas Bourriauld proposes, 'the thing upon and around which subjectivity can reform itself'.[43] Bourriauld recognises a philosophical link in Guattari's writing with the art practices he himself examines through his curatorial practice and in *Relational Aesthetics.*[44] Arguing that Guattari's writing has been significantly under-estimated, Bourriauld places particular

importance on his writing on subjectivity, arguing that 'subjectivity as *production* plays the role of a fulcrum around which forms of knowledge can freely pitch in and soar off in pursuit of the socius.'[45]

Guattari both questions and defines his understanding of the 'whole of subjecting and capitalistic power formations' in terms of the three ecological registers of the environment, human subjectivity and social relations.[46] The experimental psychiatric clinic he helped establish in France, the Clinique de La Borde, was where he developed his concept of transversality, essentially 'a measure (or so-called coefficient) of how much communication exists between different levels, in different directions, of an organisation or institution.'[47] He further expanded the idea in *The Three Ecologies* and *Chaosmosis* to include relations between and across disparate domains – social, natural and 'the landscapes and fantasies of the most intimate spheres of the individual.'[48] Bourriaud argues that. for Guattari, subjectivity is defined in relation to, and dependent on, a second subjectivity - human or in-human, collective or individual.[49] This corresponds with Nancy's argument for 'an ontology of being-with-one-another (that)…must support both the sphere of "nature" and sphere of "history," as well as both the "human" and the "nonhuman"; it must be and ontology for the world, for everyone.'[50]

Artists occupy a special position in that they can 'de-naturalise and de-territorialise subjectivity', serving as potential models for human existence in general by bringing together the subjective, social and natural.[51] Guattari argues that Ecosophic activism closely 'resembles' the work of artists in 'extracting details' that serve to open up possibilities for subjective development.[52] Arguing that the foundations of human subjectivity are threatened by the capitalist production system, Guattari predicted the psychological effect of media infantilisation, including the breakdown of social relations.[53] He proposed that social and relational aesthetic practices 'offer a way of rethinking and articulating the self in relation to the other, to the foreign, the strange'.[54] This 'logic of intensities' or 'eco-logic',

does not seek to impose a 'resolution' of opposites but allows space for creative responses to what he terms 'Integrated World Capitalism', or globalisation.[55]

Guattari's concern was with the quality of subjectivity; the uncanny disturbance mobilised by art does not produce *subjects,* it reframes *subjectivities* as an impersonal field. Guattari's writing addresses the interconnected social, natural and human ecologies that I wished to address through the parallel strand of my 'public' art practice. This became the frame for a critical reflection on the subjectivities engendered by competing perspectives on the land/landscape, and encompassed both the production of objects and the human, social and cultural histories and relations within the locality.

My thesis was that a new formation was now available; a confluence apparent for the first time whereby a previously perceived contradiction between modernity and ruralism has been dissolved, largely through new ecological thinking and awareness, the process of which has yet to be worked out. Given the near-collapse of the unregulated free-market economy and the effects of climate change now being experienced, is there now a case for envisioning, as Kester suggests, 'alternative forms of sociality and a future for the planet that transcends the brutish values of economic "necessity"'?[56] If the rural landscape in all its complexity is to survive, perhaps we need to re-examine modernist ideas of collectivism and cultural activism in order to re-animate a public discourse on its future sustainability. This PhD thesis is my contribution to the resolution of that problem.

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1 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. A. Sheridan, (London: Hogarth Press, 1977) 93, qtd in Rose, *Visual Methodologies, An introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*. 2nd. ed. (London: Sage. 2007) 110.

2 Stuart Hall, "Introduction: looking and subjectivity", *Visual Culture: The Reader*, eds. J. Evens and S. Hall, qtd in Rose, *Visual Methodologies*.

3 Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. J. Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990) 225.

4 Hall, “The Spectacle of the ‘Other’”, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1997) 226.

5 Hall, “Introduction: looking and subjectivity” 112.

6 Rose, *Visual Methodologies* 111.

7 Deirdre O’Mahony, “The Trouble with Beauty; Ethics, Aesthetics and Ecology and the landscape of the West of Ireland.” *Visual Artists News Sheet* Issue 4 Sept/Oct 2006.

8 In *The Irish Countryman.* Conrad Arensberg looked at the obligations of kindred within families and extended families, going back centuries in rural societies in the west of Ireland. Arensberg used the diaries of Solon Kimball as the basis for parts of his study including Kimball’s account of community life in Rinnamona ,near Kilnaboy. The close ties of kinship are still present today and contribute to “born-in/blow-in” tensions” in rural public spheres. Arensberg. *The Irish Countryman* 86.

9 Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. L Roudiez. (London: Harvester, 1991) 1.

10 Noelle McAfee, “Abject Strangers”, *Ethics, Politics and Difference in Julia Kristeva’s Writing.*, ed. Kelly Oliver (London: Routledge, 1993) 116.

11 McAfee, “Abject Strangers” 120.

12 Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 4.

13 What makes something abject and not simply repressed is that it does not entirely disappear from consciousness. It remains as both an unconscious and a conscious threat to one’s own clean and proper self. The abject is akin is what does not respect boundaries. It beseeches and pulverises the subject. Noelle McAfee, *Julia Kristeva* (Oxon: Routledge, 2004) 46.

14 McAfee, *Julia Kristeva* 49.

15 This can be read as the equivalent of Benson’s ‘community of selves’, referenced in Chapter 1.

Norma Claire Moruzzi, “National Abjects”, *Ethics, Politics and Difference in Julia Kristeva’s Writing*, ed. Kelly Oliver (London: Routledge, 1993) 147.

16 Kristeva *Strangers to Ourselves* 195.

17 Suzi Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art* 150.

18 Rosalind E. Krauss and Yves-Allain Bois, *The Destiny of the Informe. Formless: A User’s Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997) 238.

19 McAfee, *Julia Kristeva* 49.

20 McAfee, “Abject Strangers” 123.

21 Over the past two decades problems with water quality have been an ongoing issue in the whole of the West and the particular evidence of ecological stress in my locality also included public health warnings about Cryptosporidium and Giardia in the water supply of Ennis, the largest town in the county, whose source is River Fergus.

22 This followed on from a series of works made for my MA exhibition in 2005 at the Crawford College of Art.

23 “Eutrophication, or nutrient enrichment, … is the principal threat to the water quality of Irish lakes… The principal sources of phosphate and nitrogen compounds in Ireland are losses from agricultural activities and municipal and industrial waste discharges…The former includes sewage discharges and the collected run-off from farm yards, while the latter category covers diffuse losses from land resulting from the excessive and/or ill timed application of natural and artificial fertiliser and other diffuse sources.” Clare County Council. *Algae in Irish Lakes*. Report made available under the Freedom of Information Act Ennis: CCC, 2005.

24 The EU brought a case against the Irish government over the installation and maintenance of private waste-water systems, septic tanks, in rural areas of the country. The European Court of Justice branded Ireland's domestic waste-water legislation as inadequate at a hearing on Friday October 30th, 2009 and Ireland was accused of failing to fully implement a 1975 EU directive on waste, which the European Commission (EC) claimed had caused "serious damage to the environment". Lauren Stedman, “Ireland 'failing' over EU waste-water laws”, *Envirotech Online*, Accessed October 2009 <http://www.envirotech-online.com/>

25 I was aware of Helen and Newton Harrison’s work over the past three decades, which is an important model of a durational practice that reflects upon the ecological conditions of environmentally sensitive regions.

26 I am aware that, here, Mulvey is referring to the production of constructed imagery in studio photography to ‘perform’ ideas that emerged as part of the feminist movement’s discourse on psychoanalytic theory. However, in my case the lakeside corresponds to her reading of the studio - a site/stage where the dialectic between desire and lack is foregrounded by the unreadability of the image: a ‘trigger’ for reverie. Laura Mulvey, “Dialogue with Spectatorship: Barbara Kruger and Victor Burgin”, qtd in Roberts, John, “The Rise of Theory and the Critique of Realism”, *The Art of Interruption Realism, Photography and the Everyday* (Manchester: MUP 1998) 155.

27 Peter Seddon, “From eschatology to ecology: the ends of history and nature.” *History Painting Reassessed, the representation of history in contemporary art*, ed. David Green and Peter Seddon. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) 91.

28 L.C. Jones, “Transgressive Femininity: Art and Gender in the Sixties and Seventies.” *Abject Art Repulsion and Desire in American Art* (Whitney Independent Study Program, Whitney Museum, New York.1993) 36.

29 Soper also argues that ‘(E)cological arguments need to be cautious in accepting the genderisation of nature as feminine, as it does whenever it simply inverts an Enlightenment devaluation of both women and nature as, by association, the exploitable objects of a masculine instrumental rationality in favour of a “maternal” and/or vaginal nature which has been rapacious human son or suitor. This is in part because it reproduces the women-nature coding which has served as legitimation for the domestication of women and their confinement to a nurturing role (and may overlook the extent to which iconic associations of “women” with the land and earth-bound values, has served as a prop for national policies towards woman, land ownership and the division of labour are deeply conservative). This is the point that was made by Bhreathnach-Lynch and cited in Chapter 1.

Kate Soper, ”Nature/’nurture’”, *Future Natural*, eds. Robertson, Mash, Tickner, Bird, et al., London: Routledge, 1996, 22-34. Rpt. in *Land and Environmental Art*, eds. Jeffery Kastner, and Brian Wallis. 1998. (London: Phaidon Press, 2005) 287.

30 Siri Hustvedt. “Gerhard Richter: Why Paint?” *Mysteries of the Rectangle* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005) 157.

31 Gerhard Richter, “Conversation with Jan Thorn Prikker concerning the cycle *18 October 1977* 1989”, *The Daily Practice of Painting Writings 1962-1993* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995) 189.

32 Nicholas Royale. *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) 5, quoting Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic,* trans. and ed. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1978) 143 – 4, 192.

33 Dasgupta 74.

34 W. J. T. Mitchell defined the 'grail-quests for purity' in the story of landscape as 'non-representational painting freed of reference, language and subject matter', and 'pure hyper-representational painting, a super likeness that produces "natural representations of nature."' W.J.T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape", *Landscape and power,* ed. W.J.T. Mitchell, 2nd ed., 13. Qtd in Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith, "Six artists in search of a landscape." *Éire/Ireland An interdisciplinary Journal of Irish Studies* , The Irish American Cultural Institute, Visual Arts Issue, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell. XXX111: 3 & 4; XXX1V 268.

35 Dasgupta 74.

36 Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* 110.

37 Dasgupta 74.

38 Miwon Kwon cites Mary Jane Jacob's use of the terms 'issue-specific' and 'audience-specific' context to define the move away from site specificity toward a more intimate relationship between artist and audience that is a way of 'shrinking the distance between the poles of production and reception.' Kwon 109.

39 Exemplified by Suzanne Lacy's description of the artist as 'experiencer, reporter, analyst and activist'. Lacy, "Debated Territory" 174. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local* 278.

40 Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain* 184.

41 Soper, "Nature/'nature", 287

42 Soper, "Nature/'nature", 287.

43 Bourriaud 97.

44 Bourriaud 86.

45 Bourriaud 88.

46 Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. Ian Parker and Paul Sutton. English ed. (UK: The Athlone Press 2000) 28.

47 Gary Genosko, "The Four Functors", *Félix Guattari: An Aberrant Introduction* (London: Continuum, 2002) 200.

48 Guattari, *The Three Ecologies* 69.

49 Bourriaud 92.

50 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* 53.

51 Bourriaud 88.

52 Gary Genesko, "Prospects for a transdiciplinary Ecology", *RSA Ecology and Artistic Practice Symposium*. Web.

53 Gary Genesko cites an unpublished manuscript of Guattari's concerning the "Great Ecological Fear" in which he wrote of an iceberg: 'the tip, above water and visible, represented environmental disasters and menaces; down below the water line was the bulk of the worry, that is, the degeneration of social relations, like the rise of organized crime organizations in the detritus of Stalinism and as parasites of hypercapitalist growth, and mental pollution caused by

media infantilization, passivity-inducing post-political cynicism. The iceberg represented a continuum of material encompassing the fabric of everyday life, large-scale crises, and habits of thought'. Genesko, quoting Guattari, "La, grand-peur écologique", handwritten mss. Fonds Félix Guattari (IMEC) ET 10-03. 5.

Gary Genesko, "Prospects for a transdiciplinary Ecology" 5.

54 Guattari, *The Three Ecologies* 68.

55 Guattari, *The Three Ecologies* 52.

56 Kester, "Theories and Methods of Collaborative Art Practices", *Groundworks: Environmental Collaboration in Contemporary Art*, ed. Grant Kester (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon University/Regina Gouger Miller Gallery, 2005) 33.

Chapter 7 Cross Land.

Cross Land provided an interrogative frame through which to examine the problematic question of landscape regulation and its effects. It was one of a series of artworks commissioned by Clare Co. Arts for *Ground Up*, a programme of contemporary art in rural contexts that took place between 2003 and 2007.[1] My initial proposal, *Caprus*, is discussed in full in *Appendix 3.* Following further field and theoretical research for this PhD the proposal was changed, and renamed *Cross Land*. This chapter describes the social, agricultural and ecological context for the project and its effect on my practice.

7.1 Cultivating Relations: (Re)connecting Culture and Agriculture.

Nature is no longer a local affair; what happens in an internationally significant landscape like the Burren is open to scrutiny on a global stage, particularly when the care of the local environment is linked to EU subsidies. In recent years more environmentally responsible modes of farming have been encouraged in the Burren through Rural Environmental Protection schemes (REPs), which promotes the farmer as custodian of the landscape. Although family farming is still the economic mainstay of the region it is now increasingly combined with off-farm work.[2] The imminent reconfiguration of EU agricultural subsidies in 2013 means that the maintenance of 'farming landscape', or sustainable heritage farming, will become the only viable option for farmers in North Clare in coming years, a paradigmatic shift from the rural as a site of food production to an arena of cultural production.

Less visible, although equally profound, is the effect of this change on the individual and collective subjectivities of farm families. Sociologist Áine Macken-Walshe argues that the 'poor engagement' in new rural development initiatives by those with small farms indicates a strong cultural resistance to the change.[3] In her study of the reasons underpinning this opposition, Macken-Walshe makes the case that, within traditional farming culture, value and prestige are associated with knowledge that has been developed over generations through the practical experience of working with the soil and animals.[4] This 'tacit' local knowledge 'could not be explained through words alone but had to be demonstrated in practice. It applied only to the specific place where it had been developed, and it made sense as part of a wider understanding of one's relationship to one's holdings.'[5] While economic returns play an important part in motivating farmers, a significant number continue to follow 'non-viable' farming practices – now officially designated as 'failing'. Despite the specificity and socially-rich nature of such farms, they are perceived as belonging to the past.[6] Macken-Walshe argues that it is unsurprising that there is antagonism towards new rural development policies when the connections between the culturally-rich activities underpinning small-scale farming, and new paradigm policies 'designed to valorise unique local recourses for the purpose of a "culture" economy', are simply not being made.[7]

Anthropologist Tim Inglis argues that the concept of 'culture' is often posited to explain the failure of development policies: 'the cultural assumptions of the élite are held responsible for their not understanding local people; the culture of the locals has prevented their taking the development opportunity, because it has taught only sullenness and mistrust of government.'[8] Inglis argues that if we accept the premise that culture is the 'ground upon

which a society draws the figures of its politics,' then by defining culture differently – in anthropologist Clifford Geetz's terms, as 'the ensemble of stories we tell ourselves' – it becomes possible to open up a space between the often-conflicting demands of agency and sociality, or between subject-object relationships.[9]

7.2 Local Culture: Farmers and the Burren.

Brendan Dunford published his analysis of *Farming and the Burren* in 2002. The book was a landmark for the area: the first public acknowledgement of the 'overwhelmingly positive' role that farmers have played in the management and maintenance of the Burren landscape.[10] Recognising the sensitivities caused by decades of official disregard of local cultivation knowledge, Dunford was scrupulous in his methodology – visiting, interviewing and documenting stories of farming practices in the locality, and gaining the trust and respect of farming families in the process. He set up the BurrenBeo Trust to promote the sustainable management and use of 'this unique landscape and heritage in an accessible, inclusive and effective manner.'[11] He has also established an EU project, BurrenLIFE, to research and deliver 'a model of sustainable agriculture for the Burren that meets the needs of farmers and their environment, while benefiting from, and facilitating the needs of, other sectors such as tourism.'[12] Dunford is even-handed in his criticism of the management of the Burren in the past:

> There remains a critical lack of awareness among many farmers of the resource that they are being paid to protect … equally, many representatives of local, regional and state management bodies, visitors and even well intentioned 'conservationists', remain hopelessly oblivious to the important role that farmers play in protecting, and contributing to the

Burren's heritage, and of the constraints within which these farmers operate. This is a situation that needlessly stifles co-operation and development.[13]

The Burren Rural Environmental Protection Schemes (REPS) were first introduced in 1995. The schemes are designed to support more ecologically sustainable farming practices as part of an EU strategy to maintain regional diversity and local ecology.[14] The Burren REPS acknowledged the unique methods of farming in the region, such as the inverse transhumance or winter upland grazing, and the scheme has helped to keep traditionally-minded farmers in business.[15] Farmers must comply with regulations regarding the implementation of REPS or face heavy fines and penalties.

7.3 *Caprus/Cross Land.*

In 2005 I made a public art proposal for *Ground Up 2* called *Caprus*. (See Appendix 3) The commissioned work was a reflection on the rapid decline in the population of wild goats in the Burren. Traditionally, goats were an important part of mixed farming practices in the Burren, often hobbled in pairs, or tethered in one spot to restrict their movement until vegetation was grazed bare. Most Burren farmers had stopped keeping goats by the 1970s; some simply got rid of herds, while others

Fig 23. Feral Goat in the Burren 2007.
Photograph Deirdre O'Mahony.

gradually managed them less and less until they became feral.[16] On first moving to the Burren in 1991 herds of fifty or more goats would regularly appear near my home, the smell the first signal of their presence. The hollow 'thunk' of the clashing skulls of the rutting males reverberated in the springtime. To stand in my back garden looking into the next field and watch these battles was, to me, a sign of the wildness, the remoteness, the beauty, the 'otherness' of the region. There are now just a few goats left living in *Poll na Gabhar,* (translation: 'the cave of the goats') at the base of Clifden Hill close to my home in Kilnaboy.

When I began my research for *Caprus* I looked for information and stories about the goats from my neighbours and noted that the subject was changed very quickly – one farmer responded, 'there used to be more goats. We won't talk about that now.'[17] The reason for this reluctance was a fear of 'outsider' interference in a series of culls of the herds that started in 2002. It is estimated that between 2002 and 2004 over 4000 feral goats were culled from the Burren. The practice is far less common now, as are the goats.[18] Efforts to preserve the herds led to tensions once more amongst the various communities in the area. It generated a significant controversy and re-opened the Mullaghmore debate about prioritising 'wild' nature over the needs of local farmers.[19] There was general agreement that there had to be some culling as the herds were too large; the problem was that there was no co-ordination of the cull. Within a year the herds

Fig. 24. Evidence of damage to Ash tree from the goats. At certain times of the year they need tannin from the bark. Photograph Peter Rees.

were severely depleted and the hazel scrub, upon which they fed, was spreading fast.[20]

Relations between local farmers and those concerned for the goats' welfare grew strained. The main entry work required of farmers joining REPs in the Burren was to repair and maintain dry-stone walls and heavy fines were imposed for non-compliance.[21] The feral herds caused extensive damage to walls and grasslands. Experts identified a small number of indigenous 'Old Irish' goats amongst the feral herds and efforts are being made to isolate and breed from this stock, as it is believed that they graze extensively on the hazel.[22] As the feral goats bred with roaming domestic Senaan goats it is believed that this may have changed their feeding and behavioural habits; domestic goats prefer sweet grass for most of their diet, hence their unpopularity with some farmers.[23] However there was also some affection and respect for the goats; Ute Bohnsack, an agricultural advisor for REPS, wrote of a farmer who 'told me how he enjoyed watching these mighty, hardy creatures when he is out herding commenting that they "kept our great-grandfathers alive during the famine."'[24]

Between 2003 and 2004 the conflict rumbled on. There were local meetings, discussions in the local papers and radio. In 2004 I submitted a proposal for *Ground Up 2* to coppice – cut down to the plant base, a twelve meter NO ENTRY sign from a tract of dense hazel scrub in Carron, North Clare, and document it using aerial photography.[25] The intention was to use the NO ENTRY sign to highlight the absence of the goats and draw attention to the spread of the hazel scrub.[26] This was a calculated attempt to provoke a response from both the farming community and the wider public. In retrospect, it demonstrated a lack of understanding of the complexities of the issue and it was fortunate

that the commission adjudication of the proposals was delayed. By the time the project was approved in late 2005, my PhD research was underway. Searching for a site on which to construct the work in 2005, I was told about some suitable land for the project where the scrub was accessible and dense enough for the image to 'read'. Known locally as 'cragg', the rapid encroachment of hazel over this type of marginal land exemplified the problem of the scrub. It is very difficult to access. For this project it required a scramble across limestone pavement, fields, bog, cragg and some very precarious dry-stone walls to access the site. The farmer mentioned that the previous owner of that land called it 'cross' land because it was 'hard to work, hard to access and hard for the animals. He would put cattle on it to graze and they would come off it skinnier than they went in.'[27] Hearing the name 'cross land' prompted a new idea that was simpler and more effective. I would coppice an 'X' or cross, each arm 60 metres long and 1.5m wide, from the hazel scrub. Re-titled *Cross Land,* the symbolic potential of the 'X' was far richer than the literal 'no entry' sign. It was an image able to raise as many questions, suggest as many meanings, as there were people to look at it. It brought to mind Lippard's idea of the local – 'the intersections of nature, culture, history, and ideology that form the ground on which we stand - our

Fig 23. Overview of site used for *Cross Land*. Sept. 2006. Photograph Deirdre O'Mahony.

land, our place, the local,' – a point that is simultaneously connected to, and isolated from, its surroundings.[28.] The outcome marked a significant change in my practice.

7.4 *Cross Land:* Process.

When the project began I took the view that it was the absence of the goats which had led to the spread of the scrub. However, during an extended discourse with farmers, ecologists, rangers, agricultural scientists, natural scientists, sociologists and others, it was clear that the problem was far more complex than my initial proposal suggested. Research by BurrenLIFE suggests that a range of factors is responsible for the spread of the scrub. Farming in the Burren requires negotiating with up to five different regulatory agencies who have authority over land use. Part of the Burren is a designated National Park coming under the remit of the National Parks and Wildlife Service which enforces the relevant Wildlife acts. Much but not all of the area is also a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) established under the European Union Habitats Directive. The Department of Agriculture regulates farming and oversees the REPs. Archaeological sites in the area are the responsibility of the National Monuments Service, and permission for the construction of buildings and access tracks comes from the planning office of Clare Co. Council. The course of this artwork involved a time-consuming, bureaucratic process of negotiation with all of these agencies. As increasing numbers of farmers now hold

Fig 26. Feral Goats on Mullaghmore.
Photograph Peter Rees

full-time jobs and are managing farms in evenings and at weekends, rather than navigate the paper-work necessary for permission to construct access tracks to allow tractors in to feed and water cattle, marginal lands are being left un-grazed.[29] Limited available labour, poor market returns and the use of different cattle breeds and feeding systems have compounded the problem, and the warm wet summers in recent years have provided ideal conditions for hazel growth on ungrazed lands. The precise role of the goats – feral, 'Old Irish' or cross-breeds – in controlling the scrub is difficult to quantify, and a study is presently underway to assess the impact of the goats within a contained area of the region.[30] Apart from the grazing and browsing livestock, the population of rabbits who fed on the growing shoots of hazel was much higher prior to the myxomatosis outbreak in the 1950s. Hazel wood was the primary source of fuel up to the 1960s and was cut regularly until the 1970s. Hazel is a remarkable plant capable of growing very rapidly, and as marginal upland grasslands are increasingly underused, the scrub is spreading at a 'pestilential' rate.[31] The combination of human and natural factors simultaneously at play in the area indicated that, far from being a simple matter of a lack of goats, a more complex mixture of global and local factors were involved: new farming policies and regulations, changing work patterns and climate change that have allowed the scrub – a signal of these changes – to spread like a green rash over the limestone pavements.

Fig. 27 The Cross Spider, found when examining the site with ecologist Dr Sharon Parr of BurrenLIFE in 2006. Photograph Deirdre O'Mahony.

Permission was granted by the various agencies for the project to proceed and the BurrenLIFE ecologist, Dr Sharon Parr, examined the *Cross*

Land site prior to cutting. Parr has a particular interest in unusual fungi, and was looking for the glove fungi, rare in other parts of Europe but believed to be growing in the Burren.[32] She walked me over the site, pointing out the varieties of lichens and fungi growing in the hazel scrub. The area I had chosen had been coppiced regularly until thirty years ago and the trees on one part of the site were quite mature, growing tall and straight up to 5 meters high. As mature hazel woods are a rare occurrence, the location of the cut was moved to an area where the growth was more recent. The cutting of the cross began in September 2006 and finished in January 2007. (See Timeline of research in Appendix) The grikes and klints in the limestone pavement made the work difficult and dangerous; inside the hazel wood the growth is dense and the treacherous gaps in the pavement are enveloped in thick moss. It took longer than expected to complete the process and brought home the reality of life for those who were dependent on the collection of hazel for fuel in the Burren. The project journal contains a full account of the process and is reproduced in full, along with all material related to this project, on my website.[33]

Fig 27. Rescuing the Kite Feb. 2007.
The first trial of Kite Aerial Photography.
Photograph Deirdre O'Mahony

Originally, I intended to hire a helicopter to fly over the project but by the time the cut was finished I could not justify the ecological or economic cost of such an enterprise. Sharon Parr has used satellite mapping to research the extent of the scrub encroachment on pavement, and I considered using the same technique, but it was too expensive and there was always a risk of

cloud cover when the flyover took place. The site was not overlooked by an accessible vantage point and the only way of documenting the project was from the air. A simple alternative was Kite Aerial Photography (KAP), using a kite, a customised camera cradle and a small, light camera with an infra-red trigger. Several months were spent testing the system, and after much trial, error, practice and a long wait for the right weather, the image was produced.

It is now clear that the days of the wild goats roaming unfettered in the Burren are coming to a close unless their role in holding back the spread of the scrub can be proven to bring more positives than negatives to the area. Still the scrub continues to spread and, under a new Farming for Conservation scheme, farmers are now being paid to clear the hazel. Roundup weed killer is being painted on the stumps to prevent the persistent re-growth, an ironic twist to the story so far. Kate Soper issues a sombre reminder of nature's capacity to retaliate in unexpected ways;

> ...the nature whose structures and processes are independent of human activity (in the sense that they are not a humanly created product) and whose forces and casual powers are the condition of and constraint upon any

Fig. 29. Deirdre O'Mahony. *Cross Land*. Coppiced wood each arm 60 x 1.5 meter. Inkjet Print on Diabond. 70 x 50 cm, 2007. Edition of 7

human practice or technological activity, however Promethean in ambition…This is the “nature” to whose laws we are always we are always subject, even as we harness it to human purposes and whose processes we can neither escape nor destroy.[34]

7.5 Activating a public discourse.

Lippard suggests that, as ‘envisionaries’, artists can expose the ‘layers of emotional and aesthetic resonance in our relationship with place’.[35] With this in mind, I set out to try to engage multiple stakeholders in a public discourse on the sustainability of rural landscapes and the issues raised by *Cross Land.* I set up an ‘office’ two evenings a week during September 2006 in Cassidy’s Pub, one mile from the site in Carron. The owner was helpful and interested in the *Ground Up* project.[36] Permission was given to use the ‘snug’, and publications, texts and cards of different artists’ work were placed on the walls for the duration. The local knowledge gained in the early stages of the project and the interaction with farmers and residents of the area had already proved a rich source of ideas for this practice-led research, and I was interested in a public exchange process whereby I was available to

Fig. 30. The *Cross Land* office, Carron, Sept. 2006. Photograph Deirdre O'Mahony.

explain or simply answer questions on *Cross Land* and the *Ground Up* artworks. The 'office' experience brought home the change in rural pubs in recent years; on all but one of the eight evenings spent in the pub, there were no more than four customers – most stayed for one drink and left. Staff in the pub later reported that at weekends the 'office' material was scrutinised regularly, although I received no direct comments. Cassidy's was used to launch *Cross Land* on 23rd June 2007. The project journal and account of the process was written up and disseminated on the *Shifting Ground* website.

The website was also the forum for a public discussion triggered by a new initiative led by a consortium of local, national and semi-state agencies called the *Burren Brand and Signage Plan*, that was canvassing opinion on 'branding' and regulating directional signs in the region.[37] The project caused a flurry of postings and emails indicating anxiety at yet another 'executive, top-down' initiative for the Burren.[38] Concerned that this could potentially turn into a replay of the Mullaghmore conflict, the launch of *Cross Land* provided the opportunity to publicly examine some of these concerns.[39] I circulated information through the website, email and the local press about a 'gathering' which would give stakeholders the opportunity to meet face-to-face with those behind the initiative, and ensure that voices from a number of sectors could be heard. Present were two farmers, some of the *Ground Up* artists,

Fig. 31. *An Taisce Get Out. An Taisce* is an Irish environmental charity with significant powers over planning regulation. 2007. Photograph Deirdre O'Mahony.

heritage and wildlife representatives, REPS agents, representatives from the Burren Visitor Management Initiative project, *Fáilte Ireland,* the tourism development agency, Ed Carroll from *City Arts* (a community arts development agency in Dublin), and Jay Koh, an artist who has worked in Europe and Asia for many years. Koh was working on a public art project for *City Arts* and his methodology is predicated on the creation of a safe space for artistic exchange when working in unstable or contested contexts. A fundamental part of his practice is what Kester calls, 'an aesthetics of listening' or 'active' listening, and Koh brought an external critical perspective to what was often a tense and uncomfortable meeting.[40]

I made a short presentation focusing on artworks that addressed similarly contested situations. I outlined the trajectory of *Cross Land*; the shift in my understanding of the complexity of agencies and regulation and the formal outcome of the artwork and documentation of the process. The discussion ranged over why there was a need to 'manage' the Burren; the sense of a need for people to have their views heard, including dissenting voices; and that farmer's views had to be taken into account in managing the region. An account of the meeting was later published in Visual Artists' Newsletter.[41] Jay Koh was interested in the fact that only a small number of farmers were at the meeting. He asked why the *Ground Up* programme had not connected with local dissenting voices. From his experience, artists working durationally create more sustainable modes of education and action, whereas artists who are effectively working 'top down' leave nothing when they are gone. The meeting left me convinced that, in order to really address the issues raised, a new way of engaging with public space was required, one that could allow for an open democratic discourse on the future of the Burren. With a wonderfully bureaucratic new title, *The Visitor*

Management and Signage Initiative for the Burren held further public meetings. Based on the public response at these events they decided to abandon the 'branding' initiative; an important moment in negotiations on rural policy in the Burren.[42]

7.6 Aftermath.

Had it been made, the original *Caprus* proposal could have been developed as the kind of 'promethean environmental art…that uses nature as a raw material and focuses on the spectacular and the sublime, sometimes without any evident desire to heal the humanity/nature split', to use the words of critic and writer Paul O'Brien.[43] *Cross Land* worked outside and beyond such a categorisation, performing what Rancière calls a kind of 'double play', focusing on the layers of meaning that emerged through the process whilst also pointing to the unmistakeable forms of Dennis Oppenheim and Richard Long's seminal works.[44] Nicolas Bourriaud argues that recycling historicised forms – the mainstays in the historical canon of minimal and conceptual art (or, in the case of *Cross Land,* Land art) – draws attention to how the work of art 'performs' and focuses on the manner in which meaning is constructed:

Fig 32. Richard Long *England 1968.* Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper. 835 x 1138 mm, Collection Tate and National Galleries of Scotland. Lent by Anthony d'Offay 2010

Fig 33. Dennis Oppenheim, *Cancelled Crop.* 1969. Wheatfield Harvester, 267 X 154 m. Holland.

> The recharging of historical forms distracts the viewer's attention towards what has become the truth of the artistic undertaking: the elaboration of *visual acts* – to the detriment of the "creation" of the work of art – given to the construction of a network of meanings to the disadvantage of the monumental nature of meaning.[45]

Recognising and appropriating the 'form' of monumental land art allowed room to play with the cultural construction of the image and critique the detached gaze that accompanies this kind of practice. As Lippard argues, 'Land art takes much of its power from distance—distance from people, from places, and from issues'.[46]

Cross Land was printed as an edition of photographs and copies given to all the participants. The ambiguity and beauty of the image, its 're-charged' capacity in the present context, and the nature of the process would, I thought, prompt media interest in a more complex discussion of the topic of the changing landscape – however, it generated no interest in the press whatever. In April 2008 the *Cross Land* image was exhibited in a group exhibition, *10,000 to 50*, in the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), and the project was also included in the *Ground Up* book and DVD published in September 2008.[47] The representation of the image as a stand-alone artwork at IMMA made me rethink the audiencing of the *Cross Land* work. In that context it performed in exactly the same way as the Land Art works it referenced – as a distanced perspective, without contextual information.[48] When it was subsequently exhibited in *re-presentations* at the Burren College of Art Gallery in 2009, a 20 minute DVD was also shown that narrated my unfolding, changing perception of how an artist might make visible the complex interrelatedness of place and space.

By dematerialising the *Caprus* project into the *Cross Land* process, I began to move between a visual and sensory object-based practice, and a dialogical art practice. By activating a spatial-cultural discourse between agencies, farmers, scientists, artists, and local inhabitants, a discursive and transdisciplinary mode of art practice was set in train. Guattari conceptualised just such a transdisciplinary, 'praxic opening-out' as a way of creating space for different understandings of the relationship between the individual, society and nature.[49] Working with farmers, scientists and agricultural advisors I gained a new understanding of how to expand this practice. I followed the spectrum of movement – experiencer, reporter, analyst, activist – that mirrored the trajectory from private to public art practice outlined by Suzanne Lacy in *Mapping the Terrain*.[50] I noted the careful way that Brendan Dunford first reported on and then activated a discourse on agricultural knowledge and the (in)visibility of local knowledge. The loss of place-based, 'tacit' knowledge through successive, 'progressive' agricultural policies, and the effect of such policies on the local environment, requires a durational, activist, aesthetic practice that can make the connections between and across disciplines, places and practices. The Burren has been studied by academics and observed by artists yet, until Dunford's PhD, the practiced knowledge of local farmers had been invisible. The *Cross Land* process revealed the aesthetic dimension in politics defined by Rancière: 'a disturbance of established knowledge structures, so as to reveal their innate power structures and restrictions…the site of a production of a different knowledge…that is equally ambivalent, incommensurable, and singular.'[51] It indicated the potential of a collaborative methodology that might begin to unpack the power relations governing subjectivities in the West. Such an aesthetic process, based on exchange and dialogue, might allow for new understandings of place, space and community.

Through *Cross Land,* a small thread of the web of interdependencies that shape people and place was grasped and made visible. Extending and developing that process meant being visibly and publicly grounded in the area. Lippard argues that if artists are participants as well as directors in a collective or collaborative process of defining a sense of the 'local', new imaginative spaces can open up for envisioning the collective desires and expectations, disagreements and conflicts that form the strata of power relations within communities.[52] Foucault wrote that 'space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power', highlighting the essentially political nature of spatial relations.[53] The next step in this research was the formation of a public, interstitial, open space for exchange and reflection upon the natural, social, and cultural life (including the contested history) of the Burren. An idea for such a site began to form as I was driving past the former Post Office in Kilnaboy. I decided to re-open the building as a social and cultural exchange point.

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1 *Ground Up* was funded by The Arts Council of Ireland/An Chomhairle Ealaíonn and Clare Co. Council Arts Office.

2 Kathy Walsh, *The Voice on the Ground: A Survey of the Needs of Burren Farm Families.* The Heritage Council/BurrenBeo Trust Ltd., accessed Sept. 2009.

3 Áine Macken-Walsh, *Barriers to Change: A Sociological Study of Rural Development in Ireland* (Athenry: Teagasc/RERC, 2009) <www.agresearch.teagasc.ie/rerc/downloads/workingpapers/10wpre04.pdf>

4 Macken-Walsh 101.

5 Annette Jorgensen," Fields of Knowledge" in eds. M.P Corcoran and M. Peillon, *Uncertain Ireland: A Sociological Chronicle 2003 – 2004* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2006) 120 – 121, qtd in Macken-Walsh, *Barriers to Change* 101.

6 Macken-Walsh 7.

7 Macken-Walsh 10.

8 'Local people exculpate themselves from blame for the mess they are in by cursing the obtuse bureaucrats from the metropolis who promise an unattainable future while doing nothing to restore the reassurance of the past. At the same time the development agents themselves are strongly criticised by

academic evaluators not only for the acute limitations of their models of implementation, but also for the suppressed content of the ideological-economic imperatives that drive them...Both sides, fairly enough, then reach for the concept of culture to explain what has gone wrong.' Fred Inglis, "Culture and Sentiment: Principles and Practice in Development." Accessed June 2011. 1.

9 Inglis 1, 11, citing Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture* (London: Hutchinson, 1975) 448, 452.

10 Brendan Dunford, *Farming and the Burren* (Dublin: Teagasc, 2002).

11 http://www.burrenbeo.com

12 Joe Saunders, *Tourism in the Burren: Summary of Literature and Policy Documents* (Ennistymon: Burren Connect 2010).

13 Dunford, 97.

14 In the most recent survey of Burren Farmers, out of 111 farmers surveyed 91 were in REPs. 79% of survey respondents agreed with the statement that 'REPS has had a positive impact in protecting the Burren's heritage'; some went on to further qualify this statement by stating that *'REPS was a good income supplement'* and that *'it tidied up the place'.* Macken-Walsh.

15 Brendan Dunford, "Agricultural Practices and Natural Heritage", *The Book of the Burren* 238.

16 Colin Johnston, "Notes for a presentation to the International Goat Preservation Association on Burren feral goats." Unpublished document, 2004.

17 Personal interview. Anon. March 2004.

18 Reviewing this thesis for final publication Colin Johnston, who has campaigned to prevent further culling of the goats, told me that action by the National Parks and Wildlife Service has led to an increase once more of the goat population. However, he estimates that the herd is now a mixed herd- the purest of the Old Irish goats are estimated to be around 70% native and 30% domestic Senaan. Interview 20 July 2011.

19 When John Bewleigh visited during the research phase of the *Ground Up 2* project he commented on how passionately those he met related to issues of the land and land use. On the way home from meeting him I sighted a wild goat, the first I had seen for some time, and the coincidence of his comment and the sighting triggered the idea for *Caprus*.

20 'Many farmers feel that the present-day absence of farmed goats is a primary contributory factor to the continued spread of scrub. Whitehead (1972) notes that some 241,427 goats were exported from Ireland in 1926, but that 'it was not long before the local people began to regret the shortage of goats, for the scrub soon started to spread and became well-nigh impenetrable in parts where the cattle used to graze'. In consulting with elderly Burren farmers, many examples are given of areas that were scrub-free twenty years or more ago when goats were common, but have now reverted to scrub or woodland.' Brendan Dunford, "The role of goats in the management of the Burren." Accessed September 2006 <www.burrenbeo.com>

21 At the *Landscape Theory* seminar in the Burren College of Art on June 17, 2006, I raised a question about conflicts arising from expectations generated by picturesque representations of the West, set against the contemporary, complex reality. This prompted the following response from Roisin Kennedy in the subsequent publication: 'The stone wall was identified as a key characteristic of the Irish landscape in modern Irish art most notably in the paintings of Paul

Henry. That imagery was then appropriated for tourism. But, as Deirdre has suggested, the preservation of this image of the West of Ireland landscape has become larger than these contexts: it answers to a kind of national need to maintain a distinctive and familiar Irish landscape. The problem for those living in the West is that your surroundings have become part of the modern myth that the landscape is and should be retained as a static phenomenon.' Roisin Kennedy, "The Art Seminar", *Landscape Theory*, ed. Rachel Ziady DeLue and James Elkins. (Oxon: Routledge, 2008) 115.

22 One of the stories I heard repeated many times was that a large number (the quantity varied with the teller) of domestic goats were released into the wild by an artist living in Ballyvaughan in the 1970s. This was posited as the reason for the Old Irish goats crossbreeding with domestic goats, with a resulting change in behaviour and grazing patterns.

23 When I had the *Cross Land* office in Carron I was told by a farmer that the indigenous goats will find the lowest point in a dry-stone wall and cross in single file, whereas the Senan goats tend to go over *en masse* and bring large sections of dry-stone walls down as they cross.

24 Ute Bohnsack, "The Feral Goats of the Burren: Love them and leave some," *BurrenBeo,* accessed October 2004<www.burrenbeo.com>

25 I had intended documenting the work using a helicopter. The irony of making an image using such an unsustainable and wasteful (but seductive) mode of transport finally struck me and brought to mind Robert Morris' famous remark about D8 caterpillars, crews at the ready, waiting for the artist to give the command...

26 Deirdre O'Mahony, *Caprus Proposal.* From *Field Ground Up 2* public art proposal to Clare Co. Arts Office, adjudicated by Michael Dempsey, November 2004.

27 Interview with Hugh Robson, landowner, 2 January 2006.

28 Lippard, *The Lure of the Local* 7.

29 This situation has eased in the recent years thanks to BurrenLIFE and Farming for Conservation initiatives that provide advice on form-filling and grant applications to assist with traditional and environmentally sensitive farming.

30 According to BurrenLIFE the feral goats represent an invaluable and unique genetic resource and the project is now working with one local farmer to maintain a secure 20 acre enclosure within which a breeding population of Old Irish goats are kept. This will allow them to monitor the role that the goats play in keeping the scrub in check. This pilot project allows BurrenLIFE to monitor the impact of the feral goats on scrub and grasslands, and look at their potential use as a 'conservation grazing' tool. "The 'Old Irish' Goat", *BurrenLIFE* Newsletter Issue No. 3, Winter 2007 - Spring 2008.

31 This was the term used by a delegate from the Irish Farmer's Association at the Burren Spring Conference in 2011.

32 On the walk with Sharon Parr we saw no examples of the fungus; however, when I subsequently had my 'office' in the local public house in Carron, I posted a photograph of the fungus and it was recognized by one local man.

33 The *Cross Land Diary* is available to download on <http://deirdre-omahony.ie >

34 Kate Soper, "Nature/'nurture'" 286.

35 Lippard, *The Lure of the Local* 286.

36 In June 2006 I helped a *Ground Up* artist, Séan Taylor, to find a launch site for his commission, *The Blushing Hills*, in the field below Cassidy's, and this prompted the pub's owner to take an interest in this kind of art practice.

37 The *Shifting Ground* website is no longer active but all the material related to *Cross Land* can be seen on <http://deirdre-omahony.ie >

38 'These are two key components of the Burren Initiative, a Fáilte Ireland Tourism Development Scheme project being carried out by Clare County Council in partnership with National Parks and Wildlife Service, Burren Beo and Shannon Development. The signage plan will address issues such as rationalising existing practice, delineating the Burren, reducing visual clutter, effective directional signage to visitor attractions and facilities and the standardisation of place names. The branding exercise aims to develop a Burren brand that is distinctive and memorable, that will be supported by the local community and will become an effective marketing tool for local service providers. Brendan McGrath and Associates were appointed to prepare a signage plan for the Burren and to develop a Burren brand.' "Branding the Burren." Press Release, BurrenBeo Newsletter, April 2007. Web.

39 From my posting on the *Shifting Ground* forum, May 2007:

"The notion of develop(ing) a Burren brand that is distinctive and memorable, that will be supported by the local community and will become an effective marketing tool for local service providers at first sight appears to reduce the name of the Burren to no more than that - a name without any cultural or historic content, simply a way of adding commodity value to a product whether tourism or goods. The language of the press release gives no sense of the context of the issue and this requires more thought and information from ALL stakeholders."

40 Kester argues that Koh's processes and methodologies can 'create a "discursive" model of the aesthetic that allow context specificities to emerge and to form and transform subjectivity in a series of dynamic and dialogical exchanges.' Koh's contribution to the gathering was significant and I later asked him to evaluate the X-PO project. Kester, "The Art of Listening (and of Being Heard): Jay Koh's Discursive Networks", ed. Sean Cubitt, *Third Text – Third World Perspectives on Contemporary Art and Culture* (Summer Special Edition Routledge, 1999).

41 Philip Gaston, "Gathering Insights", *The Visual Artists' News Sheet,* Issue 5, Sept/Oct. 2007. The Cross Lands gathering, part of the Shifting Ground initiative, was a discussion between local stakeholders focused on the future of the Burren. The account is available to download on <http://deirdre-omahony.ie >

42 An advisory group was established to ensure that the project, now re-named *Burren Connect*, has more effective communication with the various communities in the Burren. I was asked to join the *Burren Connect* advisory panel as the Cultural Representative for the region and it has been an interesting discursive space, opening up possibilities for integrating cultural reflection into the planning consultation process on the future of the region.

43 Paul O'Brien, *Art, Politics, Environment*, CIRCA No 62.

44 By double play, Rancière refers to the way that fiction, in this case the photographic representation, 'undoes and then re-articulates connections between signs and images, images and times, and signs and spaces framing a given sense of reality, a given "commonsense". It is a practice that invents new trajectories between what can be seen, be said and be done.' Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics,* ed. and trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010) 149.

45 Nicolas Bourriaud, “The Work of Art in the Age of Ecological Recycling: Benjamin's Aura Turns Green.” *Flash Art* (No. 167, November/December 1992) 2.

46 Lippard, “Peripheral Vision”, New York Foundation for the Arts. Accessed 21 Jan 2011, Web.

47 The final stage of *Ground Up* was a publication and DVD documentary on the commissions.

Fiona Woods ed. *Ground Up, Reconsidering Contemporary Art Practice in the Rural Context,* DVD by Fergus Tighe (Ennis: Clare Co. Council Arts Office, 2008).

48 At the request of Jenny Haughton, who selected the work, information on the project was sent to the curators. However, no mention was made of the ideas being addressed through the work in the accompanying publication, and convinced me that it was necessary to include the discursive process in any further public showing of the work.

49 Gary Genosko, “Prospects for a transdisciplinary Ecology”, RSA Ecology and Artistic Practice Symposium. Web. Accessed 18th September 2006, 5, citing Félix Guattari, “La grand-peur écologique”, handwritten mss. Fonds. Félix Guattari (IMEC) ET 10-03.

50 Lacy, “Debated Territory” 174.

51 Kathrin Bush, ‘Artistic Research and the Poetics of Knowledge’, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Researcher*, eds. Dieter Lesage and Kathrin Busch, AS Mediatijdschrift / Visual Culture Quarterly, No. 179 - 2007 (Antwerp: Belgium, 2007) 41. The reference is to Rancière, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*, trans. Hassan Melehy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1994) and was cited in Ross Birrell’s editorial on Rancière. Birrell, “Editorial. Jacques Rancière and The (Re)Distribution of the Sensible: Five Lessons in Artistic Research*” ART&RESEARCH* Volume 2, No. 1 Summer 2008. Accessed July 2009 Web.

52 Lippard “Entering the Big Picture”, *The Lure of the Local.*

53 Michel Foucault, “Space, Knowledge and Power,” an interview with Paul Rabinow, trans. Christopher Hubert, *The Foucault Reader,* ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984.); cited in Kastner and Wallis 202.

Chapter 8. A Space Between: The Ex-Post Office.

8.1 Introduction.

In 2007 I began a public art project located at Kilnaboy in a disused rural post office a mile from my home and approximately four miles from Mullaghmore.[1] (See Map Appendix 1, Fig. 3) Although the decision on the Mullaghmore interpretive centre development had long been reached the controversy cast a shadow over social relations and had been divisive and traumatic for all involved.[2] This unspoken tension was at odds with much of the area's daily life, with its customary neighbourliness and concern for those in need. The local Kilnaboy Development Association organises many local social initiatives including a Youth Group and Athletics Club. However, these are perceived by many to be a 'closed shop'. In her paper on the Mullaghmore conflict Eileen O'Rourke argues that, given the authoritarian Church and State legacy,

> any form of bottom-up, participatory development, or even collectivism, is fraught with problems. It is difficult to get people to attend public meetings (unless it is something that directly affects them, such as farm subsidies), and those who do rarely voice an opinion. The few that participate are seen to do so under the pressure of party politics, community pressure or vested interests, rather than to express their true feelings. The general belief is that most things happen 'behind the scenes'.

Despite calls for 'new blood' in local organisations people are reluctant to propose themselves for office for fear of causing upset or offence to the existing management.[3] The old post office had become an abject and forlorn reminder of rural conviviality. It provided the perfect location for a collaborative, dialogical aesthetic project, a metaphor for local/global social relations and an everyday micro-utopian, interstitial space, to use Nicolas Bourriaud's terms.[4] My question was whether a new form of landscape aesthetic could activate a participative process that can acknowledge and address the changing social, natural and cultural ecologies of the Irish rural landscape.

An intersubjective, dialogical aesthetic process offered the best route to examining that problem. I leased the former post office building to allow room for the kind of incidental social encounters that used to take place in rural post offices, and to re-activate a public, social and cultural exchange point in Kilnaboy. The building is a familiar, non-institutional space that was a post office and the former home of the postmaster for the best part of seventy years. Re-opening it as an interstitial space was intended to activate an arena where all could meet, and create a possibility for transdisciplinary collaborative exchange between different communities and publics in the area. Too often, inappropriate urban paradigms of cultural institutions are transposed on to rural public sites, which then remain underused and ignored by their audience. The intention was to give space for collective reflection about the future of rural life outside existing sectoral interests and without prioritising any one community. Such a 'thinking space' might also serve as a necessary, public counterpoint to representations of rural life as either simple, slow and lacking the intensity of urban life, or as an unspoiled haven and recreation site.[5] Homi K. Bhabha argues that 'the postcolonial perspective forces us to rethink the profound limitations of a consensual and collusive "liberal" sense of community.'[6] For Bhabha, a way of addressing the 'tennis match' of binary oppositions is

> thinking about the general as a form of contingent conditionality, or as an "interstitial" articulation that both holds together and "comes between" -- not only in the sense of being a space or mode of passage but in the colloquial sense of "coming between," that is, meddling, interfering, interrupting, and interpolating: making possible and making trouble, both at once.[7]

Such a process might bring together traces of different discourses and meanings, giving rise to 'something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation'.[8]

8.2 *The Post Office Cultural Exchange* Proposal.[9]

The project began to take shape in August 2007 when James Maher, the owner of the building, and the last postmaster of Kilnaboy, agreed to let me lease the space for eleven months.[10] I began without pre-conceived ideas about what might take place – the project was contingent upon insights derived from the physical contents and encounters within the space. I submitted a proposal for funding to the Arts Council under the Once-Off Project scheme in August 2007. The criteria for the Award was that 'it involve a critical engagement with modes of exhibition, the presentation or re-presentation of work, and the conventions of exhibition practices and involve a serial or process-based approach which unfolds over extended periods of time.'[11] The application covered the costs of rent, insurance, renovation of the building, and curating and managing the space until July 2008. From the beginning it was made clear that I would run the project for the first ten months only. After that time, the project would be offered to those using it, to continue running it or not – a litmus test of the sustainability of the idea.

The project proposal emphasised that this was to be a process-based work, involving my labour, time, organisational skills and commitment as well as the production of site-based artworks; as such it reflected Andrea Fraser's proposition of 'artist as service provider'.[12] Drawing extensively on Pierre Bourdieu's reflexive sociology, Fraser brings a critical eye to the economic and ethical issues raised by the artist as producer of 'critical-aesthetic' services. 'Project work', she argues, implies a redefinition of the artwork from a commercial product to a service product – from tangible goods to intellectual property.[13] The strategic use of the term 'services' by Fraser was a conscious decision pointing to the way that service-based project work is often produced in response to particular socio-cultural agendas and/or political/institutional service requirements. As noted in relation to community arts projects in Scotland and Ireland in Chapters 3 and 4, a focus on 'difference' and marginalisation is seen by some as a rationale and justification for cultural expenditure in the arts,

prompting questions about instrumentalising agendas. For example, John Mulloy asks, '(W)ith community arts now acting largely as an arm of the state, does its focus on marginalisation implicate it in the state's production of national identity through categorisation and exclusion?[14]

In the case of my project I was aware that it conformed with the Arts Council's stated objective to extend access to the arts to those in 'marginalised' rural areas and was therefore fulfilling their public service requirements. However, mine was also a self-conscious, reflexive response to cultural (and institutional) symbolic representations of the West as a signifier of alterity and otherness. With Fraser, I argue that this reflexive practice provides another understanding of artistic service provision as 'a self-conscious artistic critique of the cultural commodity, of the exploitation of art for economic and symbolic profit, and of the structures of artistic practice and of the artistic field which provide for the creation of the value thus appropriated.'[15] Crucially, this was an aesthetic project (in the Rancièreian sense) and not a regeneration project; my objective was open ended and not directed towards an instrumental end.[16]

8.3 The *X-PO* Archive.

The material fabric of the space was of primary importance; the domestic scale and familiar furnishings held significant symbolic value and helped to signal its potential function as a hub for insider-outsider connectivity. Re-naming the post-office "*X-PO"* (ex-post office) was intended as a creative action, drawing attention to the change in function. By documenting and creating an archive of the contents of the post office and curating a program of events, installations, talks and exhibitions of work by artists, the intention was to activate a reflexive space that mirrored the complex reality of rural life in the West. The final aim was to build an archive of local rural knowledge and to re-activate the post office as a social space with the eventual aim of its becoming a self-sustaining cultural contact point for the area.

Top L. and Right: Fig 34 & 35: Interior the former post office prior to renovation. 2007. Photograph Deirdre O'Mahony.
Bottom Left and Right Fig 36. Exterior of former post office during renovation. Sept. 2007. Photograph Ben Geoghegan.
Fig 37. The post office room during renovation. Sept. 2007. Photograph Ben Geoghegan.

I took on board Sheik's idea of the notion of 'difference in itself; projects that relate to a specific set of parameters and/or a specific public as opposed to the generalised and idealised.'[17]

The building sits on a rise overlooking the crossroads and the ruins of the old Kilnaboy church, graveyard and Síle-na-Gig. Built by the Land Commission in 1936, it has one public room, the former post office space, linked by a hallway to three private rooms: a kitchen/living room with a 'Stanley' stove, a bathroom and bedroom and a lean-to back kitchen. The building had been empty since the Post Office closed in 2003. (See Map Appendix 1, Fig 4). The kitchen/living room was filled with old newspapers and piles of soot-covered belongings of the former owner of the post office, John Martin 'Mattie' Rynne.

Mattie Rynne was postmaster of Kilnaboy for over fifty years. His mother Bridget opened the original Kilnaboy post office when she was twelve. Her former home is now a ruin across the road from the present site. Bridget Rynne was a dressmaker who kept a small shop and made cakes as well as running the post office. She married John Rynne in 1916 and Mattie was born in 1917. From all accounts he led a solitary childhood, and ill-health, possibly a weak heart, was the reason given for his removal from school at the age of twelve.[18] He took care of his mother until her death in the 1960s and lived alone in the building until his death on 17th January 2000. He left the Post Office building to James Maher, who was the last postmaster of Kilnaboy until it closed in 2003. The building remained shut until 2007.

The Post Office in Kilnaboy used to be the busiest in North Clare. Mattie was renowned throughout the area for his discretion and whatever business was transacted in the post office remained private; a quality that was much appreciated locally. Mattie was a circumspect and discreet man who insisted his customers wait outside the post office while he dealt

with each individual. While people waited, news was exchanged. In 2008, at *X-PO,* Mary Moroney spoke about what the post office meant to her:

> Mattie was a very helpful if you needed a phone, had someone in hospital or needed a doctor you could just knock on the door, even if it was ten o clock at night and he'd let you in and he closed out the door and gave you all the privacy you needed. The Post Office in rural Ireland is the biggest loss ever particularly for people that are alone and that used to come out on a Friday morning, meet up here, have their chat and go to the shop across the road. That is all gone...For a lot of people living on their own that is a great loss. They have nowhere to meet anybody now.[19]

8.4 Archiving the Invisible: Mattie Rynne the Inside Outsider.

My first action was to document the contents of the post office, both the 'public' office space and the private living space. The private half of the house was left much as it was when Mattie died. The post office still contained his many books and journals, manuals and tapes. I cleaned, collated and catalogued the contents. What the collection of books, papers, objects and his own archive of newspaper clippings revealed was an intellectually curious, private and sensitive man who was passionately interested in the world at large: an insider-outsider. Like the working class intellectuals and philosophers described by Rancière in *The Nights of Labour,* it was clear that here was a man who had quietly, through his reading and writing, made a 'profound gesture of nonidentification with his supposed being or condition.'[20] He refused to be 'contained by the confines of what a worker is, or is supposed to be, do, or say'.[21]

Mattie's lights were often seen on late into the evening as he listened to his short-wave radio and the world beyond Kilnaboy. The BBC World Service could be heard when visiting the post office, showing his desire to communicate with the world at least thirty years before the internet became a pervasive medium. I found 85 cassettes of tape recordings that

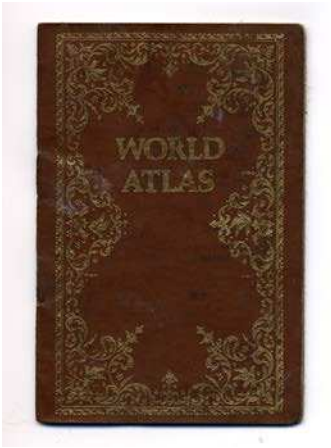
Mattie made from language courses dating from the 1970s. He studied French, German, Italian, Dutch and Spanish. There were correspondence courses in 'Radio Inspector and Practical Equipment' and in 'Advanced English'. His collection of CB radios and tapes showed a desire to reach out to the wider world; a secret life in which he communicated with strangers in tongues incomprehensible to most of the people with which he grew up. This almost Beckettian, existential quest to find meaning in a circumscribed experience indicates a resistance to a boundaried, exclusionary idea of community where all know their place. Documents and old jotters contained essay assignments for correspondence courses run in the UK in the 1960s. There were writings on numerology and essays on "The Social State", books on history, politics, astrology and self-help. Mattie exemplified Ranciere's understanding of aesthetics as a form of intellectual enquiry, staking his claim 'on the equality of everything that comes to pass on the written page, available as it is to everyone's eyes ... [ ] equality [which] destroys all the hierarchies of representation and also establishes a community of readers as a community without legitimacy, a community formed only by the random circulation of the written word.[22] Lucy Lippard speaks of the appeal of the 'junkyards, thriftstores, bookbarns and rural antique shops (that) still offer the dark corner, the collection caught *en dishabille*' that speaks to the collective unconscious.[23]

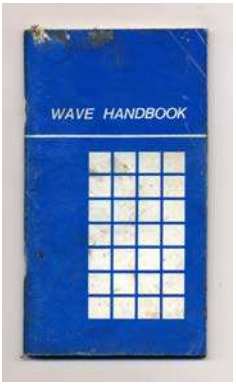
I cleaned the years of dirt from the rooms, moved by the poignancy of some of the books; books on ballroom dancing and yoga, the heart and spiritual healing. Mattie wrote crosswords and in 1956 won the Sunday Express prize of £200, easily a year's salary at that time. I found a copybook filled with his notes on numerology systems. The objects also told a story: pieces of china that belonged to his mother, the branding irons for cattle and sheep bearing his father's initials, 'JR'. Mattie had an electronic calculator before anyone else, and an electric shaver made out of Bakelite. The photographs of Mattie found in an old broken teapot taken in the 1940s show a stylish man in sunglasses, a blackthorn tree and a dry-stone wall in the background.

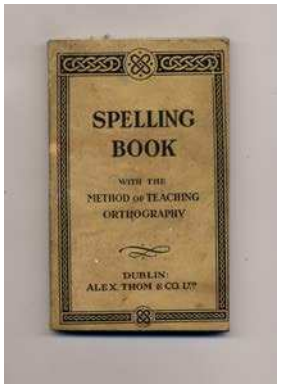
While renovating the space in September 2007 I was commissioned to publish a small pamphlet on the project for *TULCA,* an artist-led annual visual arts festival in Galway. The pamphlet documented the transition of the post office from an abject, un-homey, redundant space into an active public space.[24] The pamphlet was well received by the wider artist community, generating a lot of discussion on artist-led initiatives in the region and drawing attention to the project within the cultural sphere before it had even started. Locally I began to publicise the project from October 2007 and the Kilnaboy Development Association helped to publicise and mobilise people for a public meeting about the project. Prior to opening the post office I circulated a questionnaire to every house in the parish asking for suggestions for social clubs and groups that might want to use the space. I received over fifty responses and interests ranged from set-dancing to local history.

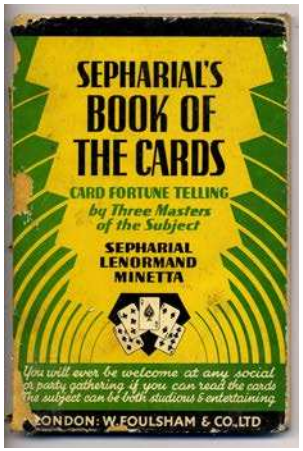
8.5: Going Public.

I made an installation of the archive of Post Office materials and Mattie's books, papers and belongings, titled *The Life and Times of Mattie Rynne*. By using museum modes of display – glass shelves, display cases, clipboards for documents – and layering narratives by making some elements inaccessible or difficult to find, the installation of Mattie's belongings not only preserved an element of privacy regarding some of the material, but also suggested that such modes of exhibition-making and display could make visible stories and narratives that generated discussions on future imaginings and events at *X-PO*. The intention was to use the installation to draw people in who might not otherwise come near such a project, offering a way to 'catalyse understanding, to mediate exchange, and to sustain an ongoing process of empathic identification and critical insight.'[25]









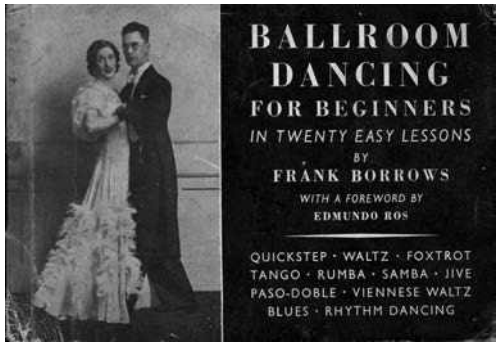


Fig. 38. A selection of Mattie Rynnes books and objects.
Photographs Deirdre O'Mahony

The installation was accompanied by an exhibition of a series of eight paintings of Mattie Rynne and his friends by Peter Daffy. Peter was the postman in Kilnaboy for many years and left his job to study painting in 2002. In the critical early stage of opening *X-PO* he acted as the interlocutor for it, introducing and mediating the project to a wider local audience. His knowledge and connections were invaluable, drawing many into the building who otherwise would not have attended an 'art' event.[26]

The *X-PO* opened to the public on 9th December 2007. *The Life and Times of Mattie Rynne* was the introductory stage of the project, serving as an introduction to this kind of artwork and, indeed, to me. I was aware as an 'outsider' that my role was ambiguous; Kester speaks of John Latham's description of artists as a 'third force' – 'neither management, nor work force, neither left nor right.'[27] I saw my role at *X-PO* as a potential activator/connector between different communities in the area. I was also reflexively aware of the limitations discussed in Kwon's writings about locational identity, and in relation to the 'quasi-anthropological role' that Foster argues can so easily presume ethnographic authority, already discussed in Chapter 5. However, I was also aware of the creative potential of constructing alternative positions and narratives through a reflexive, visual practice that is both context and location specific.

The certitudes of expressive models exemplified by the representation of the West are here replaced by processes that are, as Kester argues, 'contingent, ephemeral, and improvisational.'[28] The re-presentation of the archive of Mattie Rynne opened up a dialogue around the hidden stories of the locality and became a way for me to reflexively consider Hal Foster's 'ethnographic turn'. Anthropology takes culture as its object, is contextual in nature, is intrinsically interdisciplinary, and studies otherness – qualities that form the conceptual and material substance of much of contemporary art practice.[29]

The installation of the postmaster's belongings made use of aesthetic space to reflexively examine the power of cultural institutions in a way that was read and understood by those who visited the space. The installation spoke to more than one man's story; indeed, it showed a resistance to Rancière's idea of the distribution of the sensible: 'that which upholds consensus and defines who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed.'[30] This kind of reflective, aesthetic appreciation can, Kester suggests, enable us to 'intuit the existence of a grounds for communication (and potential unity) with other human beings'.[31]

A wall-drawing of Mattie Rynne was intended as a temporary intervention that would only be seen for the duration of the opening installation. I was trying to provoke the viewer's recognition of the specificity of the experience – in Miwon Kwon's words, 'its unfixed impermanence to be experienced as an unrepeatable and fleeting situation' – and an anti-institutional bias in favour of the local.[32] However, when a field trip from the Burren Spring Conference came to *X-PO* in early 2008 some of the visitors were particularly vocal in their opposition to the removal of the drawing. This open disagreement prompted others to come forward who wanted it to stay. This moment marked a shift in my thinking, as I came to understand my practice as a verb/process, following a trajectory declined by Kwon in Chapter 5.[33] This marked a point when the project made a transition from an artist-led to a collaborative decision-making process. Mattie's portrait has remained in the kitchen ever since.

During the exhibition, stories emerged of Mattie's interest in short-wave radio and his contact with other CB radio buffs across the county. Stories also emerged of how he practised his language skills on some of the newcomers – Dutch and German settlers who came to Clare in the 1970s to set up as cheese-makers and artists. He practiced conversation selectively; his knowledge and skills were not commonly known. James Maher remembers him saying that a day spent

without learning something new was a day wasted, and his books, papers and tapes are evidence that he lived by his beliefs.

Mattie's effects indicated a desire to find meaning beyond the confines of Kilnaboy and his selective engagement with the various communities indicated a circumlocutory evasion of the role he was supposed to play. He discussed global current affairs with selected visitors, and ordered books on esoteric philosophy from Charing Cross Road Booksellers through some of the recent arrivals in the area who travelled regularly to and from London. It is tempting to imagine what Mattie would have made of the immediate access to information now available via the Internet. The opening was followed within two weeks by the first lighting of the community Christmas tree at the *X-PO*. This event, run by the Kilnaboy Development Association, was of key importance as it directly involved families and the local youth club.

Fig. 40: Clockwise from top: Deirdre O'Mahony. Mattie Rynne wall drawing, soot on plaster, approx 140 x 180 cm. Photograph Ben Geoghegan. Top Right *The Life and Times of Mattie Rynne* objects in installation, 2007. Photograph Ben Geoghegan. Bottom Right: Opening of *The Life and Times of Mattie Rynne*. Photograph Peter Rees. Bottom Left: Peter Daffy's paintings installed with the Post Office archive. Photograph Ben Geoghegan.

8.5 Curatorial Programme and Events.

There were three distinct strands to the activation of *X-PO*: the curation of a programme of artworks by contemporary artists that addressed key issues in rural areas; the revival of the space as a social hub, and a programme of talks and events.[34] In 2006/7 I curated an exhibition called *Local Local* for the *Shifting Ground* conference.[35] The curatorial experience opened up a conversation around art and rural life and echoed Sarah Pearce's iteration of an expanded practice 'where the radical reworkings of presentation, exhibition, display, and installation are fundamental to the practice of being an artist'.[36] I began the curated program in January 2008 with Amanda Dunsmore's video installation, *Mr and Mrs Krab's Utopia*.[37] This work was newly commissioned for *Ground Up 3* and took the form of an audio piece with incidental images. The *X-PO* was an obvious venue for the work and on visiting the space Dunsmore decided to have the Post Office counter reconstructed around some of the original drawers as a setting for the speakers and video monitor. The counter could now be used to lean on, see into, and listen to the piece.

As an artist from the UK, married to a German and living in rural east Clare, Dunsmore was better placed than most to unpack the subtleties of a utopian desire to live out a rural idyll. She looked for outside, informed opinions on social issues found in contemporary rural Ireland, asking participants why they relocated to Clare.[38] One conversation between a Dutch couple, Mr and Mrs Krab, was selected from the interviews she conducted, in which they described what brought them to Clare. The narrative follows a linear path. They speak poignantly about their state of mind, their health and marriage in Holland, their first visit to Ireland, the hospitality they received and the transformative effect upon their lives and health of moving to East Clare. They speak of the recent changes in their community, relating it to their experience in Holland and their ambivalence about the effect of prosperity on contemporary life in Ireland. It is funny, moving and occasionally provocative as parts of the commentary reflect critically on developments in rural housing during the 'Celtic

Tiger' years. The work prompted many responses to this outside perspective on rural Ireland, and the Krabs' often blunt commentary on aspects of Irish culture provided a point of discussion on the nature of 'belonging'.

Artist Jim Vaughan's photographic series *Local News* was the following exhibition at *X-PO*. The series documents the incidental, everyday moments in his hometown of Roundstone in Connemara. Vaughan's photographs prompt a sense of unease; the expectation of future progress suggested by images of infrastructural construction is undermined by photographs of a community struggling to adapt and maintain social contact in the face of rapid change and a huge influx of visitors every year. The informal, specific, local nature of the photographs was recognised and noted by local photographic enthusiast Peter Rees, who attended a talk on *Local News* given by Vaughan at *X-PO*. Hearing Vaughan speak not only about his own work but that of artists such as Martin Parr offered a different perspective on what constitutes 'good' photography and prompted Rees to reconsider his own collection of photographs from a new perspective. When *X-PO* first opened Rees brought some of his photographs of the old post office and the surrounding buildings for the archive. He mentioned he had many more photographs and took me to see his collection. There were more than 25,000 photographs, in albums, filed chronologically and dating back to 1983. Most of the images were of Kilnaboy; he was the unofficial recorder of every public event, including the events around Mullaghmore. Staggered by the depth and organisation of this resource, I asked him if he would consider going through the archive and re-presenting it in exhibition form. Peter agreed and over the following four months we selected 1000 photographs for exhibition at the *X-PO* in June. This is discussed further in Chapter 9.

Farming - A Visual Stuttering was an installation by Eileen Healy that opened in April 2008. Healy's work drew upon both video and archival photography to document changes in farming and to highlight the relationship between man, animal and landscape. In the front room, the former post office, a three-part DVD projection *Dawn, Noon* and *Nocturne* in

the blacked-out space reflected the cyclical rhythms of farming life.[39] The kitchen held Healy's own family photos of aerial shots of their farm, taken over almost forty years. These are familiar images for many as photographers regularly visit houses in rural areas, offering aerial photographs of farms. Healy's re-presentation, which she refers to as 'Visual Stutterings', quietly opened a way for audiences to consider the effect of changes in farming practice and regulation. The three images, taken in 1970, 1986 and 1995, prompted a number of comments, most notably on the way that national agricultural policies and EU regulations have shaped the landscape. This is made visible through the disappearance of hedges and increase in field size, and the appearance of bales of shiny black silage. This work was shown alongside a new DVD,*' Model Farm'* , that appropriated a virtual farm taken from a UK-based information website on EU regulations for running a dairy farm. The opening of Healy's installation also marked the second public meeting on future actions at *X-PO*. It also marked the first visit to the project by Jay Koh, who met with members of the community and observed the project in action. The launch and meeting was poorly attended in part, due to a local GAA match; however, it also signalled that I needed to rethink the exhibition/curatorial strategy.

Fig 41. Amanda Dunsmore. *Mr and Mrs Krab's Utopia*. Installation in the custom-built counter made around the old drawers of the Post Office. Photographs Michaele Cutaya.
Right Jim Vaughan *Local News 13* Photograph Jim Vaughan. Talk given by Vaughan at *X-PO* Peter Rees in background. Photograph Deirdre O'Mahony. Bottom Right: Eileen Healy *Visual Stutterings* Photograph Ben Geoghegan

Fig. 42: Top Left: The Kilnaboy Development Association Christmas Party held annually at *X-PO* 2009. Photograph Peter Rees. Top Right: The Health and Beauty Club. Photograph: Deirdre O'Mahony. Bottom Right: Talk by Michael Mc Caughran on the Shell to Sea Campaign Photograph Ruby Wallis, July 2008. Bottom Left: Sadhbh Gaston working on the *X-PO* garden. 2008. Photograph Deirdre O'Mahony.

Nancy's call for rethinking community, not as something that has been lost but as something that happens 'in the wake of society', suggests a form of collective praxis, a projective enterprise that might allow for the formation of a provisional, contingent idea of 'community'.[40] The first three months of programming at *X-PO* introduced the notion of a local knowledge archive through the ongoing collection of images, objects, materials and stories triggered by the Mattie Rynne installation and the contents of the former post office. This showed how objects and images could make visible hidden or overlooked stories. The capacity of this mode of public re-presentation affected the course of future imaginings and events at *X-PO*. My relationship with communities began to develop as a reciprocal and mutually informative exchange process, paving the way for encounters where the kind of 'pragmatic presuppositions' Habermas identified as necessary for truly discursive forms of communication could take place regardless of the social or material differences of the speakers.[41]

The space began to function as both a cultural site and a social interstice. Clubs formed; a singing group[42] and a mapping group met on a regular basis. I programmed a series of talks on different subjects and this was taken on at a later stage in the history of the project when the Mapping group began monthly talks and individuals freely exchanged information and knowledge on aspects of the locality, from caves to dry-stone walls, *Cillíns*[43] and Holy Wells. Within the first three months of opening *X-PO* hosted four installations, three lectures and two public meetings. My intention was to track the ideas that caught the imagination of the participants and see what might emerge from the process of opening the space. *The Life and Times of Mattie Rynne* suggested a form that archival representations of local knowledge might take. Furthermore, by foregrounding the potential of archival processes to challenge dominant and essentialising narratives, the exhibition making process suggested a possibility for spectators to become active as interpreters, a possibility that was embraced by several of the groups who used the space on a regular basis. A turning point was reached as I prepared for

the second phase of the *X-PO* project: the presentation, installation, organisation, documentation and consolidation of *X-PO* as an autonomous agency.

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1 1930s Kilnaboy was described by Arnesberg and Kimball as a place 'where twelve houses, a school, a chapel, and a post office are all that remains of an antiquity preserved for the eye only in the ninth-century church and graveyard.' Arensberg and Kimball 176.

2 O'Rourke, "Landscape planning and community participation: Local lessons from Mullochmore, the Burren National Park, Ireland." 491/2.

3 O'Rourke 487.

4 'Social utopias have given way to everyday micro-utopias and imitative strategies, any stance that is "directly" critical is futile, if based on the illusion of a marginality that is nowdays impossible, not to say regressive. Almost thirty years ago, Félix Guattari was advocating those hands-on strategies that underpin present-day artistic practices; "*Just as I think it is illusory to aim at a step-by-step transformation of society, so I think that microscopic attempts, of the community and neighborhood committee type, the organisation of day-nurseries in the faculty, play an absolutely crucial role."* Bourriaud 31.

5 *Thinking Space for the North* was another long-term project by artists Dan Robinson and Bryan Davis, made in association with Grizedale Arts, in order to re-imagine the future of a remote and unoccupied farmhouse at Low Parkamoor in relation to wider local, national and global contexts.

6 Jonathan Rutherford, "The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha", *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* 211.

7 W.J.T. Mitchell, "Translator Translated: W.J.T. Mitchell talks with Homi Bhabha," *Artforum* (March 1995) 110.

8 Rutherford, "The Third Space" 211.

9 *The Post Office Cultural Exchange* was the first name given to the project. It changed to *X-PO* at the suggestion of Jim Maher, the landlord and last postmaster of Kilnaboy.

10 Eleven months is the standard length of time for a lease on grazing in this area and is a way of retaining full rights on the property. It should be noted that Jim Maher continues to lease the building on an annual basis. *X-PO* now closes in the summer months from June - Sept, as it is the busiest time of the year for most of the users of the space. It also saves on the rent.

11 The Arts Council, "Support for Artists", *A Guide for Individuals to Arts Council Support* (Dublin: Arts Council, 2007) 17.

12 In using the term 'services' I invoke Fraser and Helmut Draxler's definition: 'the work of the interpretation or analysis of sites and situations in and outside of cultural institutions; the work of presentation and installation; the work of public education in and outside of cultural institutions; advocacy and other community based work, including organizing, education, documentary production and the creation of alternative structures'. Andrea Fraser, "How to Provide an Artistic Service", *Museum Highlights: The Writings of Andrea Fraser*, ed. Alexander Alberro, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005) 153/4.

13 Fraser, "How to Provide an Artistic Service" 153/4.

14 John Mulloy, *Making a Show of Ourselves: Globalisation, national identity and community arts.* ESAI Conference: NCAD March 30th-April 1st 2008.

15 Fraser, "What's Intangible, Transitory, Mediating, Participatory, and Rendered in the Public sphere?" 52.

16 ‘More recently, the Arts Council’s funding is tied far more closely to specific criteria and policies they wish to see addressed. Having said that the Council remains a much more artist-centred organisation than others in Europe and has been very supportive to self-organised initiatives by artists. According to several voices in the report, *European Cultural Policies 2015*, artists’ self-organised initiatives will play an increasingly important role in the future. ‘The authors go so far as to claim that it is just here that the room for manoeuvre, for activities which neither suit the market nor agree to follow the dictates of public funding, will be found in 2015. Art that is critical of the status quo, and that will resist being utilized as a commodity, as entertainment, job opportunity or social leveller. How these initiatives will be maintained and supported is not spelled out, whether they will exist as no- or low-budget activities, or if they will have external sources of funding or generate their own income.’ Maria Lind, “The Future Is Here”, *European Cultural Policies 2015*, eds. Maria Lind & Raimund Minichbauer (London, Stockholm, Vienna: Iaspis and eipcp. 2005). NP.

17 Simon Sheik’s idea of a ‘counter-institution’ – space that exists outside sectoral interests, or the marketplace, acting solely as an experimental laboratory for social relations – best describes what I was trying to define and corresponds with Bourriaud’s conceptualisation of an experimental, imaginary institution of society, that is neither fixed nor stable, but ‘constantly articulated through projection and praxis’. Sheik, *Countering the Public?* 3.

18 On seeing the eventual exhibition, visitors who knew Mattie remarked that though he spent less time than most at school, he was smarter than the whole class put together.

19 Mary Moroney, Group interview between Anne Byrne, Mary Moroney, Sean Roche, John Ruane and Francis Whelan, filmed by Fergus Tighe August 25th 2008. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Rinnamona Research Group.

20 Ross, "Kristin Ross on Jacques Ranciere". NP.

21 Ross, NP.

22 Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* 14.

23 Lucy Lippard, “On the Beaten Track” 108.

24 Brian Holmes speaks of this as a ‘territory of art…where the aesthetics of everyday practice is lived as a political creation.’ Drawing on my memories of London in 1976 and the do-it-yourself ethos of punk, I looked at the seminal Punk fanzine *Ripped and Torn* and found a review of the Sex Pistols, scanning and enlarging the cut-up letters of ‘X’, ‘P’, and ‘O’, to make the ‘*X-PO’* logo. I printed 300 copies of the pamphlet on my kitchen table, which were then given away at *TULCA* events. Brian Holmes, “Do-It-Yourself Geopolitics”, *Collectivism After Modernism*, ed. Shlotte, Gregory and Blake Stimson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007) 274.

25 Kester, *Conversation Pieces* 118.

26 Daffy’s portraits of Mattie Rynne as a child and adult were purchased for Clare Co. Council and lent back to *X-PO* for the duration of the project.

27 John Latham, qtd by John A. Walker, “APG: The Individual and the Organisation, a Decade of Conceptual Engineering”, *Studio International* 191 (March – April 1976), 162.

Kester, *Conversation Pieces* 207.

28 Kester, *Conversation Pieces* 8.

29 Yves-Allain Bois, Benjamin Buchcoh, Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004) 625.

30 Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* 12-13.

31 Kester, *Conversation Pieces* 108.

32 Kwon 24.

33 Kwon 24.

34 For a full account of the curated programme of the events and exhibitions at *X-PO* both during and subsequent to this PhD project, see the *X-PO* website.

35 The *Local Local* exhibition catalogue is available to download from my website <www.deirdre-omahony.ie>

36 Sarah Pearce, *With Practicality Comes a Practice: The Artist as Curator*, accessed 22 January 2009. NP.

37 Amanda Dunsmore, *Mr and Mrs Krab's Utopia* DVD (Clare County Arts: Ground Up) 2008.

38 Amanda Dunsmore, "Mr. & Mrs. Krab's Utopia", ed. Fiona Woods, *Ground Up: Reconsidering Contemporary Art in Rural Contexts* 163.

39 Eileen Healy, *Dawn, Noon* and *Nocturne* DVD. (Eileen Healy) 2008.

40 Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* 11.

41 Habermas defines 'pragmatic presuppositions' as the rules that are implicit in the practice of discourse; the norms that ensure that 'only the unforced force of better argument' wins out. Gordon 43.

42 'Where there is a mutual and supportive respect for the efforts of the individual, a confidence is bred in which people do perform whether it be a song, a poem, a story, a dance, a joke or play an instrument - whatever takes their fancy. That for me is singing.' David Harding, "Friendship, Socialisation And Networking Among Glasgow Artists 1985-2001: The Scotia Nostra - Myth And Truth". Talk given at ZKM Gallery in Karlsruhe, Germany in March 2001.

43 *Cílins* are the burial grounds of unbaptised children.

Chapter 9: Archival Practices and Re(-)Presentations.

9.1 Re-Representing local knowledge: *Tracings, Narratives and Representations of Kilnaboy.*

Irish society has been shaped by dominant narratives such as identity, nationalism, tradition and modernity, Catholicism and familialism.[1] The potential of archival art practices to, in Bhabha's terms, come between, interrupt, disrupt and meddle with essentialising and dominant narratives of place became evident through the opening installation of *The Life and Times of Mattie Rynne*.[2] Hal Foster points to the creation of archives by artists, not as databases but as 'recalcitrantly material, fragmentary rather than fungible', calling for human interpretation.[3] Analysing the 'archival impulse' in contemporary art, Foster sees it first as a desire to make often displaced or lost historical information physically present through the use of found material objects, images and texts, and 'retrieved in a gesture of alternative knowledge or counter-memory.'[4]

This was the case when the opportunity arose at *X-PO* to re-examine and re-frame one of the most influential and authoritative texts on rural life in the West of Ireland. In the 1930s, Ireland was the focus of an extensive survey known as 'The Harvard Irish Mission', produced by scholars from Harvard University who conducted a detailed study of family and community in three rural locations, one of which was Rinnamona in Kilnaboy parish. The resulting publications, *The Irish Countryman* by Conrad Arensberg and *Family and Community in Ireland* by Arensberg and Solon Kimball, are considered to be 'classic' scientific texts and remain influential within sociological and anthropological academic spheres.[5] The local response to both texts was mixed. The books were widely read in the local community and, for some, the revelation of the private lives of their forebears was unexpected and unwelcome. In an attempt to limit the harm within the locality the texts

were rarely discussed openly. Despite the insights they offered into recent local history, the memory of the study and its findings lingered; the books were publicly ignored and a communal silence fell over the anthropological study.

In the course of her research, sociologist Anne Byrne came across some of the original diaries kept by Solon Kimball when he stayed in Rinnamona. Handwritten in pencil on a fading school copy book, Kimball gives an intimate record of a rural community in the 1930s. He details the evening gatherings of the older men whom he refers to as 'the Rinnamona Daíl.'[6] Byrne made contact with some of the successors of the Rinnamona Dáil – Mary Moroney, Sean Roche, John Ruane and Francis Whelan – and they came together in early 2008 to read through the diary and decide how to use the material. Two of the group were already actively using *X-PO* and, having seen the opening archival installation, they asked if I would join them in making a public re-presentation of their story of Rinnamona in the 1930s. This invitation to join the group offered a different way to 'define artistic work in relation to social praxis and the issue of identity: an art that focuses, not on the relationship between artist and audience but on the atomized power of individual relationships within the social whole.'[7]

A full account of the history, academic context, exhibition-making process and re-presentation of the project is given in a paper co-written with Anne Byrne called *Family and Community: (Re)Telling Our Own Story*.[8] The paper reflects upon the collaborative research processes that brought together the different disciplines of an artist, sociologist and local knowers. I brought to the table my aesthetic skills and competencies in the manipulation and reproduction of material information, reflexively and consciously aware of myself as a politically situated cultural actor within the group. Working with an anthropologist forced me to re-think and reflect upon this kind of ethnographic field work. Here, Foster was particularly important, cautioning against some of the pitfalls in artistic engagements that follow the ethnographic model. 'Few principles of the ethnographc participant-observer are observed, let alone critiqued and only limited engagement of

the community is effected. Almost naturally the project strays from collaboration to self-fashioning, from a de-centering of the artist as cultural authority to a remaking of the other in neo-primitivist guise.'[9] We were all aware of the shadow cast by Arnesberg and Kimball's well-intentioned but nonetheless, for some, essentialising representation of the Rinnamona community.

The authority and ownership over the exhibition-making process, audiencing and subsequent representation as an academic paper rested with the group. A key priority of the Rinnamona Dáil successors was to ensure a correct and accurate representation of the community in the 1930s. Photographs of all the members of the Rinnamona Dáil were sourced, scanned and reproduced.[10] The indexical power of photography, the 'material trace' and 'disturbing presence of lives halted' that Barthes noted, lent the images and their re-presentation the authority to interrupt the anthropological text.[11] The role of photography as a mechanism of surveillance in the exercise of disciplinary power has been well analysed in relation to Foucault's ideas about the inter-relationship between power and knowledge.[12] The collation process was a collaborative effort that allowed for the production of what Kester terms 'empathetic insight'.[13] He argues that this can be produced along a series of axes: through creative listening during the first stage of a project, when the diaries were read aloud in private homes in Rinnamona; at the site of production between the artist, anthropologist and collaborators in the exhibition-making process; and in the audiencing of the work between the collaborators and the communities of viewers, local and academic.

The research, exhibition and mediation of this work interrupted the dominant representation of Rinnamona by Arnesberg and Kimball without fetishising their knowledge or its public re-presentation, and created a more complex understanding of the ramifications of academic representations of local cultures amongst a broader public. The importance of the project rested in the collective reflexive process that publicly complicated the old anthropological oppositions – what

Foster calls an 'us-here-and-now versus a them-there-and-then.'[14] Andrea Fraser points to Bourdieu's insistence on a reflexive methodology that takes into account 'the full objectification, not only of an object, but of one's relation to an object – including not only the schemes of perception and classification one employs in one's objectifications, and not only one's interest in objectifying, but the social conditions of their possibility.'[15] Deploying the anthropological narrative for communal use has broken a silence; the Rinnamona community is no longer bound by one version of themselves nor is their own story 'removed' from them as in dominant representational practices or narratives. The interaction and the transdiciplinary meeting of the three 'knowledges' of sociologist, artist, and the local knowledge (in Gaelic *dinnseanchas*) of the research group members, combined to collectively tell a story-narrative of a people and place, rooted in history but connected to contemporary familial and community relationships. The re-telling of the story through the archival exhibition made visible the hidden story and, as Rancière notes, '(A)n emancipated community is in fact a community of storytellers and translators.'[16] The exhibition provided the opportunity for face-to-face interaction with visitors: to tell the story directly is a powerful practice; so too is being publicly heard and seen. The capacity for this mode of public re-presentation to frame narratives from alternative perspectives and the local response to the exhibition demonstrated the transformative power of this mode of collaborative exchange. Paraphrasing Claire Bishop's observation on Jeremy Deller's *Battle of Orgreve*, the exhibition re-staged the community modelled by Arnesberg and Kimball and played it out in a different key.[17]

Fig 42. Clockwise: Top Left; Michael the 'Judge' O'Donoghue, Rinnamona, c 1930s. Photograph Rinnamona Research Group, copyright RRG. Top Right; RRG members working in the X-PO, 2008. Photograph Jay Koh, copyright Anne Byrne, Bottom Right; *Successors Meet Predecessors* exhibition installation at X-PO, May 2008. Photograph Michaele Cutaya. Bottom Left; Rinnamona Research Group Installation detail of household implements and the 'young men' of Rinnamona. Photograph Ben Geoghegan.

9.2 The Mapping Group.

In Ireland the oral history of place, *dinnseanchas*, encompasses the knowledge of family, kin relationships and place names, and the stories, both mythical and factual, that they evoke. This knowledge of how particular sites were worked and occupied is still used by older people through the practice of oral 'tracing' in rural Clare. The practice is one that formed a significant part of communal life until the early nineteen-sixties and the arrival of television in rural Ireland. Neighbour visited neighbour and spent evenings mapping genealogical connections. Lucy Lippard notes that collaborative mapping offers 'a particularly rich vein, as yet unmined' of community-based arts practice, and this proved to be the case with the mapping group.[18] They were the first 'club' to form at *X-PO*, meeting every Tuesday evening to compare and exchange information on the ruined houses or *cabhails* of the parish. Their intention was to examine and trace the occupancy of the fifty-one townlands in Kilnaboy Parish going back to the earliest accounts, and compare these with the oral *dinnseanchas*. The name, 'the mapping group' was a way of creating space for the fledgling club. There are many noted local historians in the area who are considered authorities in the field and it was a way of both differentiating and creating space for their research. In the beginning there were three regular members of the group, Francis Whelan (also in the Rinnamona Research Group), John Kelleher and a cartographer, Peter Wise, along with several other occasional members. Whelan has been collecting stories of the placenames and ruined houses in the parish for many years. He was inspired by the example of Commons South man Paddy Cahir, who interviewed older people who still remembered the tracings of family and kinship and kept records of the occupancy of houses in the parish. Paddy Cahir's father, Johnny Cahir, was one of the 'young men' described in *Family and Community in Ireland*.

I was invited to work with the group as they made their first public exhibition in the front 'post office' room at *X-PO*. I was not the first artist to work with cartographic representations of local knowledge in this particular region. Barrie Cooke

is a noted painter and exhibited a map of Kilnaboy in his retrospective exhibition in the Royal Hibernian Academy in 2003. *Map of Kilnaboy 1954-1984* is a topographical account of the townland encountered by Cooke on arrival in Ireland and made almost thirty years after he stopped living there in 1964. Cooke's house and those of his neighbours, including Paddy and Johnny Cahir, are marked and named.[19] Timothy Driver, now known as Tim Robinson, is an artist and self-taught cartographer who moved to Ireland from London in 1972.[20] Robinson's cultural excavations in Ireland have taken the form of a series of self-published maps of the Aran Islands and a map of the Burren, *The Burren: a two-inch map of the uplands of North-West Clare* (1977), that is still regarded as exemplary field research.[21] He wanted to reinscribe the local knowledge of *dinnseanchas* onto the topographic representation, and the map of the Burren is a testament to the tracks, tombs, boundaries, shrines, cairns, homesteads, plantations and turloughs of North Clare. It provides a topographical account that directly embeds cultural memory and identity within the physical landscape, making it impossible to separate the narratives of the land from its physical structure. Robinson's fascination with the West of Ireland was driven by a desire to make amends for the loss of place names and local knowledge and redress the effect of the great nineteenth-century drive to cartographically record Ireland. The Ordnance Survey (OSI) six-inch-to-the- (statute) mile maps of the townlands of Ireland were made between 1833 and 1846. The scale of the maps extended the statute, as opposed to the Irish, standard measure on to Ireland. The maps yield an astonishing wealth of detail:

> an almost perfect, not to say "objective" and "microscopic" record of the location and shape of every house, field, tree and shrub, of mass-paths, boreens and roads… Most particularly townland and parish boundaries are defined and made so seemingly permanent on the map, complete with the script of the agreed, anglicised form of the place-names….[22]

In discussions on how this work might be presented at *X-PO* the group realised the enormity of the task and focused on the largest townland, Commons South. In modern Irish visual culture map images can be read as innovative and oppositional

and, in this local context, foregrounding the oral narratives of place was of primary importance. Claire Connolly argues, quoting Catherine Nash, '(B)ecause maps "highlight relationships of power," they occupy a less romtanticised relationship to territory than landscape, "with its iconography of cottages, cloud skies and hills."'[23] Beginning with the OSI map of 1842 and the Griffiths Valuation documents of 1855, the members of the group conducted interviews, surveyed documents and compared oral history with documentary evidence. Francis Whelan has been gathering 'field notes' in diaries for many years and these notes were scanned into the X-PO computer and added to the archive. His mentor and the inspiration for much of this work, Paddy Cahir, died the week before the exhibition opened and, later, Paddy's field notes also became part of the archive. This information was collated and recorded in the form of an audio discussion and narrative by Francis Whelan and John Kelleher detailing the occupants of every house in the Commons South. The recording was played in the old post office room, and copies of the historical accounts of occupancy posted on clipboards. These recordings are also in the *X-PO* archives, part of a series of recordings about Kilnaboy. The power and authority of the OSI maps shifted as the audiencing of the group's work became an open-ended story of place. *Tracings, Narratives and Representations of Kilnaboy* ran concurrently with the Rinnamona Research Group's exhibition and the group were available to amend and change the story, as new information was added on family relationships in the area. The 'official' survey map was overlaid with a fluid, changing narrative. Foucault prioritises genealogy because it

> does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things; its duty is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present...Genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people. On the contrary, to follow the complex course of descents to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion: it is to identify the accidents, the minute deprivations - or conversely, the complete reversals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to have value for us...[24]

The importance of identifying the 'accidents', 'reversals' and 'faulty calculations' to which Foucault points, was embraced by the Mapping Group at *X-PO*. Although they operated from the premise that they wanted to fully document and pin down the history of occupancy of the townland, it became clear that with the changing story, and sometimes conflicting accounts of occupancy, such a pinning down of people to place will never fully happen. The absence and loss of information becomes an important signifier of the loss of cultural memory of place. Many of those displaced and lost in the Famine years are visible on the OSI Map of 1842 and absent from the subsequent Griffith's Valuation documents of 1855. In the local, oral knowledge so carefully gathered by Francis Whelan they become present once more. Names are remembered in these stories. *'Séan Ó' Conchúir: Died during the famine - snail shells and bits of turnips found in his house.*[25] The stark facts call to mind Colm Tóibín's comments on the paucity of personal material about the Famine despite the copious documentation of the administration of relief: 'how little it tells us in the face of what we imagine for ourselves just by seeing a name with a fact beside it.'[26] Coming together on a weekly basis the group were able to piece together some of the fragmentary narratives. Hitherto unseen cartographies were made visible on the new map and became a tool with which to express alternative accounts of possession and loss. This articulates, as Claire Connolly notes, 'a desire to reclaim land and territory that extends beyond the transfer of titles and deeds into the realm of representation, metaphor, and cultural identity.'[27] Much discussion has taken place on the impossibility of ever 'fully' completing the work; this has not stopped them, however, from continuing the research. Now, in 2012, the group has expanded and they have almost finished tracing the householders in each of the fifty-one townlands in Kilnaboy Parish up to and including the present day. The economic value and 'ownership' of the research came under scrutiny at an early stage and the group decided on an important principle at *X-PO* – that all archive material gathered in and through the space would be made freely available to interested parties through *X-PO*.

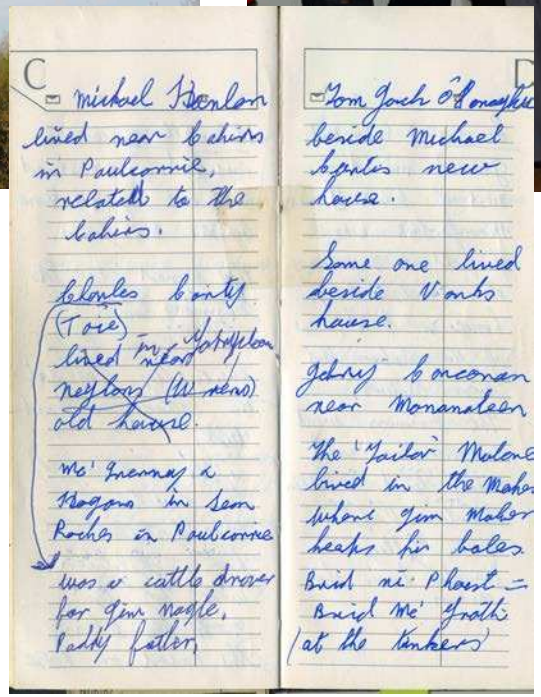

Fig 43. Right: Francis Whelan's field notes. Top Left, Finn's Cross named after a shop that existed in the late 1800's. Photograph Deirdre O'Mahony. Top Right Exhibition launch. Photograph: Peter Rees. Bottom Right: Paddy Cahir the primary source for much of Francis Whelan's research. He died the week the exhibition opened at the *X-PO.* Photograph: Peter Rees. Centre: Francis Whelan's field notes. Bottom Left: Some of the food brought for the launch.

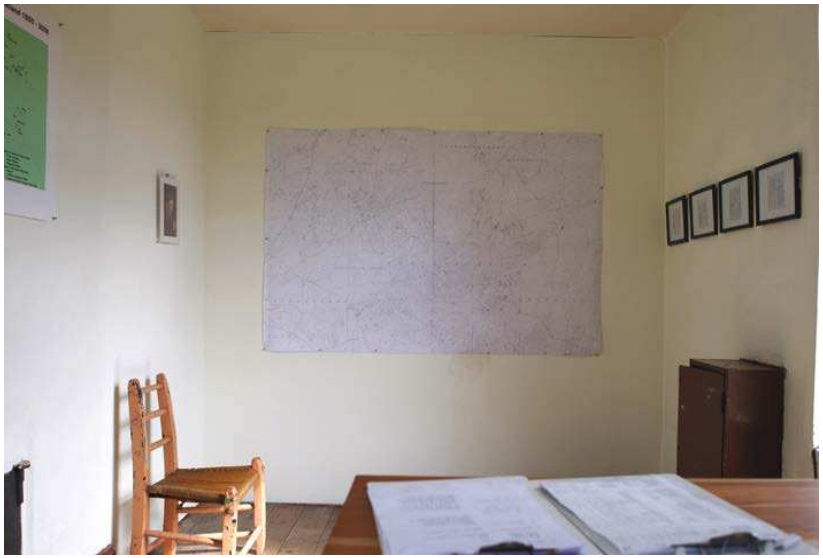

Fig. 44. Top: Rinnamona Research Group. May 2008. L-R: Séan Roche, Mary Moroney, Deirdre O'Mahony, Francis Whelan and Anne Byrne absent from photograph, John Ruane. Middle and Bottom Right: Séan Taylor. *The Blushing Hills* DVD Documentation installed in the hallway at *X-PO*. Bottom Left: Mapping Group Installation 2008. Photographs: Ben Geoghegan.

I curated one of the *Ground Up* artworks, *The Blushing Hills* by Sean Taylor, as a third component to *Tracings, Narratives and Representations of Kilnaboy*, showing it in conjunction with the Rinnamona Research and the Mapping group exhibitions.[28] The documentary film showed the flight of a hot-air balloon carrying a piece of text, 'The Blushing Hills', that came from a snippet of conversation overheard by Taylor; a description of the blooming heather of the Clare Hills in September. He decided to float the text on a balloon which would then be encountered unexpectedly by a local audience, the memory of the blue balloon reverberating in the locality in anecdotes and stories. The flight went from Carron, over Rinnamona and Commons South, landing near the castle tower of Ballyportry near Corofin and giving 'a gentle prod to the imagination' of those who witnessed the event.[29] The flight took place over both townlands featured in Rinnamona Research group and the mapping group exhibitions. The placement of the piece within a small window in the entry hall to the *X-PO* gave an opportunity to a local audience not only see the work but to also see the land from an aerial perspective. The insertion of the screen in the small window in the hallway between rooms containing the other exhibitions also alluded to a difference in process observed by John Mulloy – between modes of art practice that represent a *concept* of dialogue, a collaborative, reciprocal mode of research, and one which effectively, and quite literally, *represented* dialogue.[30]

Tracings, Narratives and Representations of Kilnaboy opened in mid-May 2008. The process of publicly exhibiting and explaining their research work to the various 'publics' who visited, demonstrated that the Mapping and the Rinnamona Research Groups possess an oral, textual and visual history that is accessible and valued beyond the locality. The groups organised a rota to keep *X-PO* open day and evening over a four-week period and the show was visited by over five hundred people. The experience gained from the exhibitions developed the confidence of those using the space to continue with a collective process of reflexive recollection. This is not the kind of 'restorative' nostalgia referred to in Chapter 5, but rather a reflective reminder of times when the *meitheal*, the co-operative system of labour exchange between neighbours

in rural areas that was outside the economic system, was a common part of life. The archival process, exhibition making and audiencing of this work was a powerful gesture of counter-memory, once more making the phrase often associated with a *meitheal* – 'being of mutual use and benefit to each other' – available as a definition of 'being-together'.

9.3 *An Udder View:* The Peter Rees Archive.

The fourth archive that emerged though *X-PO* was that of local photographer and truck driver Peter Rees. Rarely seen without his camera, he has documented events at *X-PO* from the beginning of the project. Like his father, Rees collected milk from farms throughout North Clare and was known throughout the county for his distinctive appropriation of the Coca-Cola logo on his *Udder Cola* creamery trucks. Passionate about photography from an early age Peter began to take it seriously in the mid-eighties, joining camera clubs to gain technical expertise. He carries his camera in his cab and with acute observation and skill, documents the incidental events and changes in the social life and landscape of the parish on his daily run. He also documented both his immediate and extended family and social and political events in the community over the past twenty- five years. The exhibition, *An Udder View,* was a collaboration between myself and Rees, selected from his (then) collection of more than twenty-five thousand photographs. The photographs, housed in albums in a small office in his house, are organised chronologically in shelves in the space. It was immediately apparent that here was a ready-made archive. Several evenings a week over a four-month period, we went through one-hundred and twenty-three albums, selecting approximately a thousand photographs for the exhibition.

Rees comes from outside the parish and the photographs provide a documentary account of local history from an insider/outsider perspective. The focus for the exhibition was very specific: the public events and actions in the area from the start of the collection. While driving his truck for the creamery and more recently delivering heating oil, Rees has had a

unique vantage point from which to observe the changing face of landscape and community, providing an invaluable archive of rural daily life. He has served as the unofficial recorder of the public affairs of the parish, including the events around Mullaghmore. He has documented Legion of Mary meetings, boat festivals, cattle auctions, new housing developments, the Wren Boys, school fancy dress parades, pranks played on newlyweds and the daily life of a rural locality. When first considering how to exhibit the images I suggested running a band of the original photographs through the rooms of *X-PO* as a tangible history of the locality. However Rees was concerned about the photographs being damaged or lost during the exhibition. We reviewed several methods and eventually decided to scan and reprint each of the photographs.

The archive was presented in two forms. In the kitchen space the photographs were placed in smaller versions of the original albums and a further selection of eighty-seven images were projected as a slide show on the back wall in the darkened front room of the *X-PO*. This slide show was chronological, starting with the earliest photographs of weddings, celebrations and parades and punctuated by recurring events: the first communions, the annual commemorative road-race for Olympic local hero Sonny Murphy, the 'living crib' at Christmas outside Kilnaboy Church. Photographs of the protests both for and against the interpretive centre illustrate part of the wider community story. The exhibition offered the opportunity for both a public and a private reflective space. It was very uncomfortable for some of those who had taken a public stance either for or against the centre to be publicly reminded of those days, yet the overwhelming response was positive. The timing of the slides was particularly important; the transitions allowed each image to be registered and recognised, then moved on from. The exhibition was a visible timeline of both personal and political events in Kilnaboy and gave space to publicly acknowledge a contentious past.[31]

An unexpected dimension to this work was Rees' mobilisation of volunteers, family and friends to host and audience the exhibition. The documentary film of *An Udder View* gives some indication of the temporary community that came together to look and share the experience of the exhibition, with many coming back repeatedly.[32] Rees's authority over the mediation process was really apparent. For the three-week duration of the exhibition he and his wife Kathleen hosted the slide show, offering hospitality and telling the stories behind the images. *X-PO* once more became a hub of conviviality as memories were prompted while people viewed the photographs. The public representation of the private images opened a space for reflection on the present-day reality of Irish rural life and landscape. Stories of the past serve not only to bind communities together but to establish a context to acknowledge difference, and serve as a resource to stabilize the uncertain present. Rancière proposes that 'the politics of participation might best lie, not in anti-spectacular stagings of community ... but in putting to work the idea that we are all equally capable of inventing our own translations.'[33] During the exhibition the line between artist, author, spectator and audience became blurred as visitors participated in the active translation from image to story to conversation.

Fig: 46. Top Left: The archive in Rees' home. Photograph Ben Geoghegan. Top Right: Projected images in *X-PO*. Bottom Right: Visitors looking at the archive, June 2008. Bottom Left: Visitors at the launch of *An Udder View.* Photographs: Peter Rees.

Fig 47: Photographs from the Peter Rees Archive. Top Left: The Udder Cola Creamery truck. 1998. Top Right: Michael & John Collins moving cattle to the Cahair Fada winterage. Bottom Right: Mary Keane, Kathleen Kierce, Matilda Keane and Pauline Meehan Kilnaboy NS 2007, Bottom Left, Legion of Mary meeting, 1988. All Photographs Peter Rees.

9.5 Converging practices: *Surfacing*

The Peter Rees *Udder View* exhibition was followed by my own curatorial exploration of location at the *X-PO,* an exhibition of new paintings and photographs from the *Viscqueux* series, titled *Surfacing*. The images were of Lake Inchiquin, just two miles down the road from Kilnaboy. The work in *Surfacing* was more ambiguous than the *Viscqueux* exhibition at the Fisheries Tower in Galway in 2006, discussed in Chapter 6. The work was made during 2007/8 as *Cross Land* and *X-PO* were unfolding and reflected some of my changed understanding of the complexities of the place. Directly informed by my public art practice, it provided a necessary 'personal' space from which to reflect upon my changing understanding of the Burren. The nexus between an aesthetic, optical perspective on landscape and the agricultural and utilitarian were in this context reflexively filtered by the dialogical structure and social experience of *X-PO*. The utopian ideals that prompted the move to the region many years ago had been re-charged and changed by interraction and intersubjective exchange with an 'insider' perspective on local place. Like J.B. Jackson, Kate Soper puts forward the idea of a co-constitutive perspective on landscape that reflects the cultivators and the aesthetic gaze:

> a political approach to landscape needs to recognise both sides of a nature-culture interaction: both the extent to which aesthetic responses to the landscape, and the environment more generally, are, indeed, culturally formed or constructed and hence relative to particular times, places and constituencies; but also to recognise the limits on this construction, and the extent to which the claims of a democratically motivated green politics to represent the pleasures and solace to be found in the natural landscape presuppose some more commonly grounded aesthetic feeling....An exclusive emphasis on the plurality and the construction of taste leaves too little room for any collective insight into our common ecological predicament.[34]

Kilnaboy farmland is the source of much of the eutrophication in Lake Inchiquin and many of the photographs used for the paintings were taken when algae covered the surface of the lake in the summertime.[35] At the core of the exhibition was a large-scale photographic print titled *Surfacing: Inchequin*.[36] Shot in the winter, the grey flat surface of the water mirrors the sky. Half-hidden on its wooded shore is a 1930s modernist house that stands as a shabby, faded icon of modernity in a cold, complex landscape.[37] In choosing to present an image of the house I was pointing to the modernist ideals that shaped my upbringing in 1960s Ireland. Presenting this very local signifier of modernism within the former post office, I was trying to underline the possibilities inherent in renewed understandings of collectivity and exchange engendered through the social space of *X-PO.* The location and audience, many of whom farm nearby land, introduced a further layer of meaning to *Surfacing*. The photographs of isolated rocks floating in an indistinct landscape and the uncanny paintings and drawings of forlorn wire fences vanishing into the lake are neither utopian nor dystopian. Their ambiguity is intended to remind the viewer, as Soper does, of the need to 'extend to nature some of the more painful forms of concern we have for ourselves.[38]

I made strategic use of different modes of aesthetic representation when moving between my 'public' and 'personal' art practice in order to complicate perceptions of rural life and landscape. It would be false to claim that by exhibiting the work the use and misuse of the local environment changed, as this was patently not the case. The *Viscqueux* paintings were sufficiently compelling to open up conversations on farming in the area and to allow room for an intersubjective dialogue on sustainability and farming which pointed the way to new research projects. In this case the art is political as it 'secretes the sort of dissensus-engendering – or consensus-corroding – sensibility that brings previously invisible or scarcely visible bodies into focus...bringing other people's subjectivities – often subordinated subjectivities – into the artistic equation.'[39]

Fig 48: Top Left: *Surfacing*: *Inchequin.* Photographic print, 120 x 148 cm. 2008 Top Right: *Viscqueuz* 17 2007. Oil, Gesso Board, 20 x 20 cm. Bottom Right: Deirdre O'Mahony, *Viscqueuz* 18 2008. Oil/Gesso Board, 20 x 20 cm. Bottom Left: Installation of *Viscqueux IX.* Photograph 50 x 50 cm, 2008 and *Untitled* 2006 Walnutskin Ink on Paper 86 x 58cm. All Photographs Ben Geoghegan.

9.4 Between One Thing And Another.

Beginning at the most local level *X-PO* showed how the skills and knowledge of exhibition-making can give a voice and make visible overlooked, often disregarded, 'tacit' local knowledge. Miwon Kwon suggests that efforts to re-think the relationship between art/site/community can be seen as 'both a compensatory symptom and critical resistance' to post-modern conditions. She puts forward the idea of finding a terrain between mobilisation and specificity as a way of de-coupling place from identity, of being 'out-of-place' with consciousness and precision as a form of resistance to the places we occupy becoming undifferentiated and serialised.[40] *X-PO* set out to do just that – it is an 'invented' community, to use Kwon's term, that came into being through a dialogical process of intersubjective communication between diverse participants drawn together, however briefly, 'in communication' within the space. It is tempting to include Mattie Rynne as a co-collaborator in this process; his belongings signposted a way of being-together that, Janus-like, faces inwards and outwards, looking at the local and the global.

At the conclusion of the first, artist-led phase the primary objective of the project was that *X-PO* become a self-sustaining social and cultural space. I stepped back from active management and held two public meetings to discuss if and how the project should proceed. A group of interested individuals – some 'local' locals, some incomers – took on the management, funding and running of the space in September 2008, establishing a membership structure and constitution. Clubs and groups still use *X-PO* on a weekly basis from October to June, when it closes for the summer, as it is the busiest time of the farming year. The exhibitions and installations continue to take place, run by a culture group. The space receives small amounts of public funding for specific events but the primary costs are covered by voluntary contributions and fundraisers to cover the costs of the building and insurance.

X-PO is very 'public'; it performs a kind of coming-together that is based on the here and now, not on *a priori* relations or on inherited standing in the 'community'. It has achieved much; as 'art' the project has attracted a measure of local, national and international visibility, exemplifying Rancière's understanding of 'the micropolitics of a plurality of voices that, more than absolutes, is a token of the democratic nature of aesthetics and politics.'[41] Re-opening the post office as *X-PO* has demonstrated the capacity for 'any body' to come together to 'perform' community. This kind of performed connection reflects Nancy's idea of *inoperative community* as a collective artistic praxis, one that does not prescribe or describe community but comes to provisional understandings of 'community' as a continuous process of 'un-working'.

While the various 'publics' in the area have warmly embraced the project, by its very existence *X-PO* has challenged some local organisations and provoked opposition. As an 'art' project under my direction, it did not threaten existing local hierarchies; however, now that it is run by the regular users of the space, both locals and outsiders, it is contested, vigorously and covertly. Miwon Kwon argues that 'only a community that continuously questions its own legitimacy is legitimate' and *X-PO* continues to function despite, or possibly because, it is publicly 'in dissent'.[42] Drawing participants from a broad constituency, it lays no claim to be representative – it is rather the act of participation that is at the core of the project.

9.5 Re(-)Presenting Collaborative Practices.

The broader issue of how collaborative art processes and experiments can be effectively, appropriately, critically reviewed and evaluated, is one that has been considered by Lacy and Kester, particularly when work takes place outside the mainstream cultural sphere. Grizedale Arts have shown that in order to perform effectively it is necessary to perform at multiple registers; within the localised, particular spatial context and the wider cultural economic and cultural relational

dynamics governing space and place. Kester contends that a durationally extended process of exchange, on both a discursive and a haptic level is necessary to establish trust and to draw attention to the creative praxis, or dialogical aesthetic, at play between participants.[43]

The *X-PO* archives were re-presented in exhibition form at the Burren College of Art gallery in May 2009. Some of the members of the various groups took part in the re-presentation of the work and were actively engaged in the decision-making and installation process; others had no interest in an exhibition that took place outside *X-PO.* Peter Rees and Francis Whelan and John Kelleher from the Mapping Group made presentations on their work during the exhibition. The subsequent public representation of the project has been taken up by teams now running *X-PO.* While X-PO has drawn attention to the extraordinary wealth of local knowledge of local heritage in the area, it has resisted the temptation to develop as a local heritage agency. Instead, it presents, performs and describes the richness of place-based knowledge from multiple perspectives, micro and macro, on its own terms and resists the often calcifying power of official recognition within the cultural and rural sphere. Kwon's contention that artistic practices can all too easily instrumentalise cultural authenticity and local specificity, adding value to the marketplace appeal of picturesque sites, could easily, given the economic downturn, have played out – but the users of the space have chosen not to not follow that path.[44] Instead, in Dean McCannell's words,

> the place (has) became more than a spatial coordinate, a spot of protected intimacy for like-minded individuals. It became, in addition, the locus of a human relationship between un-likeminded individuals, the locus of an urgent desire to share - an intimate connection between one stranger and another, or one generation and another, through the local object.[45]

9.6 Conclusion.

This practice-based research has required a transdisciplinary, collaborative methodology which has led to two clear creative outcomes that need to be considered in relation to this doctoral research, generating a significant contribution to knowledge in the form of a body of creative work and the furthering of my personal and professional development.

Significant Contribution to Knowledge.

The central aim of my practice-based research was to construct a model of art practice that could reflect and acknowledge the complexity of dimensions – social, psychological, economic and natural – affecting rural landscape in the West of Ireland. Three inter-connected projects constitute the outcome of this research and demonstrate how different methodologies, transdisciplinary, collaborative and dialogical, interact to generate new knowledge. The projects *X-PO, Cross Land* and *Viscqueux/Surfacing* have generated new insights into the relational connections between the local and the global, reflecting and acknowledging the complexity of dimensions, social, psychological and natural, affecting place, space and landscape in the West of Ireland.

The project methodologies were in response to the particular circumstances of the Burren as a rural landscape in transition. The scholarly relevance of a transdisciplinary practice has been confirmed by my investigations into the writings of Félix Guattari and Nicolas Bourriaud, the ideas of community articulated by Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Rancière's theories of politics and aesthetics, and Chantal Mouffe's ideas on democracy.

An attempt has been made to demonstrate the significance of context-specific, dialogical, collaborative processes of intersubjective exchange, validated by the reviews conducted of place and community-based art practices in the writings of Lucy Lippard, Suzanne Lacy, Miwon Kwon and Grant Kester. These are durational responses required to address the multiple, contested perspectives on landscape in the West of Ireland. The artistic archival processes used to challenge and interrogate dominant representations are acknowledged and corroborated in line with Hal Foster's understanding of archival art and its re-presentation as a form of institutional critique. The analysis and observations found in the texts selected for this process provide an intellectual context from which to review and reflect on different perspectives and forms of knowledge of place.

A significant contribution to knowledge has been demonstrated through a process of collective, reflexive artmaking, collaborative exchange, and transdisciplinary dialogue, activating a discourse on the future of rural landscapes at local, national and international level. Throughout the various projects that have been engaged in my knowledge of modes of aesthetic representation adequate to the re-presentation of dialogical and collaborative engagements has been greatly enhanced. This has reflected contemporary critical discourses on social and relational practices and their means of representation. Furthermore, the development of this project has allowed for movement across disciplines and enabled a transdisciplinary discourse which is both visual and linguistic.

Personal Development.

My practice has been profoundly altered by this experience. It has contributed to my development by bringing together my personal and public practice. My understanding has been enriched by being able to reconsider my connection, personal and professional, with the very particular, culturally significant place in which I live. This research has led to a re-

assessment of the role that an artist can play in contributing new understandings to ideas of rurality, community and belonging in an increasingly fragmented, deterritorialised world. Through this process, I have discovered my ‘place’, not only in this locality, but also within broader academic and cultural discourse.

This research has reinvigorated my practice, re-framing it as both a private process of critical reflection, and a public process of intersubjective exchange. It has enabled a re-definition of landscape as an active mode of cultural expression and has animated a collective, provisional process of dialogue, a form of ‘common-sense’ for the future of the Burren.

Many new personal and professional connections have been made in the course of this research, and a new understanding has been gained of how to effect and activate a politics of landscape through the broader dissemination of this research across the globe. The research contributes to an international discourse on rural sustainability as manifested through the publication of papers and through transdisciplinary conversations with colleagues in the fields of social and agricultural sciences.

1 Anne Byrne and Deirdre O'Mahony, "Family and Community: (Re)Telling Our Own Story", *Journal of Family Issues*. SAGE, Jan 2012.

2 See Chapter 8, endnote 7. W.J.T. Mitchell, "Translator Translated" 110.

3 Foster, "An Archival Impulse", 5.

4 Foster, "An Archival Impulse", 4.

[5] It is difficult, if not impossible, to think of another ethnography from a different country which so profoundly affected the analysis of that country's society that all subsequent research for a generation had as its central focus, the testing of the ethnographic model of the original. Thomas Wilson ,quoted in Byrne, Edmondson and Varley, "Introduction to the Third Edition", Arensberg and Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland* LIX.

6 Dáil: Gaelic for Parliament or governing body.

[7] Steven Henry Madoff, "Service Aesthetics, on personal Transactions in Art", *Artforum*, September 2008, 165.

8 Anne Byrne and Deirdre O'Mahony.

9 Foster, *The Return of the Real* 196.

10 There were certain individuals for whom no photographs existed, and where possible details of group photographs were cropped and enlarged. The resulting portraits were often blurred and indistinct, and I discussed the possibility of making drawings that would stand as a more symbolic, layered representation. This was rejected as the successors were concerned to stay with the reality of the family photographs and present them just as they were, taken in that moment in time, without another layer of representation or interpretation.

11 Laura Mulvey, *Death 24 x a second: Stillness and the moving image* (UK: Reaktion Books, 2006), citing Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 57.

12 David Green points to the importance of photography in relation to Foucault's ideas on power and knowledge, 'part of the mechanisms of surveillance and the normalising of disciplinary power.' The *Physical Survey of the Harvard Irish Mission* was led by Earnest Hooton, as discussed in Chapter 2, Endnote 6. Hooton is best known as the author of two controversial publications concerning the relationship between personality and physical type, *The American Criminal* (1939) and *Crime and the Man* (1939). The Harvard Irish Survey carried out measurements of some 12,000 individuals, mainly in rural Ireland, and one visitor to the subsequent exhibition recalled with ambivalence the memory of being measured and photographed by the physical anthropological strand of the HIM. Hooton argued that people in rural areas were 'less likely to be mixed with recent foreign blood that would be the city dwellers.' Hooton, qtd. in Byrne, Edmondson and Varley, "Introduction to the Third Edition", XXIV.

David Green, "On Foucault: Disciplinary Power and Photography", *The Camerawork Essays* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1997) 129.

13 Kester 115.

14 Foster, *The Return of the Real* 191.

15 Fraser, *Museum Highlights* 86.

16 Jaques Rancière "The Emancipated Spectator." *Artforum*, May 2007.

17 Bishop, "The Social Turn and Its Discontents" 183.

18 Lippard, *The Lure of the Local* 288.

19 Named on the map are blacksmith Pat Joe Curtis and his family, including PJ Curtis, one of the seven local people who took the landmark case against the State in 1991. As were Michael Kelleher and Connie Egan, who taught Cooke to fish and hunt for his food and who were the models for his painting in the National Gallery *The Two Fowlers*. Cooke came to *X-PO* and spoke about his time in Kilnaboy. Many told stories of Cooke's time in Kilnaboy in the 1950s; he was an exotic outsider who lived a life of extreme frugality, even more impoverished than their own.

20 Tim Robinson wrote about his experience of moving to Ireland from London where he worked as an artist, 'abandoning a career and a home, each of them close to the sort of cultural centrality, for an … untried art and a wet rock in the Atlantic.' Timothy Driver/T.D. Robinson, *The View from the Horizon*. (Kilkenny: Coracle Press 1997) 16.

21 T.D. Robinson, *The Burren, A two-inch map of the uplands of North-West Clare* (Roundstone: Folding Landscapes, 1977, Rev. 1999).

22 William J. Smyth, "Map-making and Ireland: Presences and Absences", *(C)artography: Map-Making as Artform.* (Cork: Crawford Art Gallery, 2007) 6.

23 Qtd. Catherine Nash "Introduction", *Irish Geographies: Six Contemporary* Artists, ed. Nash (Nottingham Art Centre, 1997).

Claire Connolly, "The Turn to the Map" 28.

24 Foucault," Nietzche, Genealogy, History", *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David C. Hoy (Blackwell. 1986). Qtd in Kathleen O'Brien, "GOAL/GOAL:Re-viewing silence in Kilmainham Gaol." *Éire/Ireland An interdisciplinary Journal of Irish Studies*. The Irish American Cultural Institute, Visual Arts Issue. XXX111: 3 & 4; XXX1V. 171.

25 John Kelleher, Deirdre O'Mahony, Francis Whelan, *Tracings, Narratives and Representations of Kilnaboy* (Kilnaboy: X-PO) 2008.

26 Colm Tóbín, *The Irish Famine* (London: Profile Books, 1998) 33.

27 Connolly 30.

28 Sean Taylor, *The Blushing Hills,* DVD (Clare County Arts: Ground Up) 2006.

29 *Ground Up: Reconsidering Contemporary Art Practice in Rural Contexts.* DVD documentary interview with Séan Taylor by Fergus Tighe.

30 John Mulloy, "Making a Show of Ourselves" 11 – 12.

31 'Political provocations supposed to give a message (are) a fallacious idea of art doing politics…what interests me …is all those propositions of artists … bringing these slight displacements of perception that maybe contribute to, I would say, a kind of maybe, political sensibility, of a kind of fabric of common experience.' Rancière, Jacques. "Art, Politics and Popularity", interview with Brian Dillon, Frieze Podcasts Accessed 15 April 2011.

32 *An Udder View* is the documentary film on the archive and includes interviews with Rees. It demonstrates the affective power of the images and the temporary 'invented' community (to use Kwon's term) created during the exhibition.

Deirdre O'Mahony *An Udder View: Peter Rees Archive* (Deirdre O'Mahony/Fergus Tighe), 2008.

33 Claire Bishop, citing Jacques Ranciere, "The Emancipated Spectator".

Claire Bishop, " Introduction", *Participation Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Claire Bishop (London: Whitechapel Gallery/MIT Press 2006) 16.

34 Kate Soper, "Privileged Gazes and Ordinary Affections: Reflections on the Politics of Landscape and the Scope of the Nature Aesthetic" *Deterritorialisations…Revisioning Landscapes and Politics* 347.

35 Although changes in the use of fertilisers due to new EU regulations have led to a significant improvement in the water quality the increase in one-off housing and the effects of this higher population density has yet to be outworked in the ecosystem.

36 Photographic Print, 1 of edition 2, framed, 93 x130 cm, 2008.

37 Michaele Cutaya has noted that the *Surfacing: Inchequin* image 'presents us with, seamlessly joined, a traditional landscape and an icon of modernity thus suggesting that tradition and modernity can always find new ways of being together but also that no unifying narrative can ever embrace the variety of the possible.' Michaele Cutaya. "Searching for a Place in Common", 2008, *X-PO* Website.

38 Soper, "Nature/'nature" 132.

39 Stephen Wright, "Behind Police Lines":.

40 Paul O'Neil points to this understanding of being 'out-of-place', as similar to Foucault's idea of Heterotopias; 'like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.' O'Neill is critical of the 'suspicious absence of any reference to Foucault's Heterotopia as an example of a "wrong place" that has become a representative of a kind of place that through its very cultural displacement, produces its own sense of location in a world over time." Paul O'Neill "An Observer's Response/The Wrong Place: Rethinking Context in Contemporary Art, 2. Kwon, 160.

41 Sophie Berrebi, "Jacques Rancière: Aesthetics is Politics".

42 Kwon. "The (Un)sitings of Community" 155.

43 Kester, *The One and the Many* 226.

44 Kwon. *One Place After Another* 114

45 Dean MacCannell. "Epilogue", *The Tourist: A new theory of the leisure class* (London: University of California Press, 1999) 203.

Glossary

cabhail: local word used to describe an abandoned or derelict building, usually in ruins.

Cuaird: to travel around a locality calling in on one's neighbours for a visit.

dinnseanchas: local knowledge of family and kin relationships, landscape, place names and the stories, mythical and factual, that they evoke.

meitheal: Used to describe co-operative activity by neighbours for neighbours, such as saving hay or gathering in the harvest for example.

Rinamona Dáil: reference to the regular gathering of men in a household consulting on local affairs in the community, provoking comparision with the authority of Dáil Éireann, the Irish national parliament.

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Appendix 1: Maps.

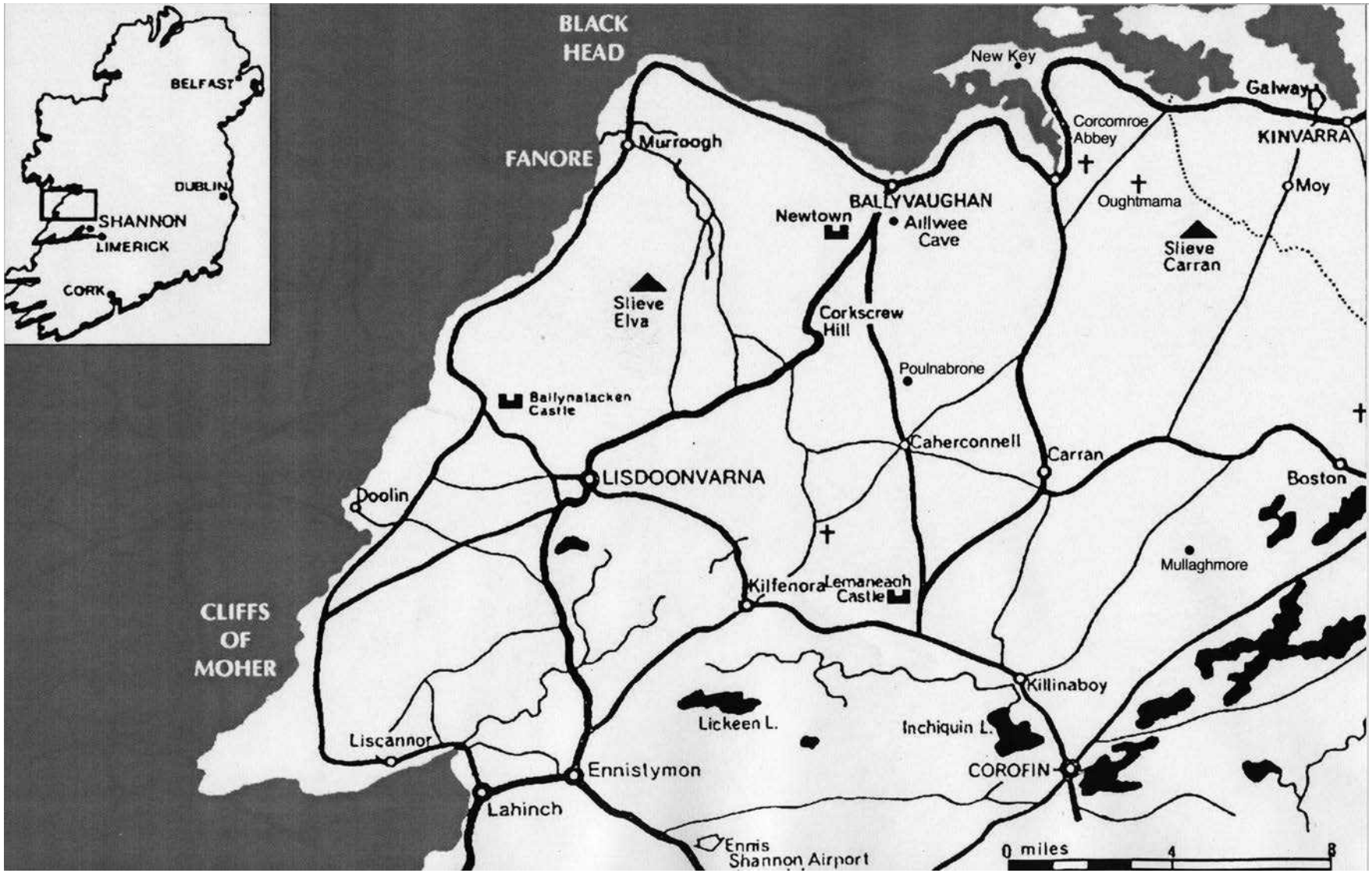

Fig 1 Map of Ireland showing the location of the Burren. Source O'Rourke, E. "Landscape planning and community participation: Local lessons from Mullochmore, the Burren National Park, Ireland." *Landscape Research,* 30. 4, 2005. 485.

Fig 2 Map of Burren. Which includes *X-PO.* Source: Hennessy, Ronán, Maria Mc Namara and Zena Hoctor, *Stone Water and Ice, A Geology Trip Through the Burren,* Burren Connect Project/Clare County Council: Ennistymon 2010.

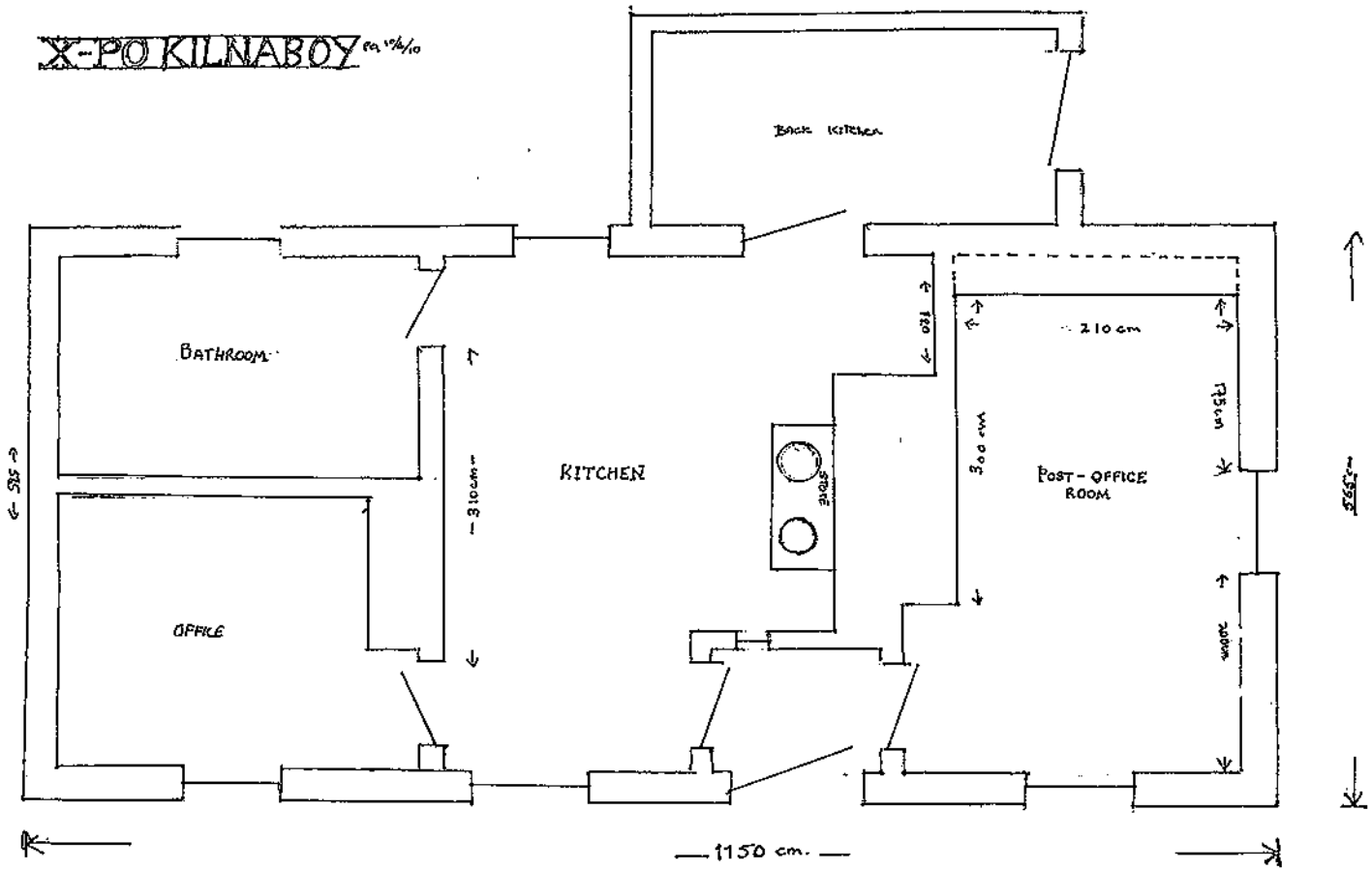

Fig. 3. Plan of *X-PO* Drawn by Phil Gaston, 2010

Fig. 4. Timeline of practice-based research from October 2005 to September 2008.

Appendix 3.

Ground Up Commissions: Public Art in Rural Contexts.

Ground Up was an experimental programme of contemporary art in County Clare that took place between 2003 – 2007 and was funded by the Arts Council and Clare County Council Arts Office. It involved 22 artists over three strands, staged a series of public events, and generated two publications and 11 temporary public artworks.[1] The program was devised and the final strand curated by Fiona Woods; North Clare Visual Arts Co-ordinator for Clare County Council. The three strands were titled *Ground Up*, *In-Over-Under-Out and Rural Vernacular.* The artists were given a period of paid research time, to use collectively or individually, and then had to submit proposals for a commission. Eleven artworks emerged from the process. Woods set up the project in order to address the following questions:

> How can contemporary art be brought to a rural audience, in a way that is accessible, but without compromising the art?
>
> How can visual and contemporary art be viewed by a rural community within their own setting?
>
> How can contemporary artists in rural areas overcome their professional isolation and address the need to acquire new skills within their own areas?[2]

The first strand involved invited a team of artists, Maria Finucane, Paul Forder, Fiona O'Dwyer, Áine Phillips, Seán Taylor and Fiona Woods. These artists were working in a variety of media and brought differing levels of experience to the project. The process included two 'seminar' days in which invited speakers gave presentations. For the third of these public dialogues as the Arts Office commissioned an artwork in the form of a mini-newspaper, 22,000 copies of which were

circulated with the regional newspaper, the Clare Champion. This newspaper included curated contributions and artworks in all disciplines.[3] Three commissions were awarded to Áine Phillips, Séan Taylor and Fiona Woods.

In 2004, with four other artists; Vincent Wall, Aileen Lambert, Maria Kerin, John Langan, I was commissioned under the second strand of the program. The brief was to 'collaboratively or as related individuals, develop proposals for a work or series of works which pertain to rural environments and communities. These works should be viewable in a variety of rural locations and should seek to engage rural communities in some way.'[4] Though there was little or no prior contact between the selected artists it was agreed at the first meeting that we were all interested in the potential of collective exploratory actions for the first research stage. A period of eight days paid research and a budget for a mentor were given for the proposal stage and a total budget of €20,000 allocated for the final commission(s). The group decided to use the research period to collaborate in a process titled *IN-UNDER-OVER-OUT* in order to to stage a limited number of interventions within a defined, geographically enclosed areaof North Clare. These interventions would serve as a way of gathering research and introducing the project. The group had a mix of 'insider' and 'outsider' knowledge of area and the name reflected the different experience of space and place shared by the group. Three of the research days were spent looking at our subjective understandings of the meaning of 'rural' and 'community' and on finding a context for a collective action that, however tangentally, reflected that meaning.

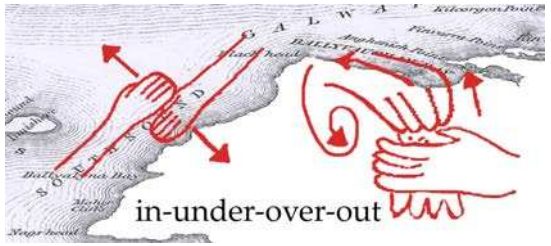

Fig 17: Logo for in-under-over-out
Design John Langan.

In the summer Agricultural 'Shows' are a big part of the rural cultural calendar and it was decided to use these events to host two interventions to introduce the project to North Clare communities. The first contact with the public was at the Ennistymon Agricultural Show on June 6th 2004, a major social event in

this area. In a portacabin at the entrance to the event, each artist contributed six images to a slideshow projected within 17:the space. To further identify and introduce the project adesigned a logo was created and printed on T-shirts. Stickers and postcards inviting comments from those attending were also distributed at the show. The slide show was visited by over five hundred people and generated fifty-one written responses on the printed postcards, as well as numerous recorded interviews.

The response generated by the intervention was mixed. Flagged as a 'public art project for Clare County Council' the images did not conform to traditional, 'aesthetic' views of the landscape. It had not been the intention to consciously provoke audiences in Ennistymon, it was rather a reflexive consideration of each individual's subjective response to their idea of 'ruralness'. There was no prior discussion regarding the content of the images, however none of the artist's privileged the picturesque landscape.

My images were of the algal growth in Lake Inchiquin and the location was easily identifiable. The response postcards were used to allow a critical responses and it was interesting to see the ease with which people felt free to comment on what they had seen. There was open criticism towards the, 'negative image' presented of the county, that none of the 'positive pluses of rural life were used'. Concern was expressed that we might 'upset the tourist image' signalling the economic premium placed on the view, particularly when the leisure, heritage and tourism industries are seen as key factors in the economic future of the

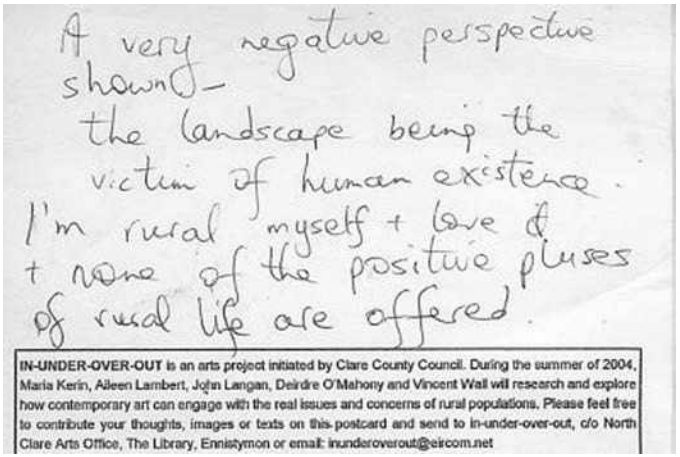

Fig. 18 Postcard response to Ennistymon Agricultural Show Intervention.

rural area. It was an affecting and considered engagement on the part of audience and artist alike. The event succeeded in introducing the project to the community, was promoted on local radio and in the press and used to flag the second intervention at the North Clare Agricultural Show in Corofin.

The Corofin Agricultural Show was larger in scale, if not effect. One collective research day was spent organising the logistics and finding temporary structures; gazebo/tent/ or no shelter at all, for each artist. Discussions on what direction or idea informed each intervention were superseded by the organisational mechanics of the event and on the day of the show, there was a marked difference in scale and ambition between the works. My own piece was a bodyprint rendered in algae from Lake Inchiquin, the source of Corofin's water. This was placed in a tent alongside other found objects from the Lake. The body image came from a story I was told on the origins of the swans on the lake by an elderly man at Ennistymon Show and prompted by slides of the algae on Lake Inchiquin. The work was overly literal, indeed there was no need to make new work for the event, the collection of found objects I had accumulated at the lakeside would have made a more effective discursive catylist. What I actually presented was a recreation of a certain kind of expressive painting and was an overly literal representation of the local narrative. Critically, the work failed to engage as intended; the opportunity was there to use the

Fig. 19: Deirdre O'Mahony Installation at Corofin Agricultural Show July 26th 2004. Photograph Deirdre O'Mahony.

algae, in the local context to signal the extent of the problem. The most effective of the works was a photo comic by Vincent Wall that used elements of each artist's practice mixing them with the characters and elements from local stories to create a new narrative. The comics were then given away.

Unlike the Ennistymon intervention the Corofin Agricultural Show project became, in effect, a five person outdoor exhibition and failed as a collaborative process. The ultimate aim with both interventions was to generate ideas and research and explore how we could collectively engage with the real issues and concerns of the rural communities of North Clare and the time and energy spent on the interventions certainly clarified my ideas on the potential of this kind of dialogical practice to generate ideas of specific relevance to rural contexts. Irish artist/writer Alan Phelan and John Bewleigh of *LOCUS +* both visited to facilitate the construction of this proposal/s framework and Bewleigh argued that "the level of funding reflects the seriousness with which they take their brief (their) strategy, values, expectations."[5] We decided to test that premis and after a considerable period of discussion it was decided to create a collective structure; *Field*, as a metaphorical and physical site within which each of us could locate our individual proposals.[6] This request for further funding was rejected and each of the proposals was adjudicated separately. Four of the artists, Aileen Lambert, Maria Kerin, Vincent Wall and myself were commissioned. John Langan's work was beyond the budget limit and his proposal was eventually realised in 2008 in Co Sligo.[7] My proposal for *Field* was called *Caprus,* later renamed *Cross Land*. This is discussed in depth in Chapter 8 of the thesis.

There were difficulties in negociating the expectations of the different actors however in retrospect, much was gained and learned by all participants.[8] In theory it should have been ideal given my stated concerns in making site-specific work about the West. In practice the time and energy it took to arrive at the final proposal and the difficulty in negotiating the boundaries of collective creative action although interesting, were too time consuming given the very limited resources

and support available. Suzanne Lacy describes a collaborative arts practice as 'something that takes a bit of time to do. You are drawn to collaborate based on shared imagery, or aesthetics, or ideology, or just plain old charisma—you like the way a person thinks, talks, laughs, etc. That's what creates a collaborative process for me...its actually quite intimate, like most close relationships.[9] While we got along very well, there was insufficient time to develop the kind of close relationship to effectively collaborate. The collective intention was that the *Field* proposal provide a model for future projects in the *Ground Up* series, and create an effective delivery structure that could mediate between artists and audiences within the region and with national and international artistic communities. This did not happen although the evaluation discussion between the artists and the commissioners was of benefit in highlighting this issue.

Reflecting back on the initial questions posed it is clear that *Ground Up* answered the questions posed at the start of this Appendix. Through the *Ground up* book, it addressed the relative invisibility of artists working in the rural public sphere. It produced interesting, (groundbreaking), Temporary artworks that posed questions about the reality of rural culture now. However, in my estimaton it did little to address the 'problem' of the audiencing of art in the region. That 'problem' set in motion a change in my understanding of how art can work in the west of Ireland and affected the development of my own commissioned work, *Cross Land* that is discussed in Chapter 8 of this thesis..

1Where Art Grows Greener? A talk given at PS2 project space, Belfast, 17 December 2008.
http://fionawoodsmusings.blogspot.com/2008/12/where-art-grows-greener.html Accessed 8 Jan. 2009.

2 http://www.shiftingground.net/02_projects_about.htm Accessed 10/10/2008

3 I contributed some of the first photographic works from the Visqueux series for this newspaper supplement to the Clare Champion.

4 Ground Up 2 Agreement and schedule contract. Clare County Council. 2004.

5 John Bewley. Personal interview. Ground Up 2 meeting, September 2004.

Appendix 2: History of practice 1993-2005

The first major body of work I made on moving to the Burren was *Traces of Origin* in 1993 when the Mullaghmore dispute was at its most divisive. This was a series of four, site-specific, 15ft x 9ft unstretched, eyeleted canvases that hung suspended from wooden ramps, on the sides of Ailwee Mountain overlooking Ballyvaughan. The work was sequential; the first painting in the series was a direct imprint of the limestone pavement, reworked in the studio. The subsequent paintings used a mix of source imagery based on local geological references, sometimes enlarging and detailing overlooked details of the many fossils found in the Burren. The original intention was to have the paintings stretched parallel to the surface of the rock, however disputes over public liability made it impossible to get permission from landowners or the County Council. The paintings were finally located above the car park of Ailwee Caves, Ballyvaughan, one of the most popular tourist attractions in the area. Significant numbers of visitors visits this destination and placing the work in such a context addressed issues of accessibility and the creation new audiences for contemporary art. It functioned successfully as an aesthetic spectacle and received critical visibility; however it was totally detached from the actual contested context in which it was placed. Ironically the OPW were buying some of my work for

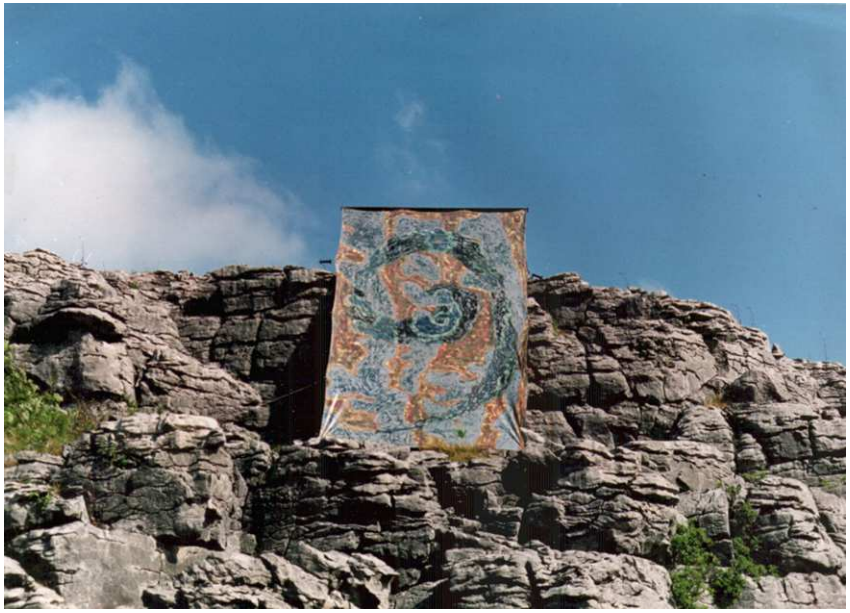

Figure 5 *Traces of Origin no 2.* Acrylic on Canvas 180" x 102" 1993. Photograph Clare County Council.

state buildings at the time, and it was suggested I submit a proposal for the Mullaghmore Interpretative Centre when the Per-cent for Art scheme brief was published. This led to the growing sense of unease at being the producer of such a spectacle that ultimately began my post graduate research.

In an effort to facilitate a deeper engagement with the contested space of Mullaghmore and the national park, I approached the local primary school at Kilnaboy with the objective of doing an Arts Council, Artist-in-Schools residency. The head teacher agreed, on the proviso that no mention was made of the controversy as families from both sides of the dispute had children in the school. Relations were particularly bad at that time and my hope was that engaging with the national park in a positive way might enable a collective visual statement by the children about the landscape. I spent six-months working in the school and the national park, collecting, recording, gathering stories about, and images of the place and this research culminated in an exhibition of the work made on the outside of the school, visible to all who passed on the way to Mullaghmore. The opening of the exhibition of the work brought many of the families together who had taken opposing sides in the dispute and it was interesting to note that no overt mention was made to the location of the primary research by any of the participants or their families.

10 Clare Champion, Friday, January 20, 1995

Deirdre O'Mahony and her students begin work last week in Kilnaboy National School.

Figure 6. The Clare Champion 1995 Cutting showing a workshop in progress with children from Kilnaboy National School. X-PO archive.

This residency introduced me to a section on the eastern side of the mountain covered with erratic boulders. One of the children, Eimear Howard, told me that her grandfather referred to the site as 'The Giants'

Playground'.[1] The boulders became a metaphor for displacement being on, but not from, that place and paralleling my own experience, both as an Irish person in London and as a 'blow-in' or newcomer in Clare. I made two series of works, *Erratics* and *Wrap* in this location. *Erratics* used the shadows cast by the boulders as a template for a series of paintings. In the autumn and spring the boulders cast long shadows over the pavement rock, producing inky black fissures with great presence. I transcribed their parameters onto unstretched canvases and returned with them to the studio. The ungainly shapes echoed paintings I had seen in London particularly Morris Louis' stain paintings, Rothko and Pollock. Paradoxically I also wanted to reference the fine brush marks of Poussain, the fabrics of Ingres and Velasquez. The two contradictory genres; performative gesture and crafted, intimate mark, represented a feminine, subjective perspective on the Burren that also worked as a personal reflection upon 'othernesses'.

Figure 7. *Erratics* The Guinness Hopstore Installation, 1997. Photograph Veronica Nicholson

The intention was to leave the works unframed and fluid, hanging within the space, the initial stains of the process as visible on the back of the work as the cumulative accretions of paint on the front. Schama's *Landscape and Memory* resonated during this the time: "Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock."[2] *Erratics* was made to be seen in an urban location and the series of ten paintings were made for the Guinness Hopstore in Dublin. They were shown in 1996 and later in 1997; three of the *Erratics* were also exhibited in a disused Cadillac showroom, the Fuller Art Gallery at

Boston University, an added level of irony coming from the Boston location, destination for so many Irish emigrants.

In 1995 I was approached by a representative from the Old Ennistymon Heritage Society. This group had been responsible for rescuing the old Courthouse in Ennistymon from demolition in the early 1990s. They had no funds and wanted to open the space as artists' studios in hope that it might help trigger an economic resurgence in the town[3]. I approached the North Clare Artist's group to see if any members were willing to take on the space and I was joined by three others, Fiona Woods, Joan O'Hanrahan and Veronica Nicholson.[4] We set up a limited company, negotiated a lease with the Old Ennistymon Heritage Society, and got the building in 1997. Some response to the change of usage, from a space of judgement to a creative artspace was required and each artist made a site-specific work in the building prior to restructuring.

Figure 8. *Response.* The Courthouse, Ennistymon. Lime wash on walls. 1997. Photograph Veronica Nicholson.

My work used whitewash made from traditional fired limestone from a local kiln in the town of Kilfenora and the limewash was from a firing that marked the 150th anniversary of the Famine. I veiled the old walls with the lime-wash; a traditional way of disinfecting a building used in famine times to stop the spread of TB and other diseases. The scale of the work was monumental, the walls were made from plaster and lath and were 25 feet high, requiring a scaffolding tower and telescopic holders for brushes. The walls came to life with the veil of white limewash, the rivulets of paint converged and were diverted by the hundreds of abandoned spider's webs still clinging to the walls.

The series of paintings *Wrap* was started in 1998 and

used a process of wrapping canvas around the same erratic boulders and scouring the surface with sandpaper or mud and grass to provide the original 'texts', for later work in the studio. Through the use of different formats and art historical references, the intention was to highlight the complexity and contradictions in the relationship between culture and landscape. By the time this work was shown the mountain had become an iconic symbol, both locally and nationally and I staged a photo-shoot of the process in front of Mullaghmore, using the sequence of images on the invitation cards and catalogue to locate the work within that context of contestation.

Figure 9. ***Wrap* process at Mullaghmore. *Wrap* invitation. Galway Arts Centre 2000. Photographs Veronica Nicholson.**

My practice had moved from a process of depiction to a process of collaboration, described by Mel Gooding as allowing the land to act as "an agent of power"[5] enabling it to determine the shape of its own representation. These 'texts' were processed and manipulated, some highly crafted and stretched on deep aluminium frames, others remained as imprints pinned on the wall, untouched by a brush. The reference to camoflage in the painted, imprinted ground of *Wrap #3* was further emphasized by overlaid layers of drips of paint like bloody highways. Each painting required a different process; *Wrap #2* was intended as an ironic tribute to the many postcard images of the iconic Poulnabrone Dolmen[6] at sunset. The kitsch intense colours used to frame the imprinted image from the site of all that contestation.

The work was site-specific to Galway Arts Centre, the former home of Lady Gregory, a key-figure in the mythology of the west.[7]The Arts Centre is in her town house, and the work was made for the upstairs gallery, which has a series of three

interconnecting rooms with large arched openings through the spaces. The painting was placed in the end room where it was 'framed' by the former drawing room of the house.

Erratics and *Wrap* both examined the interplay of chance and circumstance that presents landscape as apparently, timeless; solid and fixed, known, readily identified and therefore available for 'interpretation', but which, on examination and reflection, subverts notions of solidity and fixity, speaking of change and mutability. Dorian and Rose emphases the importance of *practicing* landscape, always placing and locating it in the present moment in order to disrupt "…accounts of landscape which seek to ground certain claims and identities in a self evident earth."[8] The attempt to draw together personal experience of displacement with elements of landscape in my work in the 1990's was a way of dealing with issues of difference, exclusion and otherness that crystallized around attitudes to land and land use.

Figure 10. *Wrap* Installation, *Wrap No 8, Wrap No. 2, Wrap No 7.* Galway Arts Centre, 2000. Photograph Veronica Nicholson

Wall marked the final engagement with painting as the sole process for my engagement with place. The Context Gallery in Derry invited me to make a site-specific series of works based on the walls of the city, still highly charged and loaded with cultural meanings for the communities in Derry. In some ways the methodology resembled a kind of reconstituted photographic process through the exposure of the raw canvas to the wall surface and 'framing' or capturing the material trace, in the form of an imprint using the soil at the base of the wall. The paintings became a topographic, forensic record; evidence not only of large political and historical concerns but also of the small biographical and

Figure 11. *Wall.* Installation, Limerick City Art Gallery, 2001. *Wall* no 2 and 3. Acrylic, soil, canvas. Photograph Veronica Nicholson.

Figure 12. *Wall.* Installation at Limerick City Art Gallery. 2001. *Wall* no 3 and cartoon. Photograph Veronica Nicholson.

personal meanings bound up in such landmarks. Three, three meter canvases were made. Two of these canvases used identical processes, but were painted using the particular colours of each community, the backs remaining the same. The paintings were installed facing each other, suspended in the white cube of the gallery. The third work was virtually unmediated, a rectangle, the exact dimension of Willie Doherty's *Dreaming (Derry)* 1988, was overlaid with Raw Sienna pigment. A tracing was then taken of the imprinted rectangle and this tracing used to make a cartoon on the opposite wall. The delicate remnants of charcoal dots were full of resonances in that context. The intention was for the images to invite engagement and reflection rather than reinforce prejudices, or contested histories. On completion, however, I felt that changes were required in my practice in order to further develop ideas in relation to site, and community specific practices. Those changes formed the start of the research for this PhD study.

1 Eimear's father, James, was one of those who took the government to court because of the proposed interpretive centre; her grandfather was one of those written about in Arensberg and Kimball's *Family and Community in Ireland,* which was the subject of future research at the X-PO project.

2 Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1994)

3 The approach came fro Anthony Edwards, then Deputy Librarian for Clare County Council. His request was that artists might attract the 'Temple Bar' effect, in Ennistymon. At the time Temple bar was promoted as the cultural quarter in Dublin.

4 Veronica Nicholson, Joan O'Hanrahan, Deirdre O'Mahony and Fiona Woods form the Courthouse Studios company and receive Arts Council funding of Ir£40,000 for the renovation of the building. The group organise *Response* site specific exhibition in 1997 prior to building work and building opened in 1998. The Courthouse Studio artists curated exhibitions including *Ennistymon 99* from the national collection at IMMA,, *InSight* with work from the Arts Council collection in 2000 and *Circue* in Maria Kerin's Bellharbour Gallery 2001. The number of artist members fluctuated with a total of 12. The Courthouse Studio artists lease finished in 2002 and the company was disbanded.

5 Mel Gooding, *The Song of the Earth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002) 30.

6 Neolithic portal tomb in the townland of Poulnabrone.

7 It was Lady Gregory who invited Synge, Yeats and other members of the Gaelic Literary revival to visit the West.

8 Dorrian and Rose 17.

6 “In a country where land has such important psychological cultural value, the term Field has an abundance of political, social, economic, historical, cultural and personal associations. Thus, Field provides a metaphor for our engagement with this commissioned brief. It is here that we, as artists are provided with the opportunity to address, respond, comment and explore through our artistic practises.” From the Field Proposal. Aileen Lambert, John Langan, Maria Kerin, Deirdre O’Mahony and Vincent Wall to Clare County Council October 2004.

7 John Langan eventually realised his proposal as *Foidin Mearbhaill - A Field in Transition* in the *Unravelling Developments* programme of public arts projects commissioned by Sligo County Council n Ballymote in 2009.

[8] The evaluation of the process by consultant Deirdre Johnston on 12 Feb 2005 revealed the different responses from all of the artists to the process. While there was an unqualified acknowledgment that the experience had been worthwhile, the lack of a supporting/delivery mechanism put too large a workload, on more experienced members of the group at the expense of the creative process.

[9] Nic Paget-Clarke, Art and Advocacy: Interview with Suzanne Lacy. *In Motion,* 31October 2000.

Appendix 4

4.1 *Shifting Ground* Partnership.

This appendix describes the outcome of a research-based partnership project between the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT) and Clare County Council Arts Office in 2005/6 that informed my practice. The project was proposed on the back of extended conversations held with the Visual Arts co-ordinator for Clare County Council Fiona Woods and myself, about the challenges facing artists and audiences when making or placing art in rural contexts. The practices and methodologies that emerged through the *Ground Up* research process had significant pedagogical potential within GMIT as many students attending at the institute are from rural backgrounds. GMIT and Clare County Arts Office applied to the Arts Council for Funding under a new Local Authority Partnership scheme and we identified a number of research areas of common interest. The aim was to formalise training in rural arts development and develop critical framework within which to assess the philosophical and ethical implications of this new area of arts practice. The outcome was a series of public seminars designed to generate a discourse around the issues affecting rural landscape and culture in Ireland and the *Shifting Ground* conference, held in Ennis, Co. Clare in 2006. The conference showcased models of practice from Ireland, UK and Europe, and the USA and brought together arts practitioners, policy-makers, academics and cultural strategists to explore 'the contribution that remoteness and ruralness can make to debates about the relationship of art to lived realities.'[1] This research was further extended and developed into a module for visual art and heritage students at GMIT titled *Contemporary Art in Rural Contexts: the Theory and Practice of Project Development*.

Shifting Ground Seminars:

In order to identify a methodological framework for the particular context of rural Ireland, my research and programming of the seminar series for *Shifting Ground,* was directed towards a critical examination of the relationship between audience, artists and site. The programme of seminars examined the ideological projections, competing interests and cultural values that shape landscape and culture in Ireland and Europe. *The Trouble with Beauty; Ethics, Aesthetics and Ecology and the Rural Landscape* was the title of my seminar presentation and considered the trajectory of my practice, mapping the stages from a pictorial response to elements in the landscape towards a more critical reflection upon the ecological and environmental consequences of recent agricultural and developments in rural Ireland. In this context I placed a particular emphasis on the legacy of post-colonialism and the tensions between the 'more or less well integrated *community of selves*' that represents Irish national identity by Ciarán Benson in Chapter 1.[2] The traditions, values and forms of knowledge that shape subjectivity; thus individual and social behaviour, were both undermined and threatened by tensions between these polarised notions of self. In a post-modern context that binary dynamic is further conplicated as other "selves" enter the frame further de-stabilising spatialised notions of identity in a fluid and shifting, multi-cultural Irish society.

Gavin Murphy presented a seminar on his experience as writer for the catalogue for *Placing Art,* a pilot public art programme in Sligo.[3] Observing that public art has had a long and complex engagement with civic life that is too often overlooked or forgotten by the advocates of a new public art, he argued that contemporary attempts to re-configue the role of public art in civic life suffer from a form of art-historical amnesia regarding the relationship between culture and power.[4] 'In our efforts to spell out a new dynamism, we have forgotten what has helped bring us to this point in the first place. What we can learn from history, is that our evaluations of art so often revolve around the tensions between the artist,

local communities and the state.' [5] *Placing Art* was intended as a radical "new" model for public art in County Sligo addressing social inclusion and rural regeneration and was intended to foster 'a renewed awareness of our place within our locale ...that is a cornerstone of civic life'[6]

The context of the commissions was a partnership between Sligo Urban District Council and Sligo County Council, who joined with Sligo Leader partnership to apply for Peace and Reconciliation funding from the European Commission. By framing the programme to address the funding criteria: 'foster(ing) peace, promote reconciliation and to encourage positive growth in disadvantaged communities' they added further funding to the existing budget and were able to employ a co-ordinator, publish a catalogue and fund an international colloquium, *Placing Art: Public Art in Rural Coastal and Small Urban Environments.*[7]. Sligo Arts office invited a commissioning agency and sectoral experts to develop a "new, dynamic" commissioning process that introduced discursive and relational practices into the public sphere with the intention of activating a public reflexction on shared social and cultural values and priorities. The commissioning process put mechenisms in place to allow members of the community engage with artists through community representation on selection panels and a "people's choice" purchace of a painting for civic spaces. These processes were intended to create a bond between participants and devolve authority from the local authority to the community through direct involvement in the decision and the art-making process. The focus was on a process that could challenge perceptions of contemporary art practice as an "imposition" on local culture and promote quality in the built and rural environment of County Sligo. [8] The *Placeing Art* programme was mediated in four publications and a public colloquium, gaining social and cultural capital from the representation of the process.

Murphy argued that the promotion and marketing of such "new" public art practices hides the complex expectations and multiple roles, public art is asked to perform whether 'the cultural demands of the tourist industry, grassroots

democracy or simply to perpetuate the funding pool for interested parties'. A case he cited was one of the artworks in the *Placing Art* programme; *Keepsakes* by artist Ronnie Hughes. Hughes proposed to commemorate the death of over a thousand Spanish sailors drowned or killed when ships from the Armada were wrecked off Streedagh beach on the Sligo coast. Royal forces and local people killed the survivors who made it to shore, stealing their belongings.[9] The artist held a number of workshops with participants, schools, historical groups and individuals from the area. They were asked to donate a personal memento that was then cast inside resin spheres moulded from a stone cannonball found on the beach. On June 24th 2000, the participants were invited to the beach to witness sixteen pyramidal stacks of spheres wash back into the sea. [10] The event was documented. The catalogue contained striking images of a pristine beach with pyrimidical stacks of translucent cannonballs washing out to sea; a metaphor of transgression and redemption. Or so the story goes.

The backstory given by Murphy in the seminar touched on a more complex, messy human account and illustrated the difficulties encountered in representing dialogical practices. At an early stage one group of participants, a local historical group, pulled out of the project as they wanted a permanent memorial to attract tourists to the area. They were not interested in a short-lived time-based work and they withdrew their support. The essence of the work was the act of generosity, letting go the momentos, however after the work allowed to wash away, some of the participants returned after the event and took the remaining pieces home, undermining the sentiment of the project. Murphy argued that the value of the "real" story was that 'it did not idealise a community but instead revealed our own struggle with our baser needs. [11] If we are to 'uncover ways in which we can evaluate public art practices dealing with rural communities that can be faithful to the actual events taking place.' These tensions were absent from "official" account.

This seminar was of particular importance to my understanding and analysis of public art practice in rural contexts and the specific "problem" with the formulation of an open critical discourse around such practices in Ireland. Artist Anne

Mulrooney focused on the language and operation of funding bodies in relation to rural communities. Over the last ten years Mulrooney has been part of a community initiative that produced an annual outdoor exhibition called *Sculpture at Kells.* Using voluntary labor, skills and know-how to source venues, funding and equipment the event was very successful, producing exhibitions with a mix of local and international artists and was extremely popular with local audiences. Artists such as Barry Flannagan were willing to get their exhibition fees paid in pints in the pub and it worked because the community were able to respond to the particularities of every exhibition in a way that was fluid, 'often unstructured, always unprofessional (because this is not what any of them do for a living) and subjective. They operate and organise based on commonsense and community dynamics.'[12]

In 2003 they applied for funding for a two-year a cross-border, exchange project between Ireland and Wales that successfully received EU Interreg, the European Fund for the economic development of rural and peripheral communities in economically disadvantaged areas[13] and Arts Council funding. They paired with a village called Pontrhyfendigaid in Wales and a significant element of the project was the Irish group passing on their experience in developing the structures, resources and skills to successfully produce similar events in Wales. The outcome was two exhibitions in Ireland and Wales in 2005 and 2006. Mulrooney invited Welsh artist/curator, Tim Davies to co-curate the exhibition and together they selected twelve, early-to mid career artists, of international standing, many of whom draw on cultural identity or heritage in their practice. *Strata* was the name of the exhibition.

Mulrooney spoke about the cultural ramifications of national and EU funding applications. In selecting an exhibition, based on nationality and fulfilling the criteria for cross-boarder projects, there was a subsequent loss of the local voice, both literal and metaphorical. The Interreg application process required the skills and knowledge to make a twenty eight-page application, and required the applicant to demonstrate the capacity to fulfill EU policies on health and safety,

equal opportunities, etc and the creation of formal roles and responsibilities all of which is understandable in relation to transparency in the allocation and expenditure of public funds but which is problematic when used to doing things on an ad hoc, voluntary basis. Mulrooney contends that in asking a local organisation to acquire that language, the subtle dynamics of control over social and cultural representation results in the regulation of 'the "common sense" of any given society.'[14] She linked the adoption of colonial methodologies as a way of signifying Ireland's capacity to be efficient and modern with the post colonial desire to be "other", 'an unthinking rejection of traditional and indigent language and modes of operation as limiting, old-fashioned and anti-progressive.'[15] Funding provision for cultural projects in Ireland often places the artist as mediator between the state and the community and artists need to be aware of the cultural dynamics and consequences of this role. The solution, she proposed was to find some kind of synthesis between the global and the local - the g/local, grounded in the specifics of locality, but available globally. Declan MacGonagle proposed a similar strategy in his text *Looking Beyond Regionalism* in which he argued that

> By definition, the culture of locality is embedded within its audience. In fact, the idea of a separate audience doesn't apply. Where the process of mediation is connected to the context and can develop a sense of the world without invalidating the local or the vernacular a new vocabulary is possible. Such a vocabulary can be read locally or internationally; it breaks the presumption of metropolitan knowledge and local ignorance; engages in those processes already present in the society; empowers and enables the otherwise disposed. It is actually in those places which have been excluded historically where social structures may be in a state of flux - that cultural intervention is not only possible but necessary and where new models will develop.[16]

Of particular importance in reflecting the changing priorities affecting the rural landscape was the final seminar in the series by GMIT Lecturer, archaeologist Paul Gosling. He elucidated the different perspectives; micro and macro,

governing the management and care of heritage sites in Ireland, outlining the scope and range of regulatory agencies on landowners and farmers. The departments governing the classification and implementation of national and EU regulations for Special Areas of Conservation (SAC's) have changed from being the responsibility of Department of Arts, Culture, the Gaeltacht and the Islands to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, with further responsibilities for regulation devolving to local government and the County Councils. The Burren is an SAC and comes under the remit of the National Parks and Wildlife Service; it also has a great many archaeological monuments whose protection rests with the National Monuments Service Heritage office. Furthermore, the regulations for farming under the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme (REPs) are set down nationally under EU guidelines, but tailored to each particular region, and come under the governance of *Teagasc* the farming agency.

The labyrinthine structure of governance is having a profound affect on rural landscape and culture. Gosling deconstructed the relationship between 'official' and 'unofficial' heritage by reflecting upon the way that monuments are protected by state and citizen. Monuments have survived in rural Ireland for millennia, cared for by local communities and are often part of the fabric of farms, fulfilling practical functions, serving as shelters and briers for cattle. They are part of the cultural responsibility of the farmer and in the Burren ring forts, dolmens, and wedge tombs are a common part of the working landscape. Competing interests between Tourism, Farming and Heritage come into play when farmers deny access to monuments. In the early nineties there were instances of large insurance compensation claims for injuries by visitors to sites. This was one of the reasons given for the rash of "No Trespass" signs in the Burren.[17] Gosling argued that in the late 1990's and early noughties the over-aestheticisation of monuments by the Heritage Council; cleaning, repairing, and clearing away vegetation and shrubs, often resulted in valuable historical and ecological information being lost or damaged in the interests of visitor management. Plant species are frequently the only record of dietary habits, crops and even trade

systems of the past and some sites, undisturbed graves for instance, are often colonies of rare species. The activities of the regulatory agencies are coordinated to a very limited extent, this has led to calls for a well-resourced and dedicated management structure to target and meet the singular needs of the Burren.

In *Conflicting Interests & Interesting Conflicts; Curatorial Strategies in the context of the Rural,* Fiona Woods, artist, visual Arts coordinator for Clare County Council and initiator of the *Ground Up* programme discussed her perspective on public art in rural contexts. Woods discussed the cultural logic of public artworks commissioned for motorways under the Per-Cent-for-Art, scheme arguing that the underlying subtext of such commissions was the validation of a new cultural space that privileged the motorist at the expense of the local communities, and preferencing global economic interests (oil corporations, transport companies) over local interests. She argued that allowing one set of cultural values to occupy such a dominant position in the rural public sphere amounted to cultural colonisation. She chose in the seminar to look at models of practice beyond Ireland, discussing three perspectives on commissioning public art in international rural contexts.

Artspace Norland in Norway was an example she gave of 'the jaded strategy and aesthetic of romanticism.' [18] Initiated by an artist, Anne Katrine Dolven, with the intention of bringing international art to regions with little or no gallery infrastructure, the intention was to present 'sculpture as a "site-construction" indicating function related to a specific milieu…to qualities inherent in the landscape.'[19] The works are all permanent, and relate to the aesthetics of sight and site, but rarely the human, social or ecological context of the municipal regions they are supposed to transform. Remarking that twelve of the thirty-three works employed framing devices that further reinforced the separation between the 'spectator' and the 'scene' the overarching emphasis on vision firmly located the majority of the works within the Romantic tradition. Referring to landscape as a medium, in the broadest sense of the word, W.J.T. Mitchell proposed that

> As a medium for expressing value, it has a semiotic structure rather like that of money, functioning as a special sort of commodity that plays a unique symbolic role in the system of exchange value. Like money landscape is good for nothing as a use – value, while serving as a theoretically limitless symbol of value at some other level.[20]

The value in this case would appear to rest with the experience of the sublime, something Woods found odd given that 'after all this was the 1990's when it was widely known that a large hole in the ozone layer was appearing right above this area.'[21]

One of the other projects discussed by Woods was Grizedale Arts, based near Conniston, in Cumbria, UK. Coniston is located in the heart of the Lake District, the birthplace of Romanticism, a former mining town, the home of John Ruskin and a destination for 8.3 million visitors per year, 89% of whom arrive in cars. On taking over as director Adam Sutherland 'tried to dispense with the fiction, with what I perceived to be the lies perpetuated to promote a simplistic vision of rural life.'[22] The agency sees its role as catalytic, a way of getting people to think about how they might construct and handle their futures. The tensions arising from the economic benefits versus the difficulties of living in very expensive real estate and the stress of visitor numbers during much of the year are openly considered by Grizedale Arts and bear comparison with the tensions in the Burren. The priority at Grizedale is to provide reflexive space for context-specific responses by artists to the 'multiplicity of micro cultures: Farmers, conservationists, tourists, extreme-sports enthusiasts (who) all compete for a stake in the land.'[23] Despite, or perhaps because of, their sincere desire to make sense of their relationship with the place in all its incongruous complexity, they have managed to provoke, complicate and challenge the contemporary reality of living in the middle of the Lake District; a region 'which is struggling constantly between trying to regenerate ... and ... maintain itself as some sort of Victorian theme park or old people's home.'[24]

By engaging on multiple registers with different communities; a farmer on the bottom of the hill, museums and international galleries, they have established long-term conversations between networks of individuals and institutions.[25] Although some of the work may be 'glib, smart arse and no more relevant than what had gone on before', (in its Land Art incarnation) they are honest about their intentions and sincere in their desire to help people adapt to change.[26] Under At Greizedale artists are encouraged to consider the Lake District as 'a kind of stage set/play ground/laboratory for networks of people and artists interested in engaging with the complexities of the rural.'[27] Building on long-term relationships with artists the focus is on bringing an aesthetic reflexivity to the tensions and expectations of visitors and the communities of the Lake District. The agency functions by working lightly, as 'part of a network of ideas and activity, connecting local and global conditions.[28] Artists are invited to visit, make a proposal, or not, that works, or not, within the existing local social and cultural framework.

One example of their engagement within the locality was the *Coniston Water* Festival the central event of Grizedale's programme in 2005. This was part of a series of events curated under the banner *Cumbriana Proof* that looked at the role of culture, tourism, and regeneration in the Lake District. The water festival had been a big feature in local life bur died out in 1998 and Grizedale Arts suggested the town restart the festival, making it more relevant and interesting for the community.[29] *Thinking Space for the North* was another long-term project by artists Dan Robinson and Bryan Davis made in association with Grizedale Arts, to re-imagine the future of a remote and unoccupied farmhouse at Low Parkamoor in relation to wider local, national and global contexts.[30] With Suzanne Lacy, Dominic Stevens and Mari-Aymone Djeribi, Fernando Garcia-Dory and Fiona Woods I was invited to do a research residency there in 2007. The open and sometimes provocative way that Grizedale engages with local issues and various communities was a significant influence on my thinking as, in the wake of *Cross Land,* I opened *X-PO.*

4.2 The Shifting Ground Conference.

The Shifting Ground International Conference on Contemporary Art & Culture in Rural Contexts, took place in glór, Ennis, Co. Clare, Ireland from 17th - 19th October, 2006. Programmed by Woods and myself, the keynote speakers were Suzanne Lacy and Simon Sheik with presentations by Dominic Stevens and Mari-Aymone Djeribi, Grizedale Arts, Fernando Garcia-Dory, Kristina Leko, Fiona Woods and myself. The conference was attended by over 100 delegates from Ireland, UK and the USA.

The seminars and conference helped built up a critical discourse around public art and rural culture in Ireland and enabled me to consolidate my ideas on the nature of effective engagement within a complex area of practice. One of the objectives of the partnership was to research the development of a pedagogical model to formalise training in visual arts practice in rural contexts. This resulted in a module that now runs for GMIT Heritage students. The Shifting Ground conference showcased models of practice from Ireland, UK and Europe, and brought together arts practitioners, policy-makers, academics and cultural strategists.

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1 *On The Edge* Gray's University Aberdeen, Web.

2 Benson 20.

3 Gavin Murphy, "Civic Matter, the Placing Art Public Art Programme." *PLACING ART a pilot public art programme* .Sligo: Sligo County Council, 2000. 17.

4 Gavin.Murphy, "Once Again, Comrades: Amnesia, Memory and Public Art." *Shifting Ground.* Web.

5 Murphy, "Civic Matter, the Placing Art Public Art Programme."

6 Murphy, "Once Again Comrades: Amnesia, Memory and Public Art."

7 Public Art Steering Group, “A report on the Evaluation of the pilot public art programme.” 2002 (PDF) Web, 26

8 Gavin Murphy, “Civic Matter, the Placing Art Public Art Programme.” *PLACING ART A Pilot Public Art Programme* .Sligo: Sligo County Council, 2000. 17.

9 “...and when any of our people reached the beach, two hundred savages and other enemies fell upon him and stripped him of what he had on until he was left in his naked skin. Such they maltreated and wounded without pity, all of which was plainly visible from the battered ships, and it did not seem to me that there was anything good happening on either side...” (Captain Cueller’s Narrative of the Spanish Armada).

Gavin Murphy, “Keepsakes.” *PLACING ART*. 38.

10 “Keepsakes: something given to be kept for the sake of the giver. The found object may only hint at a story untold. It remains a promised yarn never to be heard - an enigma caught in the ebb and flow of historical memory. Giving valued material over to memory, enmeshed as it is with the Armada experience in Sligo, is a fitting remembrance for those sailors landing on Streedagh beach that night. Keepsakes, with its pearls of memory floating in time, is another ghostly tale to stalk the terrain.”

Murphy, “Keepsakes.” *PLACING ART*. 40.

11 Murphy, “Once Again Comrades: Amnesia, Memory and Public Art.”

12 Anne Mulrooney, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place; Re-negotiating the polarity of global/local.” *Shifting Ground.* Web.

13 The primary objective of Interreg is to strengthen economic and social cohesion in the Community by promoting cross-border, transnational and interregional co-operation and balanced development in the Community territory.

14 Mulrooney, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place”.

15 Mulrooney, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place”.

16 Declan McGonagle, “Looking Beyond Regionalism 1990. Association of Art Historians.” *Sources in Irish Art: A Reader.* Ed. Finten Cullen, (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000) 102. also pub. *CIRCA* 53. Sept-Oct (1990): 26-27.

17 While insurance claims were certainly one of the reasons for the rash of signs in the Burren, the Mullaghmore conflict was also a significant factor the withholding of access to heritage sites was a part of the strategy to put pressure on tourism providers in the community to support the Interpretative centre.

18 Fiona Woods, “Are You Ready For the Country?” *Clare County Libraries.* Web.

19 *Artspace Norland* Web.

20 W.J.T. Mitchell, “Imperial Landscape.” *Landscape and power* Ed. W.J.T. Mitchell, 2nd edition, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press,. 2002) 14.

21 Fiona Woods, *Are You Ready For the Country?*

22 On rural culture Sutherland writes; ‘I was brought up in the culture; I knew it wasn’t simple – it was as full and as complex as anywhere else, filled with the same confusion, anger and pain, but punctuated by the occasional shaft of dappled light, the gnatting of gnats and the general monkey business of the multitude of crawly, creepy, bovine, ovine, porcine, equine, avian and other delicate bodies going about their own doddles before death, each just trying to catch a little of that dappled light on the way.’

Griffen, Johnathan and Adam Sutherland, *Grizedale Arts Adding Complexity to Confusion*, 21/22.

23 Adam Sutherland “The Context of the Lake District”, Grizedale Arts, Web

24 Alistair Hudson, “A Conversation on the Future of Grizedale”. Griffin and Sutherland, 186.

[25] Johnathan Griffin, “The Billboard”, Johnathan Griffen, and Adam Sutherland, *Grizedale Arts Adding Complexity to Confusion*, (Amesbury: Grizedale Books, 2009). 88.

26 Adam Sutherland, “1999”, Griffin and Sutherland, 21.

27Adam Sutherland , *Hello from Grizedale*. E-mail to Fiona Woods, Dominic Stevens, Fernando Garcia-Dory, Suzanne Lacy and Deirdre O’Mahony inviting us to visit Grizedale to research a project for Grizedale Arts collectively or individually. Email date: 3 January 2007.

28 Adam Sutherland , *Hello from Grizedale*. Email date: 3 January 2007.

29 Adam Sutherland , “Cumbriana Proofing” *Coniston* Grizedale Web.

30 Bryan Davis and Dan Robinson, *Thinking Space for the North*, Grizedale Arts, Web.