2475/4265

No Restrictions.

Errata

p.1, line 1: drop colon

p.5, line 9: "its" for "it"

p.5, line 17: "his/her" for "their"

p.24, line 11: "his/her" for "their"

p.30, line 3: "to those" for "to the those"

p.31, line 4: "carnivalesque" for "carnalvalesque"

p.58, quotation, line 5: "theory of intellectual" for "theory intellectual"

p.59, line 11: "liberalism for" for "liberalismfor"

p.61, line 21: "one of its" for "one it"

p.69, line 15: "extended" for "exptended"

p.81, line 23: "postnationalism" for "postnationlaism"

p.88, note 5: "My Readers" for "My Reader's"

p.109, lines 16/17: "according to an" for "according an"

p.113, line 4: "finds her own" for "finds their own"

p.121, lines 18/19: "epiphanies" for "epiphany"

p.123, line 18: "somewhat like" for "something like"

p.128, line 16: "unavailable to him/her ... devalues his/her" for "unavailable to them ... devalues their"

p.151, line 15: "reader/viewer as s/he" for "reader/viewer as they"

p.176, line 4: "evince" for "envince"

p.180, line 14: "nowhere" for "nowehere"

p.186, line 11: "below" for "bellow"

p.198, line 2: "is a repeated message" for "a repeated message"

p.200, line 1: "What she desires" for "She desires is"

p.213, line 24: "working towards" for "working the towards"

SELF, NATION AND NOVEL IN CONTEMPORARY IRISH WRITING

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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2004

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STATEMENT

I declare that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any other university, and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except when due reference in made in the text.
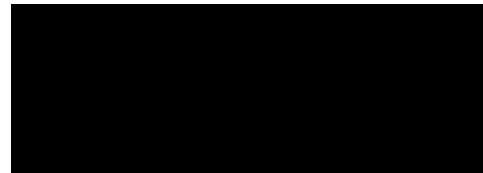
Matthew Ryan

24 November 2004

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SYNOPSIS

This thesis addresses some of the contradictions and potentialities of globalisation as manifest in aspects of contemporary Irish culture. Its focus is on recent novels, with occasional references to film and other cultural artefacts. Analysis of these points to various ways of dealing with the formation of persons in the context of the shift to an intensified abstraction of the forms the self and the social take under conditions of globalisation. The thesis develops four main categories of response to this process of abstraction: aesthetic cosmopolitanism, solipsism, liberal transcendence and abstract community. In considering novels, this thesis also investigates the formal effect of writing, print and narrative as aspects of the process of abstraction. The thesis presents the argument that in contemporary Irish culture the intellectual form of life has been generalised as a key model for the constitution of persons, because the nation is seen to be displaced as a framing abstraction of identity. As social integration becomes increasingly abstract, as is argued here, there emerges some difficulty in recognising its modes as socially integrative at all. The other, related, hypothesis presented here is that there is a tendency to represent and form the individual as the sole locus of integration and constitution, a tendency to misrecognise abstract sociality as an absence of sociality. To investigate these hypotheses the thesis considers selected works of fiction by Colm Tóibín, Richard Kearney, Neil Jordan, Patrick McCabe, Deirdre Madden, John Banville, Mary Morrissy, Desmond Hogan, Dermot Bolger, Robert McLiam Wilson, Glenn Patterson and Seamus Deane.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I type like my Father, in that two-finger-and-thumb tapping-style which journalists used to do. I first saw printed words, which I had written, while playing on the typewriters in the newsroom where he worked. There was a strange mixture of intimacy and alienation in reading-over my typographically ordered babble.

Later, when I had become an adult who wrote for magazines and newspapers, my father asked whether I would ever write something he might *want* to read: stories or a novel. I told him I would do it after this project. Those promised stories are already too late. I know he would have been proud to hold a copy of this thesis, enjoyed the weight of it, be pleased to note the chapter titles ... but he probably would not have read it. I'm sorry he did not live to see what I eventually managed to tap out. This thesis is, in part, for him in thanks for the early lesson on the ambivalent power of printed words.

It is also for my son, Auley, who likes to be read everything he can push into our hands. But I won't inflict a reading of this thesis on him. He can have the stories that Dad missed.

The thesis is also for my partner, Mary Roberts. It has always been for her. There is no need for her to read it because she has *lived* its difficult production. I know that without her, it would not have been written.

Chapter One

Critical Terrain

The Fifth Province

In Derry, near the city walls that the Apprentice Boys (in)famously secured in 1688, there is a tourist attraction called The Fifth Province. Part Celtic theme park, part sedate roller-coaster, it is aimed at the diasporic tourist. After walking through the moulded-plastic Newgrangesque entrance, members of the audience are urged, in an audiovisual introduction, to check for their own names on the walls. The surrounding faux-stone is 'carved' with family names: O'Neil, Ryan, Murphy. We are on what the advertising pamphlet describes as a: "voyage of enchantment and discovery of a past that is still with us".[1] The theme of a proud diaspora is brought home as Calgach, pre-Christian founder of Derry and our timelord guide, collects three children: Brendan from New York, Graine from Sydney and Rachel from Derry. They are to carry the adventurous and imaginative spirit of the Irish people — The Fifth Province itself — into the future. With the aid of Calgach's Celtic time-capsule, Brendan sees how he will take the diaspora across the final frontier of outer space.

The Celtic essentialism of The Fifth Province — a continuum of imaginative freedom running from Calgach to young Graine — is a sentimental appeal to the vanity of those transnational tourists who claim Irish heritage. Such an ahistorical romp serves to re-mythologise the link to an imaginary homeland. It would seem a typical journey into hyperreality, familiar to Disney customers from France to Florida.[2] But the pretence of location and belonging — the names in the stones — troubles the stream of this spectacle. Aesthetic similarities notwithstanding, The Fifth Province is not 'Pirates of the Caribbean'. The Fifth Province tells its audience that, despite the distancing effects of time and space, they remain Irish because they carry this germ of imagination.

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[1] From the pamphlet advertising The Fifth Province. Produced by The Calgach Centre, Butcher Street, Derry.

[2] See Umberto Eco *Travels in Hyperreality* (London 1987).

(Presumably visitors to Derry named Nguen or Alamassi are excluded from this special endowment.) Regardless of the double deterritorialisation of migration and tourism, those who can run their fingers over a polymerised version of their own name are at some level reintegrated into Irishness. Here, a highly abstracted sense of belonging is invited to touch-down on the material surface of place. Yet this materialisation is actually a further abstraction. It is a *sense* of location and belonging made consumable through a synthetic reduction of Irish history and culture, mediated by digital and mechanical technologies. Like the export phenomenon of the 'Irish pub', which appears in cities from Bangkok to Barcelona, The Fifth Province is an example of what Fintan O'Toole has termed 'global Ireland'.[3] Rather than an image that can be sold around the world, it is an attempt to reconfigure belonging under the conditions of globalisation and so make available, to deterriotorialised people, a version of located attachment. In this, it plays on the melancholy of migration that is part of the diasporic imagination.[4] This melancholy is also an aspect of Ireland at home. From the emigration ballad to the light which Mary Robinson burned in a window of Áras an Uachtaráin, Irish culture gestures to its absences.[5] One should not be over-critical of the attempt to recoup some self-esteem from a history of migration threaded with poverty at home and vilification abroad, but the contradictions of The Fifth Province illustrate some of the problems entailed in the representation and enactment of a globalised Ireland. Set amidst the fiercely territorial divisions of Derry, marked out at the boundaries of the neighbourhood as well as the North-South border, the contradictions of abstracted self and deterritorialised belonging call into question the transcendental capacities of a globalised or postnational future.

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[3] See Fintan O'Toole *The Ex-isle of Erin* (Dublin 1997). See also Michael Cronin 'Speed Limits: Ireland Globalisation and the War against Time' in Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons, and Michael Cronin *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy* (London 2002) p.58.

[4] Examples of diasporic melancholy: Terry Eagleton's introduction to *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London & New York 1995); Vincent Buckley *Memory Ireland: insights into the contemporary Irish condition* (Ringwood1985); Matthew Ryan 'My Celtic Tattoo or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love My Postmodern Selves' *Arena Magazine*, no.29, 1997.

[5] See Aiden Arrowsmith 'Debating Diasporic Identity: Nostalgia, (Post) Nationalism, "Critical Traditionalism"', *Irish Studies Review*, vol.7, no.2, 1999, pp.173-181.

Conceptual Markers

This thesis will address some of the contradictions and potentialities of globalisation as manifest in aspects of contemporary Irish culture. My investigation will focus on recent novels, with occasional references to film and other cultural artefacts. I will interpret their content as dealing with the formation of persons and locate it in the context of the shift to an intensified abstraction of the forms the self and the social take under conditions of globalisation. In considering novels, I am also investigating the formal effect of writing, print and narrative as aspects of this process of abstraction. The thesis will argue, as its central proposition, that in contemporary Irish culture the intellectual form of life has been generalised as a key model for the constitution of persons, because the nation is seen to be displaced as a framing abstraction of identity.

Tributary Arguments

Before proceeding to the particular Irish cultural responses to globalisation, I should clarify what I mean by the term 'abstraction'. The theoretical framework from which my use is derived will be set out in detail in Chapter Two. Here I merely sketch the concept in order to provide a useable definition, for the preliminary purposes of drawing some critical currents from Irish Studies towards my own textual analyses. From sacred cosmologies to the division of labour, human communities set out abstract orders which condition their internal relations. In the sense used here, the concept of 'abstraction' refers to the extension of social relations that draws beyond the embodied presence of others. Abstraction is a material process, but one that relates both to ideas and practices. The social theoretical proposition, running through this thesis, is that the modes of social integration, through which a community forms and recognises itself are constituted in the dominance of more abstract modalities of social relations. This therefore influences the ways in which sociality itself is understood and represented, as well as conditioning the constitution of the self. In this thesis, I will examine some Irish cultural manifestations of, and responses to, the increased abstraction of social integration. I proceed from the assumption that 'the self' is a social category, by which I mean, not only that the

particular experience of subjectivity cannot be extricated from its social mediation, but also, more fundamentally, that the formation of the self is the complex synthesis of the material *and* abstract elements of social circumstance, brought into individual experience through relations with other individuals. As social integration becomes increasingly abstract, as I hypothesise, then there might well be some difficulty in recognising its modes as socially integrative. My other, related, hypothesis is that there is a tendency to represent and form the individual as the sole locus of integration and constitution, a tendency to misrecognise abstract sociality as an absence of sociality.

My understanding of the constitutive relation between the individual and society provides the basis for a critique of liberalism, from which I will investigate aspects of globalisation that require a misapprehension or refiguration of the individual as self-authoring. While no cultural formations are innocent of power relations, those which view the formation of the self as hyper-individuation must be considered especially ideological. In the Irish novels I will analyse, ideological positions are often structured explicitly around responses to nationalism. This reflects the explicit engagement with nationalist politics an experience of colonisation necessarily imposes.[6] So the nation and nationalism will also be areas of investigation in this thesis. However, I hope to set these various responses to nationalism within the ontological shift toward increasingly abstract modes of integration I sketched above. The critique of nationalism in Ireland can then itself be critically analysed in relation to this general phenomenon. Much of this critique and cultural shift appears infused with triumphalist liberalism, the ideological arm of hyper-individuation. Throughout the thesis, I will refer to this ontological and ideological nexus as the proclamation of 'radical autonomy'. By this I mean a position that regards self-authorship as benign, desirable or inevitable. My critique of radical autonomy, in relation to the social category of the nation, is that the apparent freedom of a transcendent sense of self

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[6] Colonising and imperial nations are in a position, so to speak, to take their own nationalism for granted. See also Michael Billig *Banal Nationalism* (London & Thousand Oaks 1995). See also David Lloyd 'Cultural Theory and Ireland: Review of Terry Eagleton's *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture*' *Bullán* vol.3, no.1, Spring, p.88. Lloyd states: "Under colonial conditions, there is no transcendence either of the political state or of culture. Liberal attempts that pretend to an Irish multiculturalism or models of the two (or more) traditions are simply dishonest to the extent that they ignore the asymmetrical and violent relations that have structured Ireland historically and contemporaneously."

is available only to those who work comfortably in highly abstracted and extended social formations, in particular those able to lift themselves out of their immediate social circumstance through the intellectual form of life. The intellectual who sees the nation as an irredeemably repressive fantasy is already integrated into an alternative social formation (even if not recognised as such). For those unable to exploit fully the social structures of the intellectual form, the nation remains the abstract formation of society offering viable integration. Radical autonomy is often articulated in universal terms, but it both overlooks the differential access to the means of achieving such universality and disregards it own part in ensuring this disparity.

These theoretical terms are introduced here merely to enable my discussion of some critical work later in this chapter. In particular, the notion of 'the intellectual form of life' needs explanation, not only for its relevance to my outlines of radical autonomy and abstract sociality, but also because it describes the condition for the production of critical work. The notion has both a general and a particular role in this thesis: as a key figuration of the self within the current intensification of abstraction; and as the condition of production for novels and criticism. The figure of the intellectual and the modalities of their self-constitution are manifestations of the increased abstraction of sociality. While an intellectual can be considered anyone who works critically with ideas, the intellectual form of life is characterised in two main ways: group integration through technological mediation such as writing, print or digitised information; and the process of 'lifting out' or 'disembedding', in which received social circumstance is relativised and reconceived as contextual. Describing the role of the intellectual in the historical formation of the nation, Paul James notes the ambiguous outcomes of this form of life:

> the process of abstraction allows people to reflect upon the historical grounding of their immediate community in face-to-face relations, at the same time it lifts the person doing the recognizing onto a more abstract level which is just as likely to support internationalism or cosmopolitanism as it is nationalism[7]

As Benedict Anderson has argued, the processes of abstract integration and constitution within the intellectual form of life have shaped how we think and live the abstract

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[7] Paul James *Nation Formation: Towards a Theory of Abstract Community* (London & Thousand Oaks 1996) p.43.

community of nation.[8] However, these processes do not necessarily cease with the emergence of the nation-state, rather they continue to generate increasingly abstract social formations and self-figurations. The further expansion of abstract formations is, in part, carried by the changing role of the intellectual. I distinguish between an 'intellectual' and an 'intellectual form of life' because the increased abstraction of sociality tends to generalise the intellectual form of life beyond what Gramsci termed its 'traditional' groupings. Aspects of this shift have been formulated in various ways, such as Foucault's distinction between "universal" and "specific" intellectuals or Bauman's "legislators" and "interpreters".[9] These distinctions emphasise changes within the traditional stratum, whereas the category I am outlining stresses the expansion of the intellectual form of life beyond its older institutional supports. In Chapter Two, I will show how the intellectual form is extended through a connection with the commodity form — primarily through the nexus of the techno-sciences and the market — to generalise itself across the social whole. Here, I will use the term "intellectually trained"[10], to mean those non-manual workers who are not intellectuals, but who work with technical or specialised knowledge. Like the knowledge process workers of the new working class, they must constitute themselves in the manner of the intellectual but largely without the means to integrate themselves meaningfully or reflectively within that social group. They are 'lifted out' of ... immediate community, but not then vocationally reintegrated within a social formation of greater abstraction. What persists in this group is the intellectual's sense of being the author of their own products and self, but without an integrative limit. The result of this radical autonomy is an alienation from sociality itself and a form of life that finds authenticity only at the level of its mediation: in text. Beyond that, the only legitimation or ground value is a continuous return to market variations on consumption.

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[8] Benedict Anderson *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London & New York 1991).

[9] See Michel Foucault *Power/knowledge: selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977* (ed) Colin Gordon, translated by Colin Gordon (New York 1980) pp.125-33. See also Zygmunt Bauman *Legislators and interpreters: on modernity, post-modernity and intellectuals* (Ithaca 1987).

[10] See Geoff Sharp and Doug White 'Features of the Intellectually Trained' *Arena*, no.15, 1968, pp.30-33. See also Geoff Sharp 'Intellectuals in Transition' *Arena*, no.65, 1983, pp.84-95.

In Ireland, north and south, the "expansion of the intellectual stratum", with the intellectually trained as its central component, has been an important aspect of participation in the global economy.[11] As with other nations, this has meant a shift in the way nation and community are conceived and/or criticised. As Geoff Sharp has observed:

> Instead of the intellectual practices standing outside the mainstream of social life, they become integral with the material interests of the powers as they move into the phase of globalization. In line with these interests, they reconstruct the integration of populations by way of that branch of interconnectivity, the media.[12]

Social life is made-over in the intellectual form, providing the conditions for the expansion of the market, not only into formerly protected areas of the national economy, but also into the constitution of individual identity. To consider the intellectual work of novel writing or criticism is to enquire critically into how they can implicitly replicate their own conditions of production and thereby extend the process of abstraction, which is a basis for globalisation. One way this replication might be achieved is in the representation of an aestheticised self, which fosters a radically autonomous relation to the offerings of culture, a sense that one might simply choose and compose oneself from a cultural array beyond the limits of history. In the analysis of texts, I assume they will exhibit a structural propensity to represent social relations in the shape of the intellectual form. I will therefore attempt to take into account this structuring predisposition of writing, while at the same time remaining responsive to the way this structural aspect conditions the textualisation of the social. Critical and artistic texts will thus be critiqued for the way they replicate an ideology that represents the person as "a creator of meaning, as having passed on from individuality to autonomy".[13]

While nationalism and postnationalism appear, at present, to delimit much of recent debate over culture in Ireland, the processes of globalisation define the more general terrain for this local war of position. Deterritorialisation, the abstraction of the self and the imposition of an intellectual form of life are aspects of the present phase of

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[11] Liam O'Dowd 'Neglecting the Material Dimension: Irish intellectuals and the problem of identity' *The Irish Review* no.3, 1988 p.13
[12] Geoff Sharp 'The Idea of the Intellectual and After' in *Scholars and Entrepreneurs* Simon Cooper, John Hinkson and Geoff Sharp (eds) (Melbourne 2002) p.300.
[13] Sharp 'Intellectuals in Transition' p.86.

globalisation in Ireland as elsewhere.[14] Ireland does provide unusually significant illustrative instances of the process because of its particular history of uneven development: industrial underdevelopment, political instability and its experience of modernity as an anomalous, Western European colony.[15] From that point of departure the transition to the postmodern culture of global capitalism might well seem a straightforward step into the postindustrial information and image economy — except for the complicating factor of nationalism.[16] Ireland's variegated engagement with nationalist ideology and national social formations, from anti-imperialism to Unionism and including contemporary postnationalism, provides particular responses to the generalised experience of globalisation.[17] This dialogue draws on the history of an island already well familiar with the predicament of having to respond to pressures toward dislocation emanating from elsewhere.

In 1993 Desmond Bell observed: "For better or worse, the new cultural studies [in Ireland] have inherited an ideological agenda initially formed around the debate on cultural nationalism but now being reformulated to meet the exigencies of the current postmodern conjuncture."[18] The intervening years saw the emergence of what has come to be known as the 'Celtic Tiger'. The postmodern cultural logic has thus been joined by its economic partner, neoliberal late capitalism.[19] In this chapter I will consider how Irish cultural criticism negotiates the dividing lines of nationalist, anti-nationalist and post-nationalist by reference to its response to late-capitalist globalisation, particularly the

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[14] See Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis 1987). See also Jim MacLaughlin *Ireland: Emigrant Nursery and the World Economy* (Cork 1994).

[15] For a brief overview of Ireland's "uneven modernity" see Michel Peilon 'Culture and State in Ireland's New Economy' in *Reinventing Ireland* Kirby, Gibbons and Cronin (eds) pp.40-1.

[16] See David Lloyd *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Durham 1993) p.19: "Other modes of political organization tend to displace nationalism in the politically stabilized nation state, although it is clear enough that at moments of crisis appeal to some form of nationalist ideology is a constant resource of both governments and their oppositions."

[17] For an overview of the variegation of nationalist politics in Ireland, see Luke Gibbons 'Constructing the Canon: Versions of National Identity' in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (Derry 1991) vol.2, pp.950-55.

[18] Desmond Bell 'Culture and Politics in Ireland: Postmodern Revisions' *History of European Ideas* vol.16, no.1-3, 1993, p.141.

[19] See Terry Eagleton *Crazy John and the Bishop and Other Essays on Irish Culture* (Cork 1998) pp.308-27. Eagleton argues that the nationalist/revisionist debate should properly be considered as part of the larger contest between modernism and postmodernism: "it [revisionism] clearly belongs to the more general cultural milieu we call postmodernism, while seeming for the most part quite unaware of it." p.324.

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transition into more abstracted forms of life. These critical positions can then be judged in relation to their capacity to incorporate or counter this shift in the intensity of abstraction. The critical work considered is by no means a comprehensive survey of recent debates in Irish studies. It has been selected, not only because these writers have been influential in the debates over nationalism, but also because it introduces the defining themes of the chapters that follow. These will include the increased abstraction of the social constitution of persons, the influence of aesthetic form on this process and the ideological contest between liberal and radical interpretations and representations of the process. Chapters Three, Four and Five will trace these themes in recent novels from Ireland, where I will use the theoretical categories of 'solipsism', 'aesthetic cosmopolitanism' and 'liberal globalism' to identify different cultural responses to the processes of abstraction being played out in contemporary Ireland.

I have no wish to limit my own critical intervention to the merely economic or the theoretical vagaries of 'space-time compression' as some writers have done.[20] The rise of global Ireland in the form of the Celtic Tiger is, to be sure, an example of neoliberal economics, with all the contradictions and possibilities this entails. As Peadar Kirby notes:

> Today's neo-liberal Ireland is very much a foreign country. It offers a more solid economic base and its looser sense of identity has opened spaces of accommodation for Northern unionists. These are among its great successes. But, like the Ireland it replaced, it too is characterised by a great gap between rhetoric and reality.[21]

This 'gap' can be understood as the product of contradictions within the "matrix of associated ideologies"[22] that enable and accompany globalisation. Globalisation is thus a set of processes that include, but are not limited to, the expansion of capitalist markets or the extended reach of information, communication and transport technologies. I will, however, focus on the 'associated ideologies' of the autonomy of persons and the transcendence of material limits in the formation of society and identity. These compose part of the base assumptions both for social formations and for much critical debate,

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[20] See Anthony Giddens *The Consequences of Modernity* (London 1990). See also David Harvey *The Condition of Postmodernity: an enquiry into the origins of cultural change* (Cambridge MA 1990).
[21] Peadar Kirby 'Contested Pedigrees of the Celtic Tiger' in *Reinventing Ireland* Kirby, Gibbons and Cronin (eds) p.34.
[22] Paul James *Social Formation* unpublished manuscript.

which furthers the processes of abstraction and thereby itself provides necessary conditions of globalisation.

The Fifth Province as Textual Terrain

If The Fifth Province in Derry is an attempt to remythologise belonging, then so too is its conceptual namesake, 'the fifth province' deployed in the cultural journal *The Crane Bag*, albeit, in a more subtle and theoretically sophisticated guise. In its first editorial, Richard Kearney and Mark Patrick Hederman described the prehistory of the idea:

> Modern Ireland is made up of four provinces, whose origin lies beyond the beginning of recorded history. And yet, the Irish word for a province is *coiced* which means a fifth. This fivefold division is as old as Ireland itself, yet there is disagreement about the identity of the fifth fifth.[23]

Moving beyond those who locate the fifth province at the mid-point of the island in Meath or at the "Stone of Divisions on the Hill of Uisneach", Kearney and Hederman interpret it as an abstract space:

> Although Tara was always the political centre of Ireland, this middle or fifth province acted as a second centre, which although non-political, was just as important, acting as a necessary balance. It was sometimes described as a secret well, known only to the druids and *filli*. These two centres acted like two kidneys in the body of the land. The balance between the two was a guarantor of peace and harmony in the country as a whole.[24]

The 'secret well', linking the political and cultural, is a manifestation of a social centre that can only be known through the common store of cultural knowledge. Bringing the concept to bear on the "present unhappy state of our country" in 1977, the editors proposed the fifth province as "another kind of unity", which bypasses the "obvious impotence of the various political attempts to unite the four geographical provinces". So, for modern Ireland, the fifth province is "not a political or geographical position; it is more like a dis-position". In conception and terminology the prehistoric notion has here been drawn into the frame of twentieth-century continental European philosophy. In a move that would characterise the journal's approach to Irish politics and culture, Kearney and Hederman turned the fifth province into something like deconstruction's "third

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[23] Richard Kearney and Mark Patrick Hederman 'Editorial', *The Crane Bag Book of Irish Studies (1977-81)* (Dublin 1982), pp.10-11.
[24] Ibid

term".[25] With a sense of the urgent need for a new response to the conflict in the North, they saw a further role for the fifth province beyond Irish différance. Looking to the enactment of its unifying power, they set out a project:

> The constitution of such a place would require that each person discover it for himself within himself. Each person would have to become a seer, a poet, an artist. The purpose of The Crane Bag is to promote the excavation of such unactualized spaces within the reader, which is the work of the fifth province. From such a place a new understanding and a new unity might emerge.[26]

In effect, each person is asked to enter the abstracted sphere of what I have been calling 'the intellectual form of life' — to become a seer, a poet, an artist, a reader of life. The journal itself becomes a hinge between the part and the whole and, it would seem, between contrary positions. The 'secret well' is to be opened on the page before the reader. In this respect, the fifth province as 'disposition' resembles Barthes's relation between the reader and text: 'each person' becomes a manifestation of its possible meaning. Similarly, the 'unity' of the fifth province appears to be textual, functioning like the store of potential signs in *langue*. Such distant boundaries allow for a fluid and plural conception of cohesion. This understanding of unity is central to Kearney's extension of these ideas to the question of sovereignty, which I will consider later. The role of the fifth province and its conduit, *The Crane Bag*, is thus in the refiguration of the formation of self: as seer, poet or artist. The new unity will be orchestrated along aesthetic lines.

Detecting the failure of efforts to form the Irish self within the old unity of national culture, Kearney posits a program of demythologising and remythologising to enable the move to an aesthetic self-integration: "Myth is a two-way street. It can lead to perversion (bigotry, racism, fascism) or to liberation (the reactivation of a genuine social imaginary open to universal horizons)."[27] The "myths of motherland" called upon by the Republican movement, based in the images of a recurrent past, of sacrifice and martyrdom, are "responses to repression" that "become repressive in their own right".[28] Rather than

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[25] See Elizabeth Grosz 'Derridean deconstruction' in *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (St Leonards 1989) pp.26-38.
[26] Kearney & Hederman 'Editorial' pp.11.
[27] Richard Kearney *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy* (London & New York 1997) p.121.
[28] Ibid. See also Richard Kearney *Transitions: Narratives in Modern Irish Culture* (Manchester 1988) pp.269-82.

offering a liberatory formulation, he continues, this ideological use of myth presents its community with a "strait-jacket of fixed identity" which "excludes dialogue with all that is other than itself."[29] Through critical analysis, the parochialism of these myths can be exposed, thus delegitimising militant Republicanism and destabilising the foundation myths of the Republic.[30]

The stifling unity of such myth is by no means the only danger facing the activation of the fifth province. Kearney is also on guard against the "modernist cult of solipsism", which would take Ireland as far from his ideal in the other direction.[31] He warns:

> The danger of demythologising occurs when it is pressed into the service of a self-perpetuating iconoclasm which, if left unchecked, liquidates the notion of the past altogether. Modern consciousness may thus find itself liberated into a no-man's-land of interminable self-reflexion without purpose or direction.[32]

Here, again, the artist provides the model for a form of life that might successfully enact the dialectic of tradition and modernity. Kearney calls on the example of Joyce, particularly his ability to refashion myth, "to blend a fidelity to his local origins with a counter-fidelity to the culture of the Continent".[33] In this process of remaking, Joyce revealed "that the narrative of self–identity is a fiction", a revelation which does not liquidate "historical individuals", but rather "shows that myth actually requires the multiple reinterpretations of different writers in order to recreate itself."[34] The artistic form of life, through its syncretic quality in the production of both text and self, is thus presented as suitable for bypassing the ideologically stilled myths of unity, while keeping the modern, highly individuated, self from entirely slipping the ties of history and place. I will explore the theme of aesthetic order as an ontological frame for self-formation in Chapter Three. Here it is sufficient to note that the mode of integration — the unifying power of the fifth province — is textual. For the individual within this unity, self-identity is figured on the form of the artistic intellectual. As Kearney makes clear in the conclusion to his survey of Irish cultural journals, textuality is the organising principle for

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[29] Kearney *Postnationalist Ireland* p.121.
[30] Richard Kearney 'Myth and Terror' in *The Crane Bag Book of Irish Studies*, p.280-4.
[31] Kearney *Postnationalist Ireland* p.117.
[32] Kearney *Transitions* p.270.
[33] Kearney *Postnationalist Ireland* p.117.
[34] Ibid.

the abstract integration of a postnational society. In a telling shift from the embodied to the abstract, he replaces Padraig Pearse's more than metaphorical image of "bloodshed" as a "cleansing and sanctifying thing"[35], with a call to text: "To juggle with the words of Pearse: cultural journals can be cleansing and sanctifying things and a nation which regards them as the final irrelevance has lost its sense of nationhood."[36]

This formulation of the fifth province as a relational and critical dynamic, rather than a 'fixed' imposition of identity, attempts to theorise the actual and possible formations of belonging, located at various levels of integration from the local to the global. I will return to the way Kearney couples these formations of identity with a prospective post-nationalist polity. But before proceeding to questions of state and sovereignty, a critical pause is necessary. Kearney's model of the 'Irish mind' is characterised by mythic thinking, which allows the intersection of apparent opposites such as past and present or self and other. It refuses the either/or binary common to imperialism and nationalism, working instead through a both/and dialectic. Gerry Smyth is concerned that this might reinforce the colonial stereotype of an exotically non-logical Irishness: "The Irish mind is thus in danger of becoming permanently 'hybridised', identified precisely by its inability to interact with established normal reality".[37] While the apprehension is legitimate, the critique could penetrate more deeply into these assumptions about the position of the intellectual in the formation of identity. The particular formative characteristics of the intellectual form of life and the material structures maintaining them are, on the whole, left unexamined by Smyth as by Kearney. Smyth notes how the 'Irish mind' is "traced throughout the history of Irish writing in English ... with James Joyce nominated as the seminal modern exponent of this doubled, disruptive discourse".[38] More recently,

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[35] Padraic H Pearse 'The Coming Revolution' in *Collected Works of Padraic H Pearse: Political Writings and Speeches* (Dublin 1917) p.99.

[36] Richard Kearney 'Between Politics and Literature: The Irish Cultural Journal', *Crane Bag: The Forum Issue*, vol.7, no.2, 1983, p.170.

[37] Gerry Smyth *Decolonisation and Criticism: The Construction of Irish Literature*, (London 1998) p.29.

[38] Ibid p.28. See also Kearney *Transitions* p.279: "In both its form and content, *Finnegans Wake* is a 'mamafesta' of multiple meaning. It is an open text which looks beyond the either/or antagonism of tradition versus modernity, memory versus imagination, towards a post-modern collage where they may co-exist."

Kearney nominates the philosopher, John Toland, as an exemplary figure of the Irish mind:

> In a telling if oblique way, John Toland *is* a typical Irish thinker in that his genius for dual forms of identity epitomizes a crucial feature of Irish culture, ... Perhaps the real form of Irish identity is a plurality of identities? Perhaps the essence of the Irish mind is to have no essence (in the sense of a single, homogenous character)? Perhaps the Irish mind is at its best when differentiated into diverse minds, preferring complexity to conformity.[39]

Toland and Joyce, both cosmopolitan intellectuals, stand as models of 'thinking otherwise', of synthesising Irish and European identities. Yet there remains the problem of how their examples might be generalised to form an alternative Irish identity for those who lack the formal structures of the intellectual form of life. *Finnegans Wake* is the exemplary instance of a poly-vocal modernist aesthetic, but it is exactly this formal complexity which puts it beyond the reach of most readers. Joyce's work might well emerge from the common Irish experience of hybridity, but it speaks back to that origin across a critical distance, from the vantage of the intellectual. In the fifth province and the Irish mind, Kearney presents a textualised alternative to national community and the intellectual forms as the mode of citizenship which, in material terms, remains outside the experience of most Irish people.

Liam O'Dowd has criticised Kearney and "other contributors to the new cultural studies" for the way they "reached for the problem of identity and a belief in the primacy of ideas to the near exclusion of the material context of those ideas".[40] He proceeds to critique their use of the figure of the intellectual:

> A rather abstract debate has proceeded within the intellectual tradition of the 'old' traditional intellectuals. It has construed their preoccupations with Irish cultural and national identity as a tradition of ideas and texts, rather than as the products of a changing environment of economic, class and power relations. It ignores the changing size, composition and role of the whole intellectual stratum and the extent to which it now depends on state institutions.[41]

O'Dowd identifies the central role of the state in the initial impetus to 'modernise' the Republic's economy, the spur for the "greatly expanded intellectual stratum in Irish

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[39] Kearney *Postnationalist Ireland* p.168.
[40] O'Dowd 'Neglecting the Material Dimension' p.16.
[41] Ibid.

society".[42] The Whitaker-Lemass program of economic reform in the early 1960s is often cited as the gateway through which Ireland stepped out, from De Valeran autarky and self-integrated national identity, into a liberal economy and society.[43] Denis O'Hearn sees these reforms in the Republic and welfarism in Northern Ireland as the point where the two Irish states, like others around the world, began to foster the emergence of 'specific intellectuals' as a measure to attract transnational capital investment.[44] Technical training in areas such as engineering and information technology became a focus for education policy in the Republic. This skill-base has been developed with a view to the "perceived future needs of TNCs [transnational corporations]", rather than as the basis of a sustainable indigenous economy.[45] The earlier state-developmental model of nation-building, through high infrastructure investment and the fostering of local markets, has been largely replaced by the neoliberal state, which courts transnational corporations through tax concessions and labour market controls. Under these conditions of neoliberal economic globalisation, the cosmopolitan-Irish intellectual is less likely to be of the 'traditional' or 'legislative'[46] caste, than to be one of the "intellectually trained"[47] or "professionalised intelligentsia".[48] The social position of the intellectual, which enables the reflexive and syncretic disposition of 'seer, poet or artist', is clearly not the form of life that emerges from the state/market nexus. The structuring and constitutive power of neoliberal globalisation is the most clearly neglected aspect of Kearney's analysis of contemporary Ireland. This absence directs his aspirations for a postnationalist Ireland toward the figuration of identity around an idealist understanding of the intellectual.[49]

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[42] Ibid p.8.

[43] For example, the influential work of Terrence Brown *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-1979* (Glasgow 1981) p.214.

[44] See Denis O'Hearn 'Globalization, "New Tigers," and the End of the Developmental State? The Case of the Celtic Tiger', *Politics & Society* vol.28, no.1 March 2000, p.83-6.

[45] Denis O'Hearn *Inside the Celtic Tiger: The Irish Economy and the Asian Model* (London, Sterling 1998) p.162.

[46] Zygmunt Bauman 'Legislators and Interpreters: culture as the ideology of intellectuals' in *Intimations of postmodernity* Zygmunt Bauman (ed.) (London Routledge 1992) pp.1-25.

[47] Sharp 'Intellectuals in Transition'.

[48] Liam O'Dowd 'Intellectuals and Intelligentsia: a sociological introduction' in Liam O'Dowd (ed) *Intellectuals and Intellectual Life in Ireland* (Belfast 1996) p.3.

[49] See Conor McCarthy *Modernisation: Crisis and Culture in Ireland 1969-1992* (Dublin 2000) pp.222-3. McCarthy notes that "idealism and culturalism" is a problem common to the editors of *The Crane Bag* as well as those associated with Field Day, particularly Brian Friel and Seamus Deane. One they share with revisionist intellectuals, as illustrated in the example of Edna Longley.

Offsetting the dislocating tendency of the intellectual form of life, Kearney argues that sovereignty, rather than identity, should be deterritorialised.[50] He proposes a network of intersecting levels of democratic government, extending from local participatory forms through a federal British-Irish archipelago and on to a body representing the regions of Europe, thus by-passing the nation-state as a sovereign territorial polity.[51] For Kearney, the benefits of this plan would include transcendence of the 'sovereignty neurosis', which locks the Northern conflict in an irredentist zero-sum game, and redress of the 'democratic deficit' that haunts European integration. Like those who see the European Union as an economic boon for semi-peripheral areas such as Ireland, he seeks to hasten the transformation within Europe "from *nation* states to *member* states."[52] He hopes that globalisation and European integration, with the help of state-like polities at the sub- and supranational levels, will work to detach sovereignty from identity. Sovereignty becomes shapeless, a flickering power, flaring in different lights according to overlapping jurisdictions, and identity is acknowledged as multiple rather than monolithic. Its pluralised, multi-relational, unity will be coordinated by the individual. The national categories of land, people and state are thus exchanged for the porous unity of the fifth province.

But this severance of identity and sovereignty has been called into question. James Goodman argues that the shift to a global economy and participation in transnational organisations need not necessarily mean the end of the nation-state:

> Some argue this heralds a move away from nationalism, and into regionalism or 'post-nationalism'. But the transnationalising pressures are emerging in tandem with state structures and national identities — not against them. In many ways the two sources of authority are mutually constitutive: as transnational forces side-step state structures, national states strengthen their authority; as transnational identities become more important, nationalisms are re-geared to meet new, more 'externally'-driven aspirations.[53]

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[50] Matthew Ryan unpublished interview with Richard Kearney, 1999.
[51] Kearney *Postnationalist Ireland* pp.78-9 & 182.
[52] Rory O'Donnell *Ireland in Europe — The Economic Dimension* (Dublin 2002) p.24.
[53] James Goodman 'The Republic of Ireland: Towards a Cosmopolitan Nationalism?' in *Dis/Agreeing Ireland* (London Sterling 1998) p.90.

In the Republic, state-instituted changes in education policy, corporatist deals between unions, business and government, and tax concessions for foreign companies, all illustrate the continued importance of the national state in attracting transnational capital. The familiar role of 'official nationalism' has not diminished, he concludes, despite its being called on to legitimate new tasks for the state. In the Republic, a type of "cosmopolitan nationalism" has emerged, which places the realisation of the national interest in an international context.[54] Likewise, 'aspirational' or oppositional nationalism also persists in this transnational context. As he observes of Northern Irish responses to European integration, 'national ideology' endures amongst and is adapted by both unionists and nationalists:

> In the face of accelerating disempowerment in a regionalised EU political economy, national ideology was being realigned and reconstructed — not surprising given its continuing significance as the single, most viable means of gaining some popular control over the globalised forces shaping peoples lives.[55]

Goodman found support amongst Unionist politicians in the North, for an argument permitting "support for economic integration without having to shift political ground on the national question".[56] Even within Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party, regional economics were juggled with national politics, so that "pragmatic support for cross-border economic initiatives could be combined with repeated demands to 'seal the border' for security reasons".[57] Also, in Sinn Féin there was hope that:

> The EU could ... assist in the decolonisation of Northern Ireland, by offering a neutral reference point for negotiations, under-writing human rights and assisting the socio-economic transition in Ireland as a whole, as well as encouraging more progressive forms of North-South dialogue and socio-economic integration — that would begin "to take on a political dimension because it's clearly the basis of more cohesive political structures — social and economic cooperation".[58]

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[54] Ibid p.92. Goodman argues that this form of "official cosmopolitan nationalism" has been particularly useful for "Southern state elites" in the way it combines "aspiration and authority": "The aspiration to independence through national statehood is retained, although it is submerged in a range of international linkages that transform national divisions into common interests. In this way, nationalism is broadened and extended beyond the purely national framework, although statehood is retained as a primary political objective."

[55] James Goodman *Nationalism and Transnationalism: The National Conflict in Ireland and European Union Integration* (Aldershot 1996) p.315.

[56] Goodman *Nationalism and Transnationalism* p.284.

[57] Ibid pp.284-5.

[58] Ibid p.288.

In the pursuit of territorially based polity and identity, the political imaginary of nationalism seems to have more incorporative power than Kearney anticipated.

Linking the abstract integration of the intellectual form of life with a material, regionally located, community, Kearney's project contains the germ of a resolution of the dislocation/parochialism binary. But its implied reflexivity fails to take into account the constitutive power of neoliberal globalisation. Chapters Three, Four and Five of this thesis investigate the cultural manifestations of the difficulties and potentialities for the formation of the self under these conditions. While Kearney is wary of the 'cult of solipsism' in modernism and the dangers of "uncritical immersion in the anonymous tide of modern consumerism",[59] he concedes some fundamental ground to the hyper-individuation of neoliberal ideology by making the individual the primary organising locus of the fifth province. The expansion of the intellectual stratum has been overwhelmingly as a group servicing the technical and specific needs of the market: the computer programmer working for Dell, in O'Dowd's 'professionalised intelligentsia' rather than a Joyce or Toland.[60] Neoliberal globalisation works against the formation of the types of reflexivity Kearney sees as the ideal synthesis of critique and construction. The intellectually trained wo.ker is thus at a structural disadvantage when attempting to strike a balance between 'fidelity to local origins' and 'a counter-fidelity' to the mobility required in the global labour market. The technocrat is yet another tier of integration in neoliberal market-society, whilst the ground-level identity is that of the consumer. Kearney's hope to hold back 'solipsism' and 'anonymity' would thus need a sounder structure than the syncretic individual, which is itself at present the channel of the global consumer economy.

The intellectual form of life, like the nation, is a formation of abstract integration. Yet the nation, in its formal structures and images — 'people, land, state' — has had the breadth to incorporate those denied artistic production or writing as activities constitutive of the self. In offering the deterritorialised sovereignty of state-like structures in the European

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[59] Richard Kearney 'Between Politics and Literature: The Irish Cultural Journal' p.170.
[60] O'Dowd 'Intellectuals and Intelligentsia' p.3.

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Union and regional democracy, in tandem with an aestheticised formation of the self, Kearney abandons the nation as a key structure of abstract integration. As Kevin Whelan observes, this regional model proposes the "benign EC umbrella" as the shield for regional-based cultures against "the deleterious effects of the centralisation and globalisation of the world economy".[61] The European Union, in its redistributive and juridical capacity, might well ameliorate some of the effects of global capitalism, but it remains an economic entity in competition with the main power of neoliberal globalisation, the United States of America. Exchanging the nation-state for the neoliberal-state or Euro-member-region need not enable an identitarian link between the local and the global. Indeed, Whelan suggests that the aspiration to protect regional cultures, through the EU, is "quasi-Panglossian in its benignity."[62] The diminution of the nation-state could actually leave regional cultures open to the cultural contradictions of consumption. As we see in Derry's The Fifth Province, the encounter between region and world, on the terrain of globalised consumption, can empty-out place, history and belonging even as they are ostensibly reasserted.

Navigating Irony and Commitment

Like Kearney's, Seamus Deane's critical work has been an attempt to articulate and analyse specific Irish cultural formations, while not reducing them to an essence. He has dismantled many of the stereotypes that emerged from Ireland's colonial relationships, by setting them within the discursive frames of history and power, rather than merely allowing autonomy to the work of art. He has also interrogated both the self-integrated representations of nationalism and the apparent freedom of cosmopolitanism. And throughout, he has returned to a critique of the pluralism that emerges from capitalism's truncated liberalism. Negotiation of these elements is the critical correlate of the Irish political and cultural predicament. As Conor McCarthy observes, Deane's task is "to write criticism at a time and from a place where critical authority itself seems to be at

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[61] Kevin Whelan 'The Region and the Intellectuals' in *On Intellectuals and Intellectual Life in Ireland: International, Comparative and Historical Contexts*, Liam O'Dowd (ed.), (Belfast 1996) p.116.
[62] Whelan 'The Region and the Intellectuals' p.117.

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stake, and when a conventional literary history or bourgeois criticism ... seems no longer possible: Northern Ireland at war, and the Republic seeking to modernise in the postmodern age of late capitalism."[63] Deane's avowed task is to find 'a story' in Irish history and writing, which can accommodate genuine pluralism.[64]

His criticisms of the integral tradition of nationalism and of a fetishised cosmopolitanism provide the ground for reconsideration of the "relationship between our idea of the human subject and our idea of human communities".[65] These critical insights do not take the reductive step of rejecting nationalism or cosmopolitanism out of hand; rather, he attempts to bring them into dialogue with each other and to recoup, one from the other, elements for a reformation of the relation between self and community. His work charts a course in and against the kind of literary and cultural criticism that consistently offers "the postmodernist simulacrum of pluralism" at the expense of "the search for a legitimating mode of nomination and origin".[66] He thus establishes some of the central concerns of this thesis: the misapprehension of abstracted forms of sociality as individual self-authorship, the alienating consequences of this misrecognition and the submerged mechanisms of the socially-integrative constitution of the self. The different manifestations of this 'search for a legitimating mode' in recent Irish novels will be the object of this thesis. At times this search will be noted in its apparent abandonment, as in the solipsistic texts discussed in Chapter Four. At others it will appear as a wary hope in aesthetic form itself, as in the novels considered in Chapter Three. In Chapter Five, the 'simulacrum of pluralism', offered by celebratory globalism, is itself seen to function as a 'legitimating mode' in the work of Dermot Bolger and Colm Tóibín. There, Deane's own *Reading in the Dark* will provide a contrast, which shows in narrative practice the abstract constitution of self in formative relation to a situated social circumstance. There

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[63] McCarthy *Modernisation* p.221.
[64] See Seamus Deane 'General Introduction', *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* vol.1, (Derry 1991) p.xix: Deane states: "There *is* a story here, a meta-narrative, which is, we believe, hospitable to all the micro-narratives that, from time to time, achieved prominence as the official version of the true history, political and literary, of the island's past and present"
[65] Seamus Deane 'Introduction' in *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* (Minneapolis 1990) p.3.
[66] ibid p.19.

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are common concerns in Deane's criticism and fiction.[67] The practical effects of the novel form on his critical concerns will be investigated in Chapter Five. Here, however, I want to consider his attempt to discern a "securely Irish" story, through a critical practice "unblemished by Irishness".[68] How can he identify a "meta-narrative ... hospitable to all the micro-narratives", as he claims to do in the General Introduction to *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*?[69] How does the critic find a national narrative without recourse to the essentialist pitfalls of "national character", while simultaneously resisting resignation to the fissured self and fragmentary sociality of much postmodernist criticism?

In a review of the *Field Day Anthology*, Colm Tóibín labelled the editors "unreconstructed nationalists", criticising their difficulty in understanding the Republic as a political and social entity unto itself.[70] This attack built on an earlier review of Field Day pamphlets by Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson and Edward Said,[71] in which Tóibín had claimed:

> the social and cultural revolution of the 1960s has left the artists in the Field Day group singularly unmoved. This is, perhaps, what distinguishes Field Day as a group ... The Ireland that they imagine is the Ireland of the 1950s ... they write as though nothing has ever changed: their Ireland is distinctly pre-decimal.[72]

These complaints about Field Day's supposed anachronism echo Edna Longley's broad suspicions of the anti-revisionist position. For Longley, critics like Deane simply disguise an exclusivist nationalism, of the D. P Moran variety, behind the mask of more recent critical theory.[73] David Lloyd receives similar treatment, accused of piling "abstraction upon abstraction", only to obscure "a sinister purity" at work beneath.[74] She argues that Deane, in particular, is caught between 'destiny' (a nationalist trope and marker of Irish

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[67] See Liame Harte 'History Lessons: Postcolonialism and Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark*', *Irish University Review* vol.30, no.1 2000, pp.149-62.
[68] Seamus Deane 'Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea' in *Ireland's Field Day* (London 1985) p.58.
[69] Deane 'General Introduction' *The Field Day Anthology* p.xix.
[70] Colm Tóibín 'Confusion of Literary Traditions' *Sunday Independent*, 24 November 1991 p.8. Quoted in McCarthy *Modernisation* p.219.
[71] These pamphlets have been collected as *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* (Minneapolis 1990).
[72] Colm Tóibín 'Three Green Fields' *Fortnight*, no.271, March 1989, p.21.
[73] Edna Longley *The Living Stream: Literature and Revisionism in Ireland* (Newcastle upon Tyne 1994) p.25.
[74] Longley *The Living Stream* p.31.

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particularity) and 'promiscuity' (a travesty of liberal pluralism).[75] Dressing-up and generalising Field Day's "Derry meta-narrative" — merely a nationalism alienated from both Belfast and Dublin, according to Longley — Deane is forced to trace a line between the essentialism of destiny and the fragmentary difference of promiscuity.[76] The key critcism is, of course, that destiny wins out in the end, a secret triumph of Derry over Derrida in Deane.

Smyth has picked up the terms "irony and commitment", which Eagleton offered as a dialectical way through nationalism,[77] but presents them as a binary plaguing the revisionist debate in Irish studies.[78] 'Irony' thus represents the postmodern, postcolonial theory that enabled the "assault on the centred subject" and delegitimised the assumptions of authenticity at the heart of nationalist figurations of identity. 'Commitment' stands as the critical response to the rise of revisionist historiography, a qualified attempt to recover "nationalism as a politico-cultural paradigm". If Longley seeks to defend the autonomy of the work of art from the contextualising grasp of both nationalism and deconstruction, Smyth's concern is with the 'strategic essentialism' of those who seek to recoup aspects of nationalism in the face of a radically relativist postmodernism and a depoliticised postcolonialism. Thus:

> If postal theory was in danger of throwing the baby of meaningful resistance out with the bathwater of bourgeois imperialism, is not the 'new' essentialism liable to allow the worst effects of a complacent historiography, and the authoritarian mimeticism upon which it relies, to return through the back door?[79]

Like Longley, he sees the dangers in committed essentialism as greater than those in ironic relativism — because the former is prone to appropriation by more malign forces

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[75] Ibid p.25.
[76] Ibid p.39.
[77] Terry Eagleton 'Nationalism: Irony and Commitment' in *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* (Minneapolis 1990), pp23-42.
[78] Gerry Smyth 'Irish Studies, Postcolonial Theory and the 'New' Essentialism' *Irish Studies Review* vol. 7, no.2, 1999, pp.211-220.
[79] Ibid p.217.

than cultural critics and historians. But he concludes that by shifting between these terms the debate is unlikely to locate for Irish studies "a politics worthy of our investment".[80]

Longley's criticism of 'destiny' speaks for a liberalism that requires the separation of art and politics, while at the same time holding the aesthetic as socially redemptive. The "good poem" thus transcends the world, but in so doing achieves the aloof intervention of the emblem. Hence, her rejection of Deane's historicising critique of ideology in the aesthetic. By contrast, Smyth's fear of the return of essentialism, as anti-revisionism, emerges from his conflation of nationalism with essentialism. He is keen to keep hold of the lessons of poststructuralist critique of the centred subject, but his view of identity as 'constructed' need not necessarily exclude the nation as a constituent frame in the formation of persons. Resolute anti-essentialism forecloses the possibility that the nation-state is one conditioning socio-political structure amongst others. The defence of the 'constructed subject' — against bourgeois individualism and nationalist essence — falls back upon a conception of the individual curiously impervious to the constitutive influence of the national abstraction of social life.

Deane's work has, in part been a critique of the ideological subtext of both commentators. With an eye to the ascendancy of revisionist liberalism, he warns of its consequences for the formation of the contemporary Irish self:

> The kindest view of liberalism in present-day Ireland would credit it with the wish to improve the existing political-economic system in such a manner that people would be as economically secure and as free as possible from all the demonic influences of 'ideologies', religious and political. Its buzz word is 'pluralism'; its idea of the best of all possible worlds is based on the hope of depoliticizating the society to the point where it is essentially a consumerist organism, absorbing the whole array of goods that can be produced within the free market. ... the emphasis is on the idea of the individual and his/her liberty within a system that is junior to the individual self. ... The full realization of the individual self is regarded as an ambition that institutions exist to serve. Those that do not – religion, education, the 1937 Constitution, for example – are to be liberalized, gentrified or abolished.[81]

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[80] Ibid p.218. For Smyth, eco-criticism would seem to offer a way beyond the impasse. See Gerry Smyth 'Shite and Sheep: An Ecocritical Perspective on Two Recent Irish Novels' *Irish University Review* vol. 30, no.1, 2000, pp.163-72.

[81] Seamus Deane 'Wherever Green is Read' in *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism 1938 – 1994* Ciaran Brady (ed) (Dublin 1994) p. 238-9.

If for liberalism the individual is prior to all other social parts then Deane notes that in Ireland this translates to a present-centred pluralism, in which "everything else is, literally, anachronistic". Elsewhere, he identified the germ of this type of pluralism in Joyce.[82] While much has been made of his criticism of Yeats's 'literary Unionism', the other figure in Deane's argument is in fact Joyce who, rejecting Yeatsian cultural nationalism, made "a fetish of exile, alienation and dislocation".[83] This pluralism, which incorporates and harmonises various mythic frameworks and narratives in *Finnegan's Wake*, ultimately flattens difference: "the harmony of indifference, ... in which everything is a version of something else, where sameness rules over diversity, where contradiction is finally and disquietingly written out."[84] The sense of the individual as author of their own creations, the sovereign source of meaning, is made possible only by an intense and obscuring abstraction of social interchange. At this attenuated level of integration, pluralism is reduced to "the egregious tolerance of the indifferent to anything or anyone else who is willing to live in a hermetically sealed microclimate of individual or group privacy."[85] Deane's critique thus attempts to force liberalism to confront its own thwarted aspirations. Self-realisation of individual potential should not be reduced to the radical difference of each from each, he argues: rather, truly free individuality will be an aspect of a society that fosters differentiation and integration in complementary relation to each other.[86]

It is difficult to see how the tussle between essentialism and pluralism could leave any form of nationalism 'unreconstructed'[87] and, in fact, this problem is considered both in

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[82] Deane 'Heroic Styles' p.56.
[83] Ibid p.58.
[84] Ibid p.56.
[85] Deane 'Wherever Green is Read' p.239.
[86] See Karl Marx *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* David McLellan (ed), (Oxford 1977) p.91. This goes beyond the liberalism of "positive freedom" by considering individuality as being socially constituted, as Marx noted in the: "It is above all necessary to avoid restoring 'society' as a fixed abstraction opposed to the individual. The individual is the social being. ... However much he is a particular individual (and it is precisely his particularity that makes him an individual and a truly individual communal being) man is just as much the totality, the ideal totality, the subjective existence of society as something thought and felt."
[87] For a succinct refutation of the 'unreconstructed' label see McCarthy *Modernisation* p.220-1.

Field Day publications and by Deane himself. Hence, his outline of the project of *The Field Day Anthology*:

> It is an act of repossession, resuming into the space of three massive volumes a selection of Irish literary, political, economic, philosophical, and other writings and presenting it, with a degree of ironic self-consciousness, as an integral and unitary "tradition" or amalgam of traditions. The point is not to establish a canon as such; it is to engage in the action of establishing a system that has an enabling, a mobilizing energy, the energy of assertion and difference, while remaining aware that all such systems — like anthologies of other national literatures — are fictions that have inscribed within them principles of hierarchy and of exclusion, as well as inclusion, that become evident only when the mass of material is organised into a particular form.[88]

The nationalism of 'an integral and unitary tradition' is thus put under the interrogative pressure of 'ironic self-consciousness'. The 'system' described here hinges on the double action of formation and critique, so that the mammoth achievement of the *Anthology* is introduced as "an act of definition rather than a definitive action".[89] Longley is unwilling to admit the possibility of this double project: "It's difficult to canonise and deconstruct in the same gesture, to place a sign of erasure over four thousand pages."[90] Should the self-deprecating declaration of a knowingly fictive order be considered sufficient to open the canonical edifice to other voices? Perhaps the addition of volumes IV and V, containing writing by women, provide the answer and an example of this system in action. As McCarthy observes, the later volumes "compromise and embarrass, and implicitly criticise the *Anthology* as a whole".[91] The expansion of the *Anthology* may then be not merely a matter of editorial humility, but an enactment of the combined 'energy of assertion and difference'.[92]

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[88] Deane 'Introduction' *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* p.15

[89] Deane 'General Introduction' *The Field Day Anthology* p.xx.

[90] Edna Longley 'Belfast Diary' *London Review of Books*, 9 January 1992, p.21.

[91] McCarthy *Modernisation* p.224. See also Dympna Callaghan 'An Interview with Seamus Deane' *Social Text* no.38, Spring 1994, p.45. Deane, himself, describes the later volume as a critique of the earlier collections: "In a sense, Field Day is publishing volume 4 as a collective and as a critique of the first three volumes, but actually the work of collecting and critiquing is in the hands of the panel members, none of whom are members of Field Day."

[92] See Angela Brook *et al* (eds) 'Preface' in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, vol.V, p.xxxiii: "What had originally been intended as a single volume of women's writings, supplementing and interrogating the 1991 Field Day Anthology, and operating within similar parameters, quickly developed into a much larger, multidisciplinary project".

In an early call to exorcise the "hungry Hegelian ghost" of "essence" from Irish culture, Deane proposed that: "Everything, including our politics and our literature, has to be rewritten — i.e. re-read."[93] The project would be to expunge the stereotypes of "Irishness" that had "caused a long colonial concussion" and to free contemporary Ireland from its own reactionary and reductive designations of identity.[94] The strong causality, which Deane ascribed to largely textual stereotypes, called forth the mammoth textual response of the *Anthology*. This is a counter-discursive intervention, but one restricted mostly to literature. There, rewriting and re-reading are seen to compose a textual corrective to colonisation.

With disappointment more than opprobrium, McCarthy observes of Field Day's faith in the text that: "Only a group of writers and academics could ascribe such liberatory power to the act of reading."[95] The idealism of such textual politics is indeed a weakness in Deane's anti-colonial critique, the shape of which can be seen in the introduction to *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*. Turning from the Imperial distortions of Irish culture in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, he rejects the kind of postmodern anti-essentialism "that refuses the idea of naming" and which discounts the legitimating power of origin. To succumb to this is "to pass from one kind of colonizing experience to another".[96] It is an ersatz pluralism, he continues: "it plays with diversity and makes a mystique of it; it is the concealed imperialism of the multinational, the infinite compatibility of all cultures with one another envisaged in terms of the ultimate capacity of all computers to read one another."[97] The abstraction of culture away from more material, less interchangeable, conditions of origin allows transcendence and autonomy to pass for pluralism. This echoes the pamphlet in which he first proposed the *Anthology* project, where he criticised the Joycean 'harmony of indifference ... in which everything is a version of something else'.[98] The absorbent abstraction Joyce achieved in literature,

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[93] Deane 'Heroic Styles' p.58.
[94] Ibid
[95] McCarthy *Modernisation* p.223.
[96] Deane 'Introduction' *Nationalism Colonialism and Literature* p.19.
[97] Ibid
[98] Deane 'Heroic Styles' p.56.

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which empties-out the specificity of cultures, is homologous to the capacity for synthesis characteristic of modern / postmodern society.

The commodity form is also a manifestation of the flattening of difference through promiscuous interchangeablity. This is, of course, how the multinational corporation refigures social life. Deane recognises the common process of abstraction of social relations into increasingly disembodied forms evident in the detached polyphony of the novel and the always exchangeable commodity. These abstractions are not destructive of sociality *per se*; rather, their tendency to establish the dominance of disembodiment and dislocation alienates the individual from other, more concrete, levels of social life. Eagleton has criticised Deane for reducing 'national character' to a 'discursive fiction' and thereby participating in the liberal, over-compensatory fear of essentialism.[99] There is thus need to reassert a materialist analysis of the categories of 'nation' or 'origin'. Origin may indeed be discursively mediated, but this does not mean it is therefore susceptible to replacement by an infinite range of chosen identities. Such effacement of origin by choice is one of the abiding ideological assumptions of globalisation. To this degree, Deane's 'act of definition' in the *Anthology* displaces the stereotypical assignment (and adoption) of 'Irishness' in colonisation and attempts to resist the forced availability of all cultures and places to the requirements of the global market. But the *Anthology* project's idealism makes it accord pre-eminence to the textually abstracted forms required by such availability, thus inadvertently reproducing the conditions for a flattened global pluralism.

Deane's response is to reassert the legitimating, *originary*, power of narrative, while coupling it with a reflexive limit: 'an act of definition rather than a definitive action'; a 'meta-narrative hospitable to micro-narratives'; a 'story' with its hubristic pretensions disrupted by 'ironic self-consciousness'; a canon inviting deconstruction. The loose narrative unity of the *Anthology* is thus the model for the nation as container of

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[99] Terry Eagleton 'Rewriting Ireland' *Bullán: an Irish Studies Journal* 1998, p.137: "For a materialist, it would be remarkable if men and women who for lengthy periods of time had shared roughly the same social conditions, with whatever divergences of region, gender, ethnic provenance and the rest, did not manifest some psychological patterns in common."

difference. If Ireland's contemporary "story" is, as Francis Mulhern put it in a review of the *Anthology*, "not 'national' in any sense that would satisfy the adepts of origin and destiny", then Deane's critical engagement with counter-colonial stereotypes of Irishness is useful in dismantling the residual blockages to difference.[100] Here, Deane's work intersects with Kearney. Conversely, for Mulhern, if the 'story' is not "simply 'international' in the schematic terms of liberal utopianism or traditionalist phobia", then the reflexive act of definition offers a cultural reterritorialisation reducible to neither the sovereign individual nor parochial assertions of difference.[101] In this respect, Deane's critique of historical revisionism is not so much a nostalgic reclamation of 'fusty old Irish nationalism', as a critical response to the local manifestations of the ideology of autonomy which legitimates the dislocating abstractions of globalisation.

Revisionism tends to represent itself as pragmatic, rather than ideological, but this disavowal betrays an ideological content: a non-position suggests a degree of comfort with present conditions, amounting to affirmation. However, the anti-nationalist ideology of revisionism reveals only part of its *interested* nature. As Eagleton has argued, revisionism's set of conceptual tools is an awkward assemblage of postmodernism and liberalism — though it is unaware of its debt to either. Rather than being viewed as oppositional, kicking away the last struts of the national mystique in Ireland, revisionism should be seen as a part of the immediate cultural and critical milieu, which leaves unexamined the global ascendancy of a form of economy and society that, in the end, undermines liberalism itself. Thus Eagleton:

> What is wrong with these scholars from a radical viewpoint is not that they are revisionists, but that they are middle-class liberals. And what is wrong with middle-class liberalism is not on the whole its values, most of which are entirely admirable, but the fact that it obtusely refuses to recognise the depth of social transformation which would be necessary for those values to be realised in universal form. It remains committed to sustaining a socio-economic system which makes a mockery of the very values it promotes.[102]

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[100] Francis Mulhern *The Present Lasts a Long Time* (Notre Dame & Cork 1998) p.157. See also Luke Gibbons 'Dialogue Without the Other' *Radical Philosophy* no.67, Summer, 1994, pp.28-31.
[101] Mulhern Ibid
[102] Eagleton *Crazy John and the Bishop* p.320.

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Deane's insistence that 'there is a story' running through the history of Irish culture and politics should be understood in this wider ideological frame. His critical response resists the adoption of fragmentary method — "no system, no metanarrative, just discrete issues discreetly interlinked now and then"[103] — to analyse an apparently fragmented phenomenon. If social life, the constitution of identity and the economy are increasingly experienced as fragmentary, then this does not necessarily mean they have become unstructured. It may, in fact, be an indication of a generalised shift to higher degrees of abstraction that, in turn, require an analysis which keeps hold of the notion of structuring conditions, but is alive to the possibility that structures have extended themselves into unfamiliar forms. Mulhern's conclusion that "Irish culture, like so many late-twentieth-century cultures, is an unprogrammed hybrid, the shifting repertoire of social initiative and resistance in the island"[104] is thus trapped at the level of the phenomenon; a limitation Deane's narrative of 'assertion and difference' attempts to escape.

Deane's argument, that the conditioning influence of origin and the search for the threads of historical narratives are not necessarily repressive, is not nationalism hidden in contemporary theoretical garb. But, while critical of nationalism, he is wary of the emergent postnational conceptions of a future Ireland. McCarthy notes this two-way vision:

> Deane can see the oppressive and narrow nature of the cultural nationalism represented in an earlier generation of critics by a figure like Corkery, but he rightly questions the new 'modernity' that is being ushered in in the process of dismantling the cultural and intellectual legacy of such figures.[105]

This dual perspective might be the departure point for the formulation of a reflexive intellectual practice. In his recourse to text, Deane is susceptible to the structural bias of the intellectual form. However, the attempt to set plurality within specificity, fragment within narrative, critique within construction, signals an intellectual work that is reflexive and critical *in place*, rather than a move toward transcendence. It is resistant to the straight homology between the disembedded quality of the intellectual form of life and the projected future of a historically emplaced community. Here we find a critical

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[103] Deane 'Wherever Green is Read' p.241
[104] Mulhern *The Present Lasts a Long Time* p.157.
[105] McCarthy *Modernisation* p.217.

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redirection of the intellectual form that will be further investigated, in Chapter Five, as it appears in Deane's *Reading in the Dark*. The structural characteristics of the novel form are there set in relation to the those of the intellectual form. The result might offer an alternative to the version of aestheticised life that requires an unmooring of the self from the more material aspects of community.

Leaving Home

In Eagleton's alphabetical guide to contemporary Irish society and culture *The Truth about the Irish*, the entry under 'God' states simply: "See Gay Byrne". The television and radio presenter is often represented as one of the forces of modernisation that began to transform the Republic in the 1960s. He is seen as challenging the conservative silences around sexuality, religion and the family, wresting them from the Catholic Church and Fianna Fáil. In 1989, Fintan O'Toole wrote: "Gay Byrne's extraordinarily central place in the Irish life of the past three decades is due not to his own obvious skills ... but to their opposite: to the culture of silence which surrounds them."[106] For O'Toole, Byrne's *Late Late Show* emerged as a forum for the confessional outpouring of personal traumas and the airing of public scandals, "founded on Irish people's inarticulacy, embarrassment and silence, on speaking for us because we were — and to a degree still are — afraid to speak for ourselves."[107] Byrne's voice, "calm, seductive, passionless", was thus a clear, liberal, call in the conservative wilderness.

The final *Late Late Show* aired in 1999, but in that twilight year the television god had died early for O'Toole. In a near-final show, Byrne interviewed the singer Sinéad O'Connor, at a time when she adopted the title Mother Mary Bernadette, wore a Roman collar and claimed to be ordained as a priest. The interview is described by O'Toole as "the worst case of crass voyeurism in RTÉ's history".[108] He condemned the show thus: "There is, in her actions, nothing to debate, no general enlightenment to be gained. There

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[106] Fintan O'Toole *The Lie of the Land: Irish Identities* (New York 1998) p.146.
[107] Ibid p.147.
[108] Fintan O'Toole 'Late Late subjected Sinead to crass voyeurism' *The Irish Times*, May 7, 1999, p.14.

is only private trauma and inner turmoil breaking the surface and demanding attention."[109] This is interesting for the way it imposes a compassionate limit to the sovereignty of what O'Toole had, in 1989, approvingly termed "Gay Byrne's pluralist republic of entertainment".[110] O'Toole had celebrated Byrne's carnalvalesque TV agora, where, "the bishop owes his authority not to tradition but to his ability to sing an oul' song and the politician's power can be diminished by his inability to tell a good yarn".[111] Earlier, he had seen some benefit in subjecting social issues to spectacle, where the junkie with AIDS is followed by a song and dance. Transforming Ireland into entertainment had been a necessary technique for undermining both bishop and politician and thus relieving the oppressive silence that prevailed from the 1940s to the 1980s. Curiously, it is precisely this old Ireland to which O'Toole appeals in 1999:

> For all the terrible things about the Ireland in which Gay Byrne used to function, one of its virtues was a certain sense of tact. There was, in general, a capacity to recognise a human being in distress when you saw one. There was some element of decency, of discretion, in the way people approached pain and grief and disturbance. Maybe there was too much tact, too little inclination to intrude. But that reserve came at least from some sense of compassion and it often showed Ireland at its quiet best.[112]

O'Toole might well have appealed to the right of the individual to dignity and care, but instead he reached nostalgically for an Ireland he claimed had "disappeared".[113] In another uncharacteristic move, he also brings together "a small town in the West" and the Dublin in which he grew up, as places unified in "an underlying capacity for kindness".[114] In 1989 his Ireland had been more ambiguous: "fluid, contradictory, elusive, a country in which the terms either/or are replaced by the terms both/and. ... both traditional and modern, both conservative and liberal, both Catholic and materialist."[115] But at the turn of the twentieth-century: "We live at a time when misery, grief and distress have become forms of entertainment." In the rush from the Ireland imagined by

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[109] Ibid.

[110] O'Toole *The Lie of the Land* p.153.

[111] Ibid p.153.

[112] O'Toole 'Late Late subjected Sinead to crass voyeurism'.

[113] See Fintan O'Toole 'The Lie of the Land' in *Black Hole Green Card: The Disappearance of Ireland* (Dublin 1994) pp.15-32.

[114] O'Toole 'Late Late subjected Sinead to crass voyeurism'.

[115] O'Toole *The Lie of the Land* p.150.

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Pearse and De Valera, which for O'Toole is often too slow, some communal sense had apparently gone astray.[116]

To understand this shift, beyond the arbitrary and sterile assertions of 'good taste', we might consider the *Late Late Show*, old and new, as part of a process common to television talk and to inurement to the pain of others. The qualitatively more abstract experience of the broadcast medium can have an affective power in itself. Here, the material form mediates more abstracted social relations than those envisaged in O'Toole's liberal modernisation. The value of the spectacle, which had first undermined the established social authority of priest or politician, can in turn destabilise liberal values. The organic integration characteristic of conservative social relations is · diminished by the disembedding transports of television. Aside from the specific quick-fire mix of the 'variety' show, it is a general characteristic of broadcast media to render social relations more abstract. Even where the content derives from 'traditional' culture, the message is not carried without some formal effect. Take the example of the broadcast ringing of the Angelus bell: the social action of prayer is turned from the religious community, within and immediately surrounding one's home, and directed through an absent or disembodied co-religionist. A similar process applies to liberal society itself. The contract of respect, which governs relations between free individuals in the pluralist ideal, is weakened by the conversion of the particular individual (who, one must assume, is much like oneself) into the image of an individual as a composite aggregation of traits, or a figure reduced to only one: funny, insane, informative, starving. The complex richness of liberalism's primary unit is flattened. The values of tolerance and respect, which guard the individual against the desires of others, cannot as mere assertions re-animate those images as persons, that is, put them within a category of inherent worth. Within the media's abstracting frame, there is a shift in how people see themselves in relation to others. Another category layer is added, which retains a relational quality and can be felt intensely but, at the same time, diminishes those concrete others and 'thins'

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[116] O'Toole's anti-nationalist politics are well established. See *16 On 16: Irish Writers on the Easter Rising* (Dublin 1988) pp.41-2. See also Tom Hayden and Fintan O'Toole "'The End of the Troubles?" An Exchange' *New York Review of Books* vol.xiv, no 6, 9 April 1998, pp.77-9.

their status as fully embodied fellow human. Sinead O'Connor was subjected to the same process that had helped to 'modernise' Ireland, a process that continues, in other forms, to push sociality towards alienation by thinning the relations of self to other.

I have dwelt on this fragment from O'Toole's work because it is indicative of a particular problem in contemporary liberal anti-nationalism. O'Toole is well aware of the precariousness of the Republic's hold on prosperity in an economy dominated by Transnational Corporations,[117] but has some difficulty connecting that form of deterritorialisation with the cultural and social formations which allow the abandonment of the nation as a frame for the abstract constitution of the self. The difficulty is surprising when one considers the themes of his many essays on contemporary Ireland. A "penchant for aestheticisation", in John Kenny's phrase, dominates O'Toole's analyses of Irish culture and society.[118] He is unable to recognise the interconnection of these processes, I would argue, because here he comes up against his own practice. Kenny suggests that O'Toole's insistence on Irish dislocation might be autobiography writ large:

> As Ireland's *soi distant* über-iconoclast, he is so intent on affirming his stance of the putatively objective outsider that he tends to look at things without any participatory empathy. Quite understandably critical of the badly planned Dublin suburb of Crumlin in which he grew up, and the weird sense of placelessness he feels it encouraged, his, I think, is a classic case of the transference of individual experience into ethnic generalisation.[119]

We could extend this incisive observation, beyond the experience of suburban non-place, to read O'Toole's work in relation to intellectual practice and the generalisation of its disembedding form across the social whole. The problem is not so much O'Toole's lack of self-reflexivity, as the general shift of which it is only a manifestation. Tóibín has noted that "literary critics writing about history and politics often mistake them for texts."[120] This is true of O'Toole, but the aestheticisation of social relations and the self are nonetheless not simply the residual style of a former theatre critic. They are characteristic of a real shift in integration and constitution. O'Toole's approach to

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[117] O'Toole *Black Hole Green Card* (Dublin 1994) pp.11-12. See also Fintan O'Toole *After the Ball* (Dublin 2003).

[118] John Kenny '"Elephants are contagious": Fintan O'Toole's Ireland' *Irish Studies Review* vol.7, no.1, 1999, p.84.

[119] Ibid p.86.

[120] Colm Tóibín 'Playboys of the GPO' *London Review of Books*, 18 April 1996, p.15.

Ireland-as-text is an analytical style which clearly reflects its own historical moment while also encoding its utopianism. In place of the nationalist aspiration for territorially-based identity and community we find a utopia that can be conceived only via the high abstraction of the intellectual form. Writers can savour descriptions of the passing of the national form — so much so that they can mistake the supersession of a set of Revival images for the disappearance of the thing itself — because they are, in an often unacknowledged contradiction, assured of their autonomy by their particular social formation. Others who set off from the national shore, but are unable to exploit the constitutive abstraction of writing or other media, might not find the island of the self-authored self, but rather an alienation more banal and ingrained than those previously produced by either industrial capitalism or colonisation.

If the dominance of the intellectual form of life is an unacknowledged presence in O'Toole, the ideology of autonomy, along with its contradictions, makes a more pointed appearance in Tóibín. O'Toole's *Black Hole, Green Card* is dedicated to the latter and there is much anti-nationalist ground in common between them.[121] The sense of autonomy experienced by the literary intellectual is described thus by Tóibín:

> When you write, whether in England or in Ireland, it feels like an act of will. You decide each sentence, you cut and reshape, you reimagine; you change the ending; you make an infinite number of choices and decisions. The process of imagining and writing seems like an entirely autonomous process. What I do comes from me, the writer feels. It is entirely mine. I am free.[122]

However, this feeling of freedom poses a paradox for the novelist and editor, when he introduces his own selection of canonical Irish prose with a description of the tropes and traits he sees as particular to, or at least recurrent in, Irish fiction: dislocation, fire, the murder of women, absent parents, domestic disharmony, drink and dance. If the experience of writing is intensely individual and seemingly autonomous, how "is it then that we can find a shape for Irish writing which goes beyond the personal into the

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[121] On the Easter Rising Tóibín is unequivocal: "I loathe everything about it, every single moment of it." See Tóibín 'Playboys of the GPO' *London Review of Books* 18 April 1996, p.16. O'Toole makes a similar case: "If Pearse is Christ, give us Barabbas." See Fintan O'Toole '1916: The Failure of Failure' in *16 On 16* (ed) Dermot Bolger (Dublin 1988) p.42.
[122] Colm Tóibín 'Introduction' *The Penguin Book of Irish Fiction* (ed) Colm Tóibín (London 1999) pp.xxii-xxiii.

communal?"[123] Tóibín does not answer his question in the Introduction: as a prominent revisionist, he is wary of the connotations of the idea of 'national culture'.[124] He appears confident in the durability of the popular culture of the Republic, yet yearns for a freedom from place.[125] Eagleton detects similar ambivalence in Tóibín's novel *The Blackwater Lightship*: "Unlike some of his more hardboiled revisionist colleagues, he is aware of the need for roots and communal allegiances and aware, too, of their specious allure."[126] This tension will be of central concern to my analysis of Tóibín's fiction in Chapter Five. Here, I will consider the ambivalence enacted in his writing life as a whole. He characterises his journalistic and critical work as a place where he can "get the poison out", his fiction as a zone requiring "reconciliation".[127] In part, this division of labour can be attributed to the exigencies which come with differences of form and intended audience. There is, however, another interpretive step one might take, by relating Tóibín's division to the mechanics of narrative connected to the constitution of the self and social integration. This step goes some way to answering the question he posed for himself of how the apparent autonomy of the writer can sit within a common shape of historical and contemporary culture.

Tóibín's difficulty, in relating the individual to the communal, stems from how he equates the 'feeling' with the phenomenon, equating a sense of autonomy with actual autonomy. Owning one's writing as "entirely mine" overlooks the substance of the work. A novel is an artefact of language and language always precedes and exceeds the

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[123] Ibid p.xxiii.

[124] See Matthew Ryan unpublished interview with Colm Tóibín, 1999. On Daniel Corkery's three part conception of Irish national culture — Catholicism, nationalism and land — Tóibín sees only land as having any enduring conditioning effect on identity in Ireland. See also Tóibín 'Introduction' *The Penguin Book of Irish Fiction* p.xx.

[125] Matthew Ryan unpublished interview with Colm Tóibín, 1999. Tóibín states: "Placelessness! God I couldn't think of anything nicer.

[126] Terry Eagleton 'Mothering' *London Review of Books* vol..21, no.20, 14 October 1999. http://www.lrb.co.uk/v21/n20/eagl2120.htm. Accessed 7 January 2004.

[127] Matthew Ryan unpublished interview with Colm Tóibín, 1999. Tóibín states: "The purpose of them [newspaper columns]… is to get the poison out of myself. So that the novels … when you come to write a novel, then you're free. To even seem to lead the reader in a direction that you yourself would not want to be led. It's curious."

"A lot of the journalism, other than the literary stuff, but the day-to-day journalism … has been useful for that purpose. I've got all the anti-nationalist, poisonous, revisionist, anti-tribalist out of myself. So … I can look at the thing more clearly."

individual: it is held in common between writers and the larger language community. A further abstract integration within a language is mediated, for novelists, through the material substance of print and the book, as well as being grounded in the speech of face-to-face interaction. Writers have agency within the abstract order of language, but their choices will be conditioned by that order. To claim an autonomous freedom in writing is to slip from individuation to individualism.

Despite his emphasis on individual experience, it is evident that Tóibín does not accept such radical autonomy as the whole account of the writer. By describing the 'shape' of an Irish literary structure of feeling, he admits there is some cultural or historical force at work, even if he cannot reconcile the act of writing with its 'shape'. Tóibín thus exemplifies the ambivalence of the intellectual form. It involves an abstraction of sociality through the material mediation of writing, producing a vantage point that predisposes the intellectual to view the abstract as the single plane of social life. Neglecting the material aspects of mediation or interaction allows the intellectual to overlook the means by which they achieve abstraction. The ambivalence is in the way abstraction opens out a potential for recognising commonality, providing the means for new levels of cooperation, yet is predisposed to leave those opportunities behind. Often, this is overlaid with a temporal frame-work, which represents the progressive movement into the future as a bundling of social relations into the abstracted plane. The more concrete or embodied levels of the social are therefore designated aspects of the past. The rigid distinctions of 'tradition' and 'modernity' thus obscure the simultaneous and cross-cutting activity of the concrete and the abstract in the formation of contemporary social life.

Tóibín's avowedly bifurcate writing life neatly represents the thwarted potential of the intellectual form. The novel form provides him with a "sort of sacred space" imbued with a desire for reconciliation,[128] where families can reconfigure themselves around changed social roles, where sexuality and spirituality are reunited, where land is place, where classes and sects can live peacefully together. This, I will argue, is more than the fantasy

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[128] Matthew Ryan unpublished interview with Com Tóibín, 1999.

of class unity manifest in a bourgeois art-form; it is the inevitable pull of social constitution and integration redolent in narrative form itself, an insurgence of the larger cultural world within the small world of the novel. In novel writing, Tóibín finds an intellectual practice that will not be restricted to the single plane of the abstracted individual experience. In his journalistic writing, the non-narrative form allows a singularity of function: critical 'demythologising', in Kearney's terms, without the constitutive 'remythologising'. Hence the celebration in the critical work of the abstract individualism that accompanies globalism and placelessness, the representation and textual enactment in the novels of reformed reciprocal relations building a new territorially emplaced community. Together, they are an emblem of the pitfalls and potential within the intellectual form of life.

Conclusion

The critical positions outlined above set themselves, to a large degree, within the debate over nationalist legacies and aspirations in Ireland, but I have attempted to reconsider them in relation to the shift towards globalisation. The concepts that come with debating the nation can thus still be used to interrogate the promised global future. This shift is yet to manifest its full effects. My introduction points to how present arguments might be turned to the difficulties and contradictions emerging through these social, cultural and economic changes. The analytical categories I used in this chapter were made deliberately abstract in order to draw out the emergent problems that haunt contemporary critical work. I have used questions relating to the constitution of the self and forms of social integration to frame my investigation because these provide a level of analysis that reaches for the fundamental elements of human community. In a historically transitional moment, such as Ireland finds itself in, this fundamental level of examination is appropriate to the task of refiguring the forms of relationship between person and group.

What can be gleaned from these critical positions are the cultural resources within Ireland, north and south, for new responses to the problems of self constitution and social integration emerging from globalisation. The critical and interpretive work considered

here manifests the contradictory position of the intellectual form in globalisation: at once providing its necessary conditions and yet a site of potential alternatives to it. Colonisation has provided Ireland, so to speak, with a historical head-start in encounters with dislocation. The task to which this cultural history and present experience might now be put is the dialectical negotiation of abstract and material forces, which could produce a sustainable formation of self within community that neither pushes off into global drift nor reverts to parochial enclosure.

If Ireland is still not one of the "settled places" of the world, in Tóibin's phrase, then in Northern Ireland the fundamental social relationships are the least settled. Commentary on this region is often more explicit in its discussion of the pull between what might be termed insularity and flow. The violence, anxiety and dislocation of the North cannot be sheeted home to the present phase of globalisation. However, proposed restructurings of that society do adopt the abstraction of sociality as an alternative model. Even in the attempt to locate identity within a local territory, without recourse to exclusion, the intellectual form is nominated as the ultimate path. So Longley characterises northern writing as a transcendent realm: "It trellises the harsh girders with myriad details. It overspills borders and manifests a web of affiliation that stretches beyond any heartland — to the rest of Ireland, Britain, Europe."[129] The mobility of writing then becomes a characteristic of territory: "the North as a frontier-region, a cultural corridor, a zone where Ireland and Britain permeate one another."[130] As McCarthy has noted of Longley's "cultural geography", there is a double process of depoliticisation and textualistion at work here.[131] Longley's avowed desire to utilise "attachment to place" might be linked to the 'web of affiliations' the intellectual form offers, but not under a lopsided division between "political simplicities" and "cultural complexities".[132] This separation leads Longley to offer aesthetic form and "imagination" as areas of the artistic self beyond ideology. Yet, the aestheticised relation of the self to society is part of the matrix of ideologies supporting an overarching radical autonomy. There is an obvious appeal in the

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[129] Longley *The Living Stream* p.194.
[130] Ibid p.195.
[131] McCarthy *Modernisation* p.207-8.
[132] Longley p.194.

idea of a transcendent human truth, kept safe within poetic form, from which it might one day be generalised across a region. It is an attractive alternative to visceral assertions of difference, but seems to go against the recuperation of 'a sense of place'. Like the Fifth Province in Derry, the 'cultural corridor' is an assertion of home and location, which defeats itself by bundling these desires for material social bonds into an abstracting frame.

Eagleton notes as common to the nineteenth–century Revival and twentieth-century Irish modernism the attempt to write into existence a "premature utopia".[133] The one had to elide real differences in power between cultures and classes; the other to fetishise exile and language. In the absence of a legitimate or settled state, this cultural rendering might anticipate or stand-in for the political transformation required to realise utopia outside the book. Stepping back into the late-twentieth century, Eagleton continues:

> Liberal pluralism and postmodern culturalism are, then, contemporary versions of this mistake: if the liberals wish power away, the postmodernists diffuse it to the winds in a way which denies all fundamental contradiction.[134]

I have attempted to show how these contradictions appear in some of the critical work that engages with or articulates the disillusionment with nationalism and the nation-state. With the diminution of 'the nation' as a category of abstract integration, there is again a tendency to project the intellectual form of life — its disembedding quality, its aestheticised constitution of the self, its abstracted social relations — as an adequate replacement. If the earlier forms of culturalism had left colonialist and class differences in place by transcending them, the more recent abstraction of social life glosses over the absence of any ethically derived sensibilities of integration that could bring to everyone the rewards of the intellectual form of life. In this way, it further entrenches the reconfiguration of the self and social life in modes most available to the global market.

The problem, in Ireland as elsewhere, is the dominance of abstract sociality and the alienating effects of enclosing social life within this single plane. Counters to the thinning of sociality can be found in contemporary Irish cultural representations of the

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[133] Eagleton *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* p.270.
[134] Ibid.

predicaments of the self and society. In chapters Three, Four and Five, I will attempt to show how the intellectual form might acknowledge and reflexively foster the material mediation of sociality that constitutes it. My readings will, I hope, point to the representation and textual enactment of such a fusion, as well as of the ways in which it is prevented and obscured.

Chapter Two

Self, Nation, Novel

For Ireland the promise of a globalised future can seem particularly alluring. Emerging from a history of imperial underdevelopment and exploitation, deracination and diaspora, a new beginning in the form of a postindustrial, freely accessible global market (mediated by the European Union) seems, to many, an opportunity to wake from the country's nine hundred-year nightmare. Those who celebrate the global dawn stress that its only prerequisite is that Ireland shake off the dreams of the old nationalism. This process is already being enacted, so that all that is required for full social modernisation is to acknowledge that the postnational future has already arrived.[1] Fintan O'Toole welcomed the 1998 Good Friday Agreement[2] in terms of an already extant postnational Ireland, emphasising that political structures were now catching-up with lived experience. So the Agreement allows "not a clear map of the future, but the freedom to move into the present-day reality of what it means to be Irish".[3] He celebrates Ireland's drift into the present:

> It [the Good Friday Agreement] proposed the radical notion that we could live quite happily without knowing where, in the long run, we were going. It asked us to replace fixed visions of the future with the pleasures of contingency, to accept the truth of ordinary human experience in which everything is in some sense temporary.[4]

Yet the Agreement put in place a network of representative, executive and administrative bodies: an Assembly in Northern Ireland, a North/South Ministerial Council, a British/Irish Intergovernmental Conference, plus relevant secretariats. The joyful formlessness of the open-ended future required a deal of rationally organised state-like structures. It seems that to enter the postnational present meant to exchange the nation for a decentred and extended state administration. An

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[1] See Fintan O'Toole *After the Ball* (Dublin 2003) pp.1-44.
[2] *Agreement Reached in the Multi-Party Negotiations, Belfast, 10 April 1998* otherwise known as the 'Good Friday Agreement' (Dublin 1998).
[3] Fintan O'Toole 'Fear of the future set aside as Ireland embraces its present' *Irish Times*, http://www.irish-times.com/irish-times/special/peace/results/analysis/analysis3.html.
[4] Ibid.

idealist reading of the nation causes O'Toole to skim over these conditioning structures and to characterise the postnational future as free-floating. He recasts Benedict Anderson's materialist investigation of the nation[5] into a version of self-willed individuation:

> The Ireland inaugurated on Friday is perhaps the most self-conscious example of Benedict Anderson's definition of a nation as an "imagined community". It recognises that what people are is what they think they are. By endorsing the agreement, the people of both parts of Ireland wrote into the basic laws of two states the radical idea that a nation exists in the rich, changing perspective of the mind. The calm dignity with which that mind was stated on Friday suggests that the mind is not, after all, such a bad place to live.[6]

The nation does indeed exist in the mind, but it has a material reality also. The changes in Irish identity and transformations of the nation are not simply a matter of changing one's mind. O'Toole renders the national community thoroughly abstract. My own argument, by contrast, is more in keeping with Anderson's attempt to relate the material conditions of modernity and capitalism to the categories of the national imaginary. This is, I hope, a more dialectical approach. Part of the dialectic of the nation is the reciprocal constitution of the individual self and the community of the nation. National identity is a form of social life manifest through both the intimacy of the body and the large-scale abstraction of an extended community of strangers. This chapter will investigate how identity is formed in the mediation of these objective and subjective levels. It is structured around two themes, binding together its three sections. The themes, which also stretch across the entire thesis, are abstraction and reflexivity. The three areas of investigation, which make up the structure of the chapter are the self, the nation and the novel. In this initial section, I will consider some available theoretical paths through the apparent contradiction set in the heart of the contemporary individual. Must the self be constituted amidst a postnationalist globalism reliant on voluntarist individualism, on the one hand, or, on the other, within the enduring form of the nation as container of both a state polity and a form of community? The contemporary condition for the formation of the self is then our entry point.

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[5] Benedict Anderson *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London 1991).
[6] O'Toole 'Fear of the Future'.

The Self

Self, Social Relations and Abstraction

The difficulty of living with the tension between the abstract and the concrete can manifest itself in deadly fashion. Writing on ethnic violence, Arjun Appadurai proposes a hypothesis: that the ritually systematic attacks on the bodies of ethnic others are grotesque attempts to solidify the unsettling abstractions of demographic categories.[7] He asks whether the "vivisectionist" atrocities of ethnocide might be linked to "categorical uncertainty". The large-scale categories of ethnic labels, usually generated by the census, are "abstract containers for the identities of thousands, often millions, of persons", categories which begin to displace the actual proximate people. Neighbours thus become dissemblers covering potentially monstrous treachery with human masks. He suggests that these forms of violence "offer temporary ways to render these abstractions graspable, to make these large numbers sensuous, to make labels that are potentially overwhelming, for a moment, personal".[8] He stresses this is often a return to intimacy, that the viscously intricate mutilation, which usually accompanies ethnocide, is "a degenerate technology for the reproduction of intimacy where it is seen to have been violated".[9] Appadurai claims that in the most brutal forms of ethnic violence there is an attempt to produce "'real' persons out of the bodies of traitors", to concretise and certify the humanity of the other via the materiality of their body.

The abstraction Appadurai sees as eliciting such a deadly grasp for certainty is an effect of state administration. But beyond that organisational structure, he points to a profound insecurity emanating from the processes of globalisation. At this level,

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[7] Arjun Appadurai 'Dead Certainty: Ethnic Violence in the Age of Globalization' in *Globalization and Identity: Dialectics of Flow and Closure* Birgit Meyer and Peter Geschiere (eds), (Malden1999), pp. 305-324.
[8] Ibid p.318.
[9] Ibid p.319.

globalisation is experienced not through the movement of hypercapital,[10] nor through the distanced relations enabled by communication technologies,[11] nor through the direct power of the US imperium,[12] but rather in the radical destabilisation of face-to-face relations with others. What, in another context, has been described as 'ontological insecurity'[13] seems to be the condition of those who succumb to the "ethnocidal imaginary". The ethnicised body becomes the site of a deadly re-solidification of face-to-face relations, a counter to the 'implosion' of globalisation into local communities.[14] In ethnocidal violence Appadurai sees an atrocious, but vain, attempt to halt the abstracting momentum of globalisation: a "somatic stabilization that globalisation – in a variety of ways – inherently makes impossible."[15]

He argues that ethnocidal violence is a response to the administrative abstractions of the state. An ethnic category, combined with the suspicion of treachery, allows conceptual scope for an exchange of the actual neighbour or person in the street for an "ethnocidal imaginary".[16] This is an interesting inversion of Anderson's description of the nation as an 'imagined community', from which much of Appadurai's argument is derived. In particular this analysis shares Anderson's emphasis on the relay between the "sensuous particularity" of individuals and the abstracted categories that encompass them. But where the national imaginary enables a "deep, horizontal comradeship", in the form of national identity, the instance of ethnocidal violence indicates a profound fissure in the nation's abstract integration.[17] The imaginary integration of space and time in the nation, which is in Anderson's terms "inherently limited and sovereign", and which places its members in relation to each other – an anonymous and, to be sure, abstracted

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[10] See John Hinkson 'Postmodern Economy: Value, Self-Formation and Intellectual Practice', *Arena Journal*, no.1, 1993 pp.23-44.
[11] See Joshua Meyrowitz *No Sense of Place* (New York 1985).
[12] See George Ritzer *The McDonaldization of Society* (London 1993). See also Armand Mattelart *Multinational Corporations and the Control of Culture* (Brighton 1979).
[13] Anthony Giddens *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism, vol.1: Power, Property and State* (London 1981) pp193-4.
[14] Appadurai 'Dead Certainty' p.321-2.
[15] Ibid p.322.
[16] Ibid p.321.

relation, but one held in place by the national frame – is thus betrayed. The result is a violent assertion of the need to re-integrate the other. Although this re-integration calls on the alternative abstract frame of the ethnocidal imaginary, its primary location is in the immediacy of the body.

The reaction against unsettling abstraction, the 'somatic stabilisation' to which Appadurai refers, is a movement towards particularity inherent within any formation of community. Even as actual community is perverted into ethnocidal violence, the logic of community is still followed. This is a much deeper analysis than one guided simply by the idea of negative definition, where one ethnic identity constructs itself in contrast to another. Appadurai stresses the relational nature of community, where face-to-face or somatic interaction is the first principle. The visceral materiality of social relations, displayed in ethnocidal violence, is an "echo" of what James describes as the "concrete murmurings of the hopes and tragedies of embodied existence".[18] While the expressions of this somatic ground-level might vary, it is important to recognise its persistence amidst the powerful and pervasive abstractions of both the nation-state and global systems. The centripetal movement of ethnocidal violence, a palpable turning inwards, is a deadly reassertion of the base level of social form, that of human bodies in relations of proximity. If global space is the outer limit, then the boundary and location of the body is the most local of the interpenetrating realms of the social.

Constitutive Abstraction and Levels of Integration

The concepts of self and social formation, which I have used alongside the example provided by Appadurai, need to be set within a more explicit theoretical system. The processes of dislocation and re-integration – experienced at the level of the body or as a group – are part of a larger shift in individual and group constitution.

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[17] Anderson *Imagined Communities* p.7.
[18] Paul James *Nation Formation: Towards a Theory of Abstract Community* (London & Thousand Oaks 1996) p.44.

These are part of a generalised trend toward forms of life fashioned in the image of the intellectual. Many of the wide-ranging effects attributed to globalisation and the associated society of spectacle — or information or mobility or consumption[19] — can be theorised in terms of the proliferation of abstract social forms, most commonly manifest in the figure of the intellectual. Here I draw on the work of Sharp, Hinkson, James and others associated with *Arena Journal*.[20] Sharp describes the centrality of the intellectual form of social interchange thus:

> It is not that an essentially new form of interchange has developed. Rather, a mode of interchange which, in various phases of its development has existed as long as class society, now consummates an historical shift. It fuses with the mode of production and exchange and, as a new constitutive level of society generally, assumes a dominance as the medium in which and by which the class relations and the social relations generally are reconstituted.[21]

It is as the 'medium' through which social relations are reconstituted that the intellectual form is of particular interest. The 'newness' of this constitutive level comes from its generalisation as a frame for the formation of the self. We can, from Marx, synthesise the history of the commodity form as having extended its abstracted quality, essential to its mobility and fluid value, beyond the relations of production and into social relations in general. As Sharp succinctly states: "the commodity abstraction calls out a *more abstract mode of the constitution* of the world of objects in exchange, of the social relations of exchange, and the persons involved in these processes".[22] The intellectual form has also become socially generalised, through a coupling of the two forms. To a limited extent this happened through mechanisation and the consequent reliance on the intellectually trained worker. More socially pervasive than the means of production, the scope of

[19] See Arjun Appadurai 'Disjunction and difference in the global cultural economy', *Theory, Culture and Society* no.7, vols 2-3, 1990. Jean Baudrillard *Simulacra and Simulation* (trans) Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor 1994). Jean-Francois Lyotard *The Postmodern Condition: a report on knowledge* (Manchester 1984). Fredric Jameson 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* Hal Foster (ed), (Port Townsend 1983).

[20] For an overview of the theory developed in *Arena Journal* see: Geoff Sharp 'Intellectuals in Transition' *Arena* no. 65, 1983; Geoff Sharp 'Constitutive Abstraction and Social Practice' *Arena* no.70, 1985; Geoff Sharp 'Extended Forms of the Social' *Arena Journal* (new series) no.1, 1993; Freya Carkeek &Paul James 'This Abstract Body' *Arena*, nos 99/100, 1992; John Hinkson 'Postmodern Economy: Self-Formation, Value and Intellectual Practice', *Arena Journal* (new series) no.1, 1993. See also Paul James *Nation Formation: Towards a Theory of Abstract Community* (London 1996) and Simon Cooper *Technoculture and Critical Theory: In the service of the machine?* (London & New York 2002).

[21] Sharp 'Constitutive Abstraction and Social Practice' p.55.

commodity exchange has set the cultural frame for all those who come within the reach of capitalism. In the post-1945 period the intersection of the intellectual mode and commodity exchange was finally consolidated through the apparent triumph of scientific knowledge and its awesome technological application. The transformation of nature into profit through the exploitation of labour– the essence of the commodity – was then extended to the possibility of a universal *control* of nature, which in turn promised radically increased consumption. This fusion made instrumental rationality and empiricism central and ubiquitous as modes of inquiry and, carried in the grooves of an established commodity market, generalised the figure of the intellectual across social relations. The universalistic character of the intellectual mode of life — its traits of contextual reflection, the accompanying sense of being 'lifted out' from received culture and the associated project of self-authorship — has also become ubiquitous in the formation of persons. The result is that, "to talk about 'the intellectuals' now involves not only discussion of the nature of a social category and its role; it involves recognition that society itself is being substantially reconstituted in the image of the relations among members of that category."[23]

The proliferation of communication technologies has played a significant part in this pervasive transformation in the mode of self-formation, but these recent technological changes are not themselves the drivers of this social shift. Rather, a much earlier move into technological mediation — writing — is the source of the generalisation of intellectual forms. The importance of writing, as the means of constitutive abstraction characteristic of the intellectual form of life, will be discussed later. Here, it should simply be noted that this approach to the role of intellectuals in the formation of increasingly abstract social relations avoids the image of the intellectual as mere ideological transmitter.[24] Rather, it attempts to

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[22] Ibid p.57.

[23] Sharp 'Intellectuals in Transition' p.86.

[24] See Hinkson 'Postmodern Economy: Self-Formation, Value and Intellectual Practice' p. 28:
"Political economy has dealt with the practices of intellectuals in the same way it has technology: in terms of empirical effects; in the case of intellectual practice, as it is expressed through ideology. Intellectuality, in short, has been seen historically as a variety of forms of consciousness or cognition, unrelated to social relations distinctive of intellectual activity as such."

locate intellectual modes as parts of an added level of social constitution. This social form is now achieving an even more pervasive dominance, through recent changes in the market and technology. It is not so much that the intellectual delivers the message of a dominant class, but rather that the intellectual becomes the message, the prototypical figure of self-formation, shaping and responding to increasingly abstract social circumstance.

This argument requires the theoretical conceit of a 'levels metaphor', which should be recognised as a heuristic device and not mistaken for reality. I am not arguing that social activity and self constitution are enacted within discrete levels. We should heed Bourdieu's warning against the slip from a model of reality to "the reality of the model".[25] The model of social integration set out here is made-up of three levels: face-to-face, agency extended and disembodied.[26] The 'level' indicates neither a hierarchy of merit nor of complexity, but rather a scale indicating degrees of abstraction. These levels are separated as analytical categories only: in reality they will often intersect within a single individual. In fact, my analysis of modes of social integration and formation of the self will focus primarily on their overlay and interpenetration.

Face-to-Face Integration

All human communities entail a degree of abstraction. So, to speak of a social form dominated by face-to-face modes of social integration is not to limit any such community to an association of immediate co-presence. Such limited community would exist only in the 'here and now', unable to place its members in temporal continuity or generate a locale[27] — it would not be a community at all. It is in the *modalities* of co-presence that face-to-face integration is able to support "a

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For an example of the difficulty in escaping class-bound formulation of the intellectual, see Pierre Bourdieu *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge MA 1984) pp.370-1.
[25] Pierre Bourdieu *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge & New York 1977) p.29.
[26] James *Nation Formation* pp.21-37.

continuing association of persons even in their physical absence from each other".[28] Such modalities include kinship relations as well as relations with extra-tribal others, origin and locality myths, designations of sacred sites and the laws of reciprocity in long distance gift exchange. James encapsulates the way these face-to-face modalities are socially integrative, even functioning without physical interaction:

> What is being described here then is an ontological framing, not just circles and lines of spatial extension. In this context, integration does not depend upon individuals constantly standing toe-to-toe, nor after a particular interaction does it, in the modern sense, fade away. In this sense the modalities of co-presence bind absence.[29]

As an ontological frame, face-to-face integration contains both possibilities and limitations for its social formations. It can draw individuals into relations across a distance, but this is limited by mediation through a signifying landscape. It can also run a thread of connection through time, but this too is limited by the embodied nature of kinship or reciprocity. Conversely, a high degree of proximate interaction does not simply add up to a face-to-face form of integration. Daily proximate and immediate encounters between people do not necessarily compose a form of society dominated by this mode of integration. Working as a receptionist in the office of a large firm does not constitute a modality of face-to-face integration, despite the high level of interaction involved in such work. The receptionist's activity is not structured by "reciprocity, continuity or concrete otherness", the characteristic modalities of face-to-face integration.[30] Although bodily presence might be a requirement of the work, the interactions between the receptionist and those whom s/he encounters are not shaped or delimited by an ontology of concrete embodiment. Rather, this is an example of agency-extension.

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[27] See Paul Carter *The Road to Botany Bay* (Chicago 1989) for examples of the way social categories convert space into a community's place.
[28] James *Nation Formation* p.23
[29] Ibid p.24
[30] Ibid p.24.

Agency-Extended Integration

Integration through agency-extension is achieved via a greater degree of abstraction where social relations are formed and bound by the mediation of an institution.

James illustrates this form of social integration with some key examples:

> At this level, institutions (agencies) such as the church or state, guild or corporation, and structuring practices of extension such as commodity exchange through merchants, traders, pedlars and the like (agents and mediators), come to bind people across larger expanses of space than is possible under face-to-face integration.[31]

The emergence of the state around the sovereignty of the monarch displays precisely such a shift to agency-extension. Within this integrative frame, land becomes territory and is set within the significant spatial abstraction of borders rather than edged by frontiers.[32] For Giddens this change marks the shift from traditional to modern organisation, through the absolutist state as a "container of power". In this formulation the nation materialises through the state. State structures first extend the power of the monarch and later a pure bureaucratic power across a defined territory. Agents of the state carry this power throughout the land, ensuring that authority is not diluted by distance from its administrative hub. In this way the agency extension of state power enables a cohesive polity to be formed over larger expanses of space than is achievable by face-to-face.

Giddens's concentration on the extension of power does not account for the intersection of these forms of integration as ontological frames. An instance can easily be imagined in which a judge or tax-collector might enforce the rule of the state within a peasant community for which the daily run of activity is still

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[31] Ibid p.25

[32] Anthony Giddens *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism, vol.2: Nation-State and Violence* (Cambridge 1985) p.90.

predominantly shaped by the modalities of embodiment.[33] Anderson provides a formulation of agency-extension that captures more of the overlay and interpenetration of ontological frames. The image of the "pilgrim creole functionaries" of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, traversing the pupative national territories of the Americas, is not simply that of an administrative worker exerting state power in every corner of the dominion.[34] These figures, while acting as agents of the state, come to alter the perception of the territory and the place of the individual within it. Their journeys enable a way of thinking about oneself in relation to others who also reside within the territory. In Anderson's phrase, their movement and activity "create meaning".[35] Through the agency of the state's representative, establishing broad-based relations of state-commonality across the population, a coherent image of the national territory *and community* begins to emerge. But the fully formed national imaginary requires more than the pilgrim functionary: it needs the much more pervasive mediation of print capitalism itself. This part of Anderson's thesis will be taken up in two later sections of this chapter, which discuss the nation and the novel. At this point, suffice to observe that the example of agency-extension in the nation-state provides an instance, not only of a broadened scope of power, but also of attenuated social connection. An expanded frame for being in the world comes to overlay the more circumscribed social and spatial reach of the face-to-face.

Disembodied Integration

Disembodied social relations are experientially familiar, even if not always theorised in such terms: the Internet is perhaps the clearest and most recent example. This level of integration requires no prior or ongoing interconnection between those who enter its mediating structures. It brings people into relations that can be deferred, distanced and radically decontextualised. Technological mediation, between the users of chat groups, e-mail and websites, enables an extension of social relations

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[33] See John Banville *The Broken Jug* (Loughcrew 1994). In his version of Heinrich von Kleist's play *The Broken Pitcher*, Banville presents exactly this scenario of overlaid ontologies, to dark comic effect. Members of a farming community in Sligo, on the eve of the 1847 Famine, must fit themselves within a judicial system that cannot quite extend its hegemonic reach so far west of London.
[34] Anderson *Imagined Communities* p.65

beyond the limits of the body, time and space. Anecdotes from the 'electronic community', which tell of individuals sloughing off designations of the body like sex or age, illustrate the much celebrated liberation of persons from the parochial confines of their particular circumstance. These electronic technologies, like print, intensify the speed and breadth of disembodied extension, but they are nonetheless essentially versions of the abstracting quality of writing. I will consider writing as the key modality of disembodied integration, together with the figure of the intellectual, in the next section.

While disembodied integration can be understood as a distinct analytical category, it is best identified as an overlay added to the more concrete levels of agency-extension and face-to-face. These prior levels do not necessarily 'dissolve' within a social form dominated by disembodied integration, rather the three levels can intersect and "tend, unevenly and beset by contradiction, to be reconstituted in terms of the dominance of the more abstract level".[36] The dominance of the disembodied mode of integration stems from its "vantage point" of intensified abstraction. For those who would re-establish a central role for embodied social connection, recouping or reforming those prior levels, the problem remains as Sharp states it: "how constitutive levels can be maintained after they have, in effect, been seen through".[37] It is not only that the spectre of parochialism haunts the prior levels. Having transcended these frames of being, how can an individual rethink themselves back again? Under disembodied integration the constitutive parameter has been irrevocably extended, there is a shift in being in the world that disembeds the individual from immediate social circumstance.

Yet the critic, working from the high vantage of abstraction, can take heart from the apparent persistence of more concrete modes of integration within the disembodied level. Taken at its word, the avowedly benign spirit of the communications and information industries (seen in advertisements that seek to *bring the world together*)

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[35] Ibid p.35
[36] James *Nation Formation* p.32
[37] Sharp 'Constitutive Abstraction and Social Practice' (footnote) p.78. See also Carkeek and James 'This Abstract Body' p.83.

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presumes a common value in 'keeping in touch'. Such metaphors draw their potency from prior levels, even as the actual activities to which they refer sweep away embodied social connection. Their meaning is thinned as they are stretched across an expanded constitutive frame. Beyond the metaphorical, this thinning can be detected in more fundamental contradictions. The integrative logic of community, which I have set out in increasing degrees of abstraction, is itself put under strain at this extreme level. Disembodied extension offers an unprecedented individual f $\cdot$ om from the moorings of place and time. The contradiction lies in the way its w $\cdot$ s net extends the temporal and spatial scope of 'bringing us together', yet in sc oing fosters an ideology of radical autonomy. At this ontological level, the social constitution of the self becomes largely a matter of self-ordering or the discrete assemblage of relations selected from an array.

The Intellectual Form of Life

The figure of the intellectual, particularly the modalities of their self-constitution, is a key manifestation of the disembodied form. The intellectual form of life displays both the possibilities and contradictio's of a highly abstracted sociality. Writing is the characteristic mode which shapes the intellectual form, making, "intellectual interchange ... the prototypical expression of the extended forms"[38] The distinguishing qualities of this form need to be identified if its generalisation across social relations is to be adequately analysed. The particular formative traits that emerge are: social integration established through technological mediation; the process of 'lifting out' or defamiliarisation of social context, which comes with greater degrees of abstraction; and an associated ideology of autonomy in the formation of the self.

Intellectuals and writing are often associated in an idealist fashion, calling on images of 'the interior life' that stress ethereality. My example here is a brief article by Eco

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[38] Sharp 'Extended Forms of the Social' p.230

in which he ponders the implications of wearing jeans.[39] The piece is infused with a playful Barthesian spirit, its organising structure a smooth resolution of the jarring clash between the philosophic and the demotic. Eco writes:

> Not only did the garment impose a demeanor on me; by focusing my attention on demeanor, it obliged me *to live towards the exterior world*. It reduced, in other words, the exercise of my interior-ness. For people in my profession it is normal to walk along with your mind on other things: the article you have to write, the lecture you must give, the relationship between the One and the Many, the Andreotti government, how to deal with the problem of Redemption, whether there is life on Mars, the latest song of Celentano, the paradox of Epimenides. In our line this is called "the interior life". Well, with my new jeans my life was entirely exterior: I thought about the relationship between me and my pants, and the relationship between my pants and me and the society we lived in.[40]

With what seems only half-intentional comic pomposity, Eco sets out the way the intellectual life sits uncomfortably with 'the exterior world', developing a loose theory around the importance of baggy clothing as a condition of fruitful thought.[41] More telling than his semi-serious point about clothing is the assumption that the intellectual must lose the awareness of her/his body in order to work properly *as an intellectual*. In characterising his intellectual activity as essentially 'interior' and abstract, he fails to take into account the necessary materiality of his activities, from *writing* 'the article' to *reading* 'the paradox of Epimenides'. These constitute a technologically mediated participation in the world, an exteriority that extends well beyond the 'heteroconsciousness' enforced by his trousers. Through the material mechanisms of writing and print the intellectual can access the highly abstracted level of interchange that connects a twentieth-century Italian semiotician to a Cretan poet of the sixth century BC.

The intellectual form of life is certainly abstracted in its extension of interchange, but it is not constituted in the idealist image of pure thought. Rather, through the material mediation of writing the intellectual is able to transcend much of the binding particularity of their own moment in time and position in space, to enter into a particular type of social relation with unseen others from different periods and

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[39] Umberto Eco *Travels in Hyperreality* (London 1986) pp.191-5.
[40] Eco *Travels in Hyperreality* p.193-4.

places. Eco displays clearly the degree to which this process disregards the fact that the intellectual is still an embodied being, but he does so by obscuring the instruments of that disembodiment.[41]

What Eco characterises as a distracted distance from the world is more rigorously described in Sharp's consideration of the social constitution of the intellectual through print:

> this form of social interchange constitutes the intellectual person in a way which 'lifts' that person out of the constraints of more parochial contexts and extends the range of interchange across the boundaries of those contexts. Individuality as set within more parochial contexts is lifted too; qua intellectual, the person experiences himself or herself as a creator of meaning, as having passed on from individuality to autonomy.[42]

'Lifting out' is, then, the process by which the intellectual assumes a reflexive position that enables a conceptually-distanced consideration of themselves and their society. More concrete experience of social interaction is, in this process, set within a wider frame, so that it comes to be seen as just one form among many. The vantage point of heightened abstraction, accessed by the intellectual, affords a view that defamiliarises received social relations, thereby revealing those relations as context.

Giddens presents a similar formulation of this process in his description of "disembedding" as "the 'lifting out' of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of space-time".[43] While this analysis gives an account of two abstract structures of modernity ("symbolic tokens" and "expert systems"), these are presented as systems. The individual enters these modern 'disembedding mechanisms' through a form of social contract based on "trust".[44] The refashioned liberalism of this formulation is sufficient to place the individual, at least partially, outside these systems, as is evident in the volunteering of consent implicit in the idea of 'trust'. Giddens's formulation contrasts with the

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[41] One can only wonder whether Eco was working *sans* trousers when he wrote this meditation.

[42] Sharp 'Intellectuals in Transition' p.86.

[43] Anthony Giddens *The Consequences of Modernity* (London 1990) p.21.

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more thoroughgoing ontological shift described by Sharp. The 'lifting out' manifest in the intellectual form of life is not only transformative of the intellectual's frame of being, but also transforms the way individuality is conceived and constituted. The abstraction of social relations is not merely a matter of people entering into increasingly extended 'mechanisms', but is also the process through which those mechanisms constitute what it is to be a person. To reverse Giddens's terms, it is how the 'system' *enters* the individual.

The ideological strain in the ontological shift described above can be seen in the move from 'individuality to autonomy'. The vantage point and increase in choice allowed by the process of lifting out enables intellectuals to "experience themselves as the authors of their creations".[45] Autonomy becomes the guiding value and structuring practice when the construction of the self is the project of each individual.[46] One can regard autonomy as an ideology of the intellectual form because it plays an integral part in the global economy of images. In what has been termed the 'information economy', the construction of value and, in turn, the nature of commodities, becomes detached from productive labour. In such an economy, the process of consumption accretes value onto the commodity. As Hinkson has argued, the reach of information technology allowed large-scale image production to pull together the processes of self-formation and value construction, under the common name of consumption:

> The production of value, at least in part, shifts out of the production of commodities into the meanings which can be attached to commodities. And this would seem to be a process without limit. A labour theory of value, would have little to say about a society which spills over into forms which enact a relatively pure aestheticization of social life.[47]

Aestheticisation of life is here seen as essentially the penetration of an image market into the realm of self-formation. This penetration is carried out in two main ways: through pure image-commodities that are integrated into the self through identification; and in the attachment of images of value to material commodities.

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[44] Ibid p.26

[45] Sharp 'Constitutive Abstraction and Social Practice' p.62.

[46] On the narcissism of self formation as an individual project see Johnathan Friedman *Cultural Identity and Global Process* (London 1994).

[47] John Hinkson 'Postmodern Economy: Self-Formation, Value and Intellectual Practice' p.37.

The augmentation of the market is then effected, not merely in the way it penetrates deeply into the self, but also in how a widened and qualitatively changed field of production is opened out. The danger of over-production is lessened when an individuated market replaces the mass market. Within each individual point of consumption or aggregated self-formation, there are particular combinations of images. This particularity of consumption causes a sharp rise in the demand for image commodities. Autonomy can now be seen to function as a market logic driving the desire for images, but the expansion of this market is more properly viewed as a movement into the terrain of the self already opened by the shift to more abstracted social forms.

From 'lifting out' to the image market, the abstraction of self-formation through intellectual modes remains the characteristic frame. Within the setting of a capitalist economy and enhanced technological mediation, the autonomy of the intellectual form fuses with the "ground values of commodity exchange", shifting liberal individualism to the hyper-individuation of the ideology of autonomy.[48] But are this fusion and this shift inevitable in the generalisation of the intellectual form? Might not the vantage of abstraction also provide a view to alternative 'ground values'? One avenue for the reclamation of such cultural ground can be found in the reflexive action enabled by the intellectual form itself. If the ontological shift to a more abstracted level is irreversible, if indeed the "intellectual revolution" cannot be eliminated,[49] then the beginnings of a transition from autonomy to co-operation can be fashioned only within that frame of being. Hinkson sets out the task of such a transitional program:

> The forms of co-operation called for if cultural politics is to be able to develop a postmodern alternative to the fleeting self require interpretive efforts which support a postmodern practical reflexivity: a cultural reflexivity in social life.[50]

The call for this 'interpretive' work is neither an invitation to retreat from the intellectual form nor a call for its social contraction. On the contrary, it is an

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[48] Sharp 'Constitutive Abstraction and Social Practice' p.73.
[49] Hinkson 'Postmodern Economy: Self-Formation, Value and Intellectual Practice' p.43.
[50] Ibid.

attempt to summon and direct the power of this form. In the struggle to establish co-operation as a 'ground value' and the effort to recoup the reciprocity of prior social levels, intellectual practice will be a key mode. If 'practical reflexivity' is to be generalised in social life then it will need, at least initially, to be carried in the characteristic activities of the intellectual form. The form's defamiliarising capacity, outlined above, could be put to the task of lifting the unreflexive experience of social life out from the level of the 'phenomenon':

> Phenomenally, the ego is paramount; reflectively or in the light of a grasp of the whole significance of this form of interchange it becomes apparent that the self is best served by each individual giving a primary emphasis to the service of the other. Yet in the given conditions of a capitalist society and given the absence of a theory intellectual interchange, it is the phenomenal experience of the abstracted and intellectually derived ego which is typically accented.[51]

While the project of reflexive self-formation is currently hindered by a paucity of theory and the apparent global triumph of capital, there are reasons to believe this will not always be the case. Even under those conditions, some limited and localised interpretive work can be done which might destabilise the self-evident presentation of social phenomena. Later sections of this chapter offer two such localised areas of interpretation. Even if interpretative practice is modest in its contribution to the establishment of a thoroughly reflexive self formation, there are signs within the phenomena, the nation and the novel, of the persistence of prior levels. Thankfully, these interpenetrations by other forms of life do not all take the shape of ethnocidal violence. Rather more benign modalities of social integration will be shown to be entwined within the structures of abstraction.

As we have seen, two extremes emerge as polar manifestations of life under the dominance of disembodied integration: an aggressive reaction that asserts parochial control in self-identical social enclosure; and a solipsistic application of the individuation of radical autonomy. Some interpretations of Ireland's contemporary social and political condition are weakened by the perceived need to construct a critique of one extreme from the entrenched position of the other. This diametrical

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[51] Sharp 'Constitutive Abstraction and Social Practice' p.73.

criticism provides for reductive rather than reflexive interpretive work. We began this chapter with a voice celebrating autonomy: O'Toole's liberal voluntarist reading of a postnational Ireland displays the divide. This form of postnationalist liberalism, drawing on revisionist history, celebrates the shift to the dominance of the disembodied form — with the promise of wealth through participation in the global market — and the ideology of autonomy, appearing here as a new 'anti-nationalist' pluralism. The pitfalls of this socially liberal and economically neoliberal globalism are now beginning to be acknowledged. In Ireland the program of liberalisation can be traced back to the Lemass period and the Witaker programs. As we have seen, Seamus Deane has warned of the consequences of this kind of liberalismfor the formation of the contemporary Irish self.[52] The view that the individual is the author of their own creations or the sovereign source of meaning is made possible only by an intense and obscuring abstraction of social interchange. But while this level of abstraction can obscure the integration still at work in the extended forms of the social, intellectual work also offers a means to formulate an alternative ideology responsive to the social as well as the abstracting power of this integrative frame.

I have attempted to outline a theoretical framework that will go beyond the limits of the phenomenal. The theory, I hope, contains an ethical germ, bendng towards neither radical autonomy nor parochial enclosure, but instead moving to a recognition of their common socially integrative logic. This is the recognition of the process of self formation as necessarily constituted through relations with others, whether at a distance or intimately. Neither the hermeticism of liberal toleration nor a phobic Otherness should be allowed to remain the end-points of the interpretative horizon.

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[52] See Seamus Deane 'Wherever Green is Read' in *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism 1938 – 1994* Ciaran Brady (ed) (Dublin 1994) p. 238-9.

The Nation

The chapter began with O'Toole's call for the acknowledgment of an already present postnational Ireland. He suggested that a fluid form of identity stems from the abstract configuration of the nation; that individual choice can over-ride historical conditions; and that to change the nation is simply to think it otherwise. In terms of the theoretical schema outlined above, his description of contemporary Irish identity conforms to the disembodied level of integration in which the autonomy and self-authorship of the individual is assumed. O'Toole has 'seen through' the nationalist promise of authentic self-identity and the frames of national territory and culture already appear redundant or, in Deane's term, 'anachronistic'. But the critical force of this 'lifting out' from the nation can be directed to a more reflexive consideration of how the nation functions or fails as the basis of a polity or a community. While O'Toole alludes to Anderson's theory of the 'imagined community', we will come closer to its procedures if we focus on changes in the conditions and categories that *allow* people to 'think' the nation.[53] National identity is a deeply embedded form of subjectivity, at once personal and broadly affiliated. To shift out of its frame is to extricate the self from the defining categories of continuity, location and identity that bear its imprint. We can see that the nation is a social form of some ontological significance, conditioning the constitutive categories of time, space and the body. Has the re-thinking of sovereignty — or for that matter, of all the changes associated with globalisation, such as communication technology, the fluidity and reach of markets, or the reactions against the bloody history of nationalism itself — managed to re-fashion these categories? Have they been beaten out of national shape? If there has been a change in these ontological categories, is the shift complete? To pursue these questions through reflexive critique, I will consider a number of different theoretical perspectives on how the nation is thought and lived.

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[53] Anderson *Imagined Communities* p.22.

The theory of the nation has very often been concerned with identifying the origins of the national form as either 'modern' or 'primordial'. So, for example, Ernest Gellner labelled his former student, Anthony Smith, as a primordialist. Gellner's own account, centring or ⸱⸱ ⸱⸱nergence of industrial production and the rationalising imperatives of the state, places the nation as a thoroughly modern phenomenon with its provenance in the late eighteenth-century.[54] He categorises Smith's approach as primordialist insofar as it extends the explanation of the nation beyond the modern formation of the nation-state. Smith looks to the continuity of ethnic identity for a cause of the peculiar intensity and success of nationality as an organising principle in modern society and politics. For Gellner, nationalist politics address the particular social requirements of modernity, fabricating a new form of social integration for industrial society. For Smith, the cohesive quality of the nation is insufficiently explained by the catch-all psycho-social claim that it satisfies the modern "need to belong". The nation, in Smith's formulation, is not merely a synthetic or compensatory replacement for the secure community and subjectivity of the *Gemeinschaft* of pre-modern agrarian society. A basis for the nation is set out in the form of the *ethnie*, an ethnic community held together by a common mythic tradition. Through the continuity of a group's myth-symbol complexes, the *ethnie* traverses the pre-modern/modern divide and provides a wellspring for the unitary character of the nation.[55]

This example from the primordialist/modernist debate illustrates one it key conceptual pitfalls. Moving on from Gellner's claim that "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist",[56] Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger proceed to conflate invention with fabrication.[57] In *The Invention of Tradition* they emphasise this inauthenticity by pointing to the inconsistency between nationalist claims of the antiquity of national traditions and the documented 'invention' of these traditions in the nineteenth-

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[54] On the modern origin of nations see also Elie Kedourie *Nationalism* (London 1960).

[55] Anthony D. Smith *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (London 1986).

[56] Ernest Gellner *Thought and Change* (London 1964) p.168

[57] Anthony Smith 'Nationalism and the Historians' in *Mapping the Nation* Gopal Balakrishnan (ed) (London 1996) p.191.

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century.[58] Gellner also called upon this kind of instrumental historical argument, describing state-controlled 'High Culture' as the cohesive structure of national belonging. As Perry Anderson notes, Gellner's account emphasises the state-administrative and economic function of nationalism at the expense of the "dimension of collective *meaning* that modern nationalism has always involved".[59] For Gellner, as for Hobsbawm and Ranger, the state is always prior to the nation. Such theories have the state cultivating a political fiction that is, at best, a response to industrial modernisation, which legitimates the capture of state power and consoles a disparate citizenry, at worst, a mass delusion supporting false solidarity and ethnic exclusion. As Benedict Anderson has observed, this latter view of the nation relies on an image of nationalism as a grand deception perpetrated by elites upon an alienated mass.[60] While he too can be counted a 'modernist', his use of the term 'imagined' is closer to a notion of creativity: invention, in the sense that one might 'invent' a light-bulb.[61] The social relations between members of his 'imagined community' might, in the vast majority of cases, remain unrealised in any form of interaction, but this community is nonetheless successful in maintaining forms of integration. The nation calls upon its own by being, not only an objective and ontological structure shaping the world through the state and its territory, but also an epistemic support embedded within individuals themselves, shaping the knowledge and communication of self. This community and identity might be riven with contradictions, but it is nonetheless modernity's most successful form of social integration. The characterisation of the nation as an epiphenomenon of industrial modernisation diminishes any notion of the formative interplay of subjective and objective structures. The nation has an integrative power, in Gellner's modernist position, but it coheres by moving into the shell of legitimacy left vacant by out-moded social forms. There is no novel cultural formation in this model, only a functional role for the nation to patch together an

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[58] Eric Hobsbawm 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions' in *The Invention of Tradition* Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger (eds) (Cambridge 1983).

[59] Perry Anderson 'Science, Politics, Enchantment' in *The Social Philosophy of Ernest Gellner* John A Hall & Ian Jarvie (eds) (Atlanta 1996) p.425.

[60] Anderson *Imagined Communities* p.6

[61] James *Nation Formation* p.15

unstable social grouping in the service of a new economy.[62] This formulation relies on a demarcation in which objective structures imprint upon the individual. Gellner's high culture is a homogenising force, channelled through education, that imposes the choice of adherence or oblivion. The modern aspect of Gellner's modernism is in the way the nation must deal with the problem of fragmentation and mobility in industrial society. It thus appears as a merely functional requirement of modernisation, shaping the populace to economic and social ends. While Gellner accounts for the emergence of the nation-state as a consequence of particular modern social conditions, he underestimates the significance of the enduring pre-modern social formations inherent within national identification.[63] Amidst the "context-free messages" we are compelled to exchange in modern life, there remain, abstractly generalised in the nation, the echoes of prior social formations, which are sometimes explicit and exploited in evocations of *Volk*-like destiny, but more often implicit in the forms of attachment to place and identification with community.

There is a deficit in those modernist positions, like Giddens's image of the 'container of power', which are state-centred understandings of nationalism. Such formulations have difficulty with the intensity of attachment and identification that often accompanies nationality, especially in the case of stateless anti-colonial nationalism.[64] Any theory of the nation that minimises the process of deep subjective incorporation turns away from one of the key characteristics of the experience and constitution of the nation. Noting this gap in the theory, James sets the "subject – object relation" as one of the central themes for theorisations of the

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[62] Gregory Jusdanis *The Necessary Nation* (Princeton 2001) p.62-3. Jusdanis notes that Gellner's account of national culture "turns out to be a liberal version of the legitimization theory".

[63] See Ernest Gellner 'Reply to critics' in Hill & Jarvis (eds) *The Social Philosophy of Ernest Gellner* (Amsterdam 1996) p.637. Gellner expresses surprise at the repeated "misinterpretation" which sees a reductionist diminution of national identification in his theory: "Because I endeavour to explain nationalist sentiments as a consequence of social conditions, this in no way means that I consider those sentiments anything other than deep, passionate and sincere, and capable of leading those under their sway to perform remarkable acts, whether of heroism, self-sacrifice, or brutality."

[64] See Luke Gibbons 'Identity Without a Centre: Allegory, History and Irish Nationalism' in *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork 1996) pp.135-8. Gibbons refers to Hobsbawm's insistence that "the nation must evolve under the aegis of the state: otherwise it is like a mollusc extracted from its

nation. And moving from the theoretical to the visceral, he stresses that, "we need to take seriously the fact that people are prepared to die for their nation, and not simply because of a willed national spirit or a deluding ideology."[65] Taking this relation of attachment seriously, Smith has sought an explanation in ethnic origin and risked the 'primordialist' label.

While the primordialist designation might be difficult to shake off, Smith's focus on textual myth-symbolic continuity allows him to escape denunciation as essentialist. In fact, his argument for the specificity of cultures, locating identity in ethnic rather than racial groupings, sits comfortably within the ethical assumptions of poststructuralism. Regarding the 'subject – object' relation, he rejects the state-centred model:

> Images and cultural traditions do not derive from, or descend upon, mute and passive populations on whose *tabula rasa* they inscribe themselves. Instead they invariably express the identities which historical circumstances have formed, often over long periods.[66]

Even the parts of a national culture 'invented' in the relatively recent past will, in Smith's view, only "flourish ... if they can be made continuous with a much longer past that members of that community presume to constitute their 'heritage'".[67] If it is, in part, a modern invention, national culture is certainly not invented *ex nihilo*, as Hobsbawm appears to suggest.[68] The signs of the nation are not arbitrary, in Smith's model, they are embedded in a particular "collective cultural identity". For Smith, this 'cultural identity' is the set of "subjective feelings and valuations" that stem from "a sense of continuity, shared memories and a sense of common destiny of a given unit of population which has had common experiences and cultural attributes."[69] This is the *ethnie* that persists from the pre-modern into the modern as

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shell, emerging in a 'distinctly wobbly state'." See also E. J Hobsbawm *Nations and Nationalism since 1870* (Cambridge 1991).

[65] James *Nation Formation* p.126

[66] Anthony D. Smith 'Towards a Global Culture?' in *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity* Mike Featherstone (ed) (London 1990) p.179.

[67] Ibid p.178

[68] See Gellner 'Reply to Critics' p. 638. Gellner's position is different again, as he states: "for the purposes of understanding modern nationalism, it did not matter [whether representations of the past were genuine or not], that an invented tradition is as good as a "real" one, and *vice versa*."

[69] Ibid p.179

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the basis of the nation. Here the nation forms as a subjective experience of memories and aspirations meaningful to the collective. For the nation, as a modern social form, to hold meaning and achieve subjective valuation it must draw a sense of authenticity from the past. The nation's power to identify is derived from a coupling of the personal immediacy of 'feeling' with the extra-individual continuity of history. Smith turns this 'experience' towards the future with the added observation of 'a sense common destiny', but this future-orientation can proceed only with a glance back to a distant origin.

Smith sees the nation as providing a subjective experience of continuity with the past. If it is a new formation of the *ethnie*, then it must conspicuously make itself over in the image of its past. But the nation's viability, grounded in an apparently stable past, is made precariously contingent by the way it comes into being through subjective feeling. For Smith, the past makes its way into present subjectivity via a relatively continuous chain of 'events' 'images' and 'experiences', yet the admitted novelty of the nation-state must mark some form of break with the past. At this moment the past can either be viewed as separate from the individual — or, remaining within Smith's emphasis on the subjective, the individual can be seen as able, through a processes of lifting out, to recognise their own position as a manifestation of that continuum. The *ethnie* can then be recognised in comparative judgements of "vernacular motifs and styles".[70] In other words, this embedded form of historical subjectivity becomes recognisable, for the national subject, as an objective structure they consciously stand in relation to, rather than one within which they are totally enmeshed. Where Gellner marks this break — usually termed the transition from tradition to modernity — as an absolute divide, Smith makes it a straightforward step. The latter belies its significance as a shift in ontological perspective.

If the formation of the nation-state is a conspicuous marker of this shift, how should we approach its emergence so that it is neither reduced to an imposition of

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[70] Smith 'Global Culture' p.178

objective structure nor encapsulated in the easy subjective assimilation of a continuous past? Such an approach would entail a theorisation of the conditions that *allow* both national subjectivity and nation-state polity. Although the history of nationalism shows the claim of an originary point — a war of independence, a mythologised migration, a divine land grant — to be a common cultural and political strategy, this fixing of origins is not the best course for a theory of the nation. The nation is modern simply because it functions within modernity. Its ubiquity in our era should be the focus of inquiry rather than any preoccupation with its provenance. Neither liberal nor marxist, modernist nor primordialist, can account for the durability and transmobility of the national form by tracking back to its first heartbeat or even its initial cell division. The durability of the nation as an organising principle of identity, community and polity does not centre on a clearly defined genesis; rather its success resides in its capacity to function at an ontological level, shaping individual, community and polity in a common form of being in time and space. More than a point of origin in the past, the nation provides a present. As Anderson has noted, the characteristically national perception of time can be summed-up in the idea of "meanwhile": elsewhere, within a known territory, unseen others are active within a common frame. The national community is made up of a set of people who share a sense of simultaneous joint movement through time within, or in association with, a defined territory.

The success of the nation as a social formation lies in its meaningful organisation of the relation between the individual and the group. A dual movement underpins this success: the nation at once extends the individual self into highly abstract relations with (absent) others and also encloses that set of relations within a limited or sovereign space. This is essentially the formation of identity, in the double action of the link with others (a community) composed of a set of signs bound up in the immediacy and singularity of the body. This capacity to shape the material location of an abstract relation — the formation of identity — is the great achievement of the nation. One might generalise that this relational negotiation of the subjective and

the objective is a quality of all forms of social organisation.[71] Yet it is characteristic of modernity that the objective appears to confront the individual as a system functioning beyond them.[72] In turn, the self comes to be viewed as a discrete entity somehow formed of a unique essence or, at least, composed of sovereignly authored parts. The nation's durable effectivity appears in its meaningful integration of the cloven social sphere of the subjective and the objective.

While the nation puts in place these abstracted relations and tends towards a disembodied level of integration, it overlays and makes use of a "manifold" structure of other integrative levels, from the national incorporation of the body (particularly in war), through the localised attachment to territory, to the broad category of citizenship. A member of a national community is constituted in the intersection of these levels. The effectiveness of the nation, as an organiser of space, can be seen in its capacity, at once, to constitute a material experience of the body in space, while extending the possibility of that placement to forever unvisited, yet accessible, corners of the territory. It also places the body of the self in a relation with the body of the other, though this is not necessarily the relation of same-to-same exploited in the imaginings of racial solidarity. A common relation to national territory is established through cohabitation and the conversion of space into meaningful place. In terms of a temporal frame, the nation allows a reach back into a stored past, while also situating its members in a common present and usually orientating them towards a particular joint future. Of these three states of time, the present is the only one that can be grasped as having a material aspect, yet it is only in relation to the past and the future that the immediate present has meaning. The national form, with its store of past events and aspirations for the future, can situate

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[71] See Pierre Bourdieu *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge 1992) pp. 135-141 "The spurious alternatives of social physics and social phenomenology can only be superseded by grasping the principle of the dialectical relationship that is established between the regularities of the material universe of properties and the of classificatory schemes of the *habitus*, that product of the regularities of the social world for which and through which there *is* a social world." p.140.

[72] See Georg Lukács *The Theory of the Novel* (London 1971) p.68. Lukács describes the development of this rift in terms of the history of aesthetic forms, citing Dante as the figure of "historico-philosophical transition" in which "there is still the perfect immanent distanclessness and completeness of the true epic, but his figures are already individuals, consciously and energetically placing themselves in opposition to a reality that is becoming closed to them, individuals who, through this opposition, become real personalities."

the experience of the continuous present. The normalisation of these simultaneous movements between the abstract and the material is a key factor in the conditions that allow us to 'think the nation'. As James has argued, "the abstraction of social relations integrated in the emerging dominance of disembodied extension" is the necessary (but not sufficient) condition for nation formation.[73] As such, the generalisation of the intellectual form of life is the social condition characteristic of national community. The incorporative vantage allowed by increased abstraction and disembodied integration can connect a large group dispersed across a wide territory, sufficiently abstract to cross boundaries of geography and social distinction while intersecting with the forms of prior levels to constitute a subjectivity sufficiently complex to sustain a meaningful self. While the intellectual form of life has the social authenticity of an integrative link to others — via the technologies of writing — that link is an attenuated one. If such mediated connection were the sole plane of integration, then there would be a thinning out of the meaningful constitution of persons. Material life, that is the necessary condition of bodily being, would be set apart from the structures of identity. But, we have seen, there is a tendency to efface the prior levels in the movement to greater degrees of abstract social integration. 'Lifting out' and 'seeing through' are paths for the dominance of disembodiment. The movement between embodiment and abstraction, subject and object, which makes up social authenticity, is thus diminished.

So, while the formation of the nation requires a highly abstract social imaginary, the continuing process of disembodiment also threatens its coherence and richness as a social form. Aspects of social life previously enacted through face-to-face interaction are increasingly subsumed within the realm of disembodied relations. Where there is a manifold of "opposing modalities formed in the intersection of levels of social integration", there arises an "ontological contradiction".[74] For the nation as a social form the most conspicuous appearance of such contradiction is in the process of globalisation. The modalities of intellectual life, enacted in the

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[73] James *Nation Formation* p.195
[74] Ibid p.185.

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exchange of information through communication technologies wedded to a market trading in and through such technologies, confront the nation as its own constitutive activities lifted away from it. Where the market and its commodity form had generalised the intellectual modes and solidified the social formation required by the nation, in the present phase of market expansion the dominance of disembodiment is increased in a bid, not to incorporate prior formations of space and time, but to *overcome* those defining categories. The integrative structure of the prior levels is thereby even further hollowed out, diminishing the manifold levels of constitution to a single plane that brings social organisation closer to management than to community. As Ghassan Hage has observed:

> The global/transcendental corporation needs the state, but does not need the nation. National and sub-national (such as State or provincial) governments all over the world are transformed from being primarily the managers of a national society to being the managers of the aesthetics of investment space.[75]

Footloose capital requires the stabilising force of the state, while the nation stands as a potential obstacle. The transcendental quality of the global economy appears not only in capital mobility, but also in the high degree of abstraction. The novelty of the 'new economy' is a matter of degree, in which the reach of the disembodied relation has been exptended, not only across the globe, but also deep within the self. In the global North, since the mid-twentieth century, consumption has become a constitutive practice, rather than merely a matter of sustenance. The essential role of the consumer is to unfetter desire and extend choice to all aspects of life. The form of life that allows this extension lifts the individual from received relations, placing community under the radical doubt of autonomous will. Expansion of the consumer market requires the freedom to make oneself over repeatedly, without the hindrance of cultural limits that might extend from more relational or co-operative social organisation. Bauman sketches this restless consumerism:

> Ideally, nothing should be embraced by a consumer firmly, nothing should command a commitment till death do us part, no needs should be seen as fully

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[75] Ghassan Hage *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for hope in a shrinking society* (Annandale 2003) p.19.

satisfied, no desires considered ultimate. There ought to be a proviso 'until further notice' attached to any oath of loyalty and any commitment[76]

The 'fleeting self' of the postmodern consumer, as Hinkson has it, is the emergent subject position within this transcendental economy.[77] The dialectic of subjective and objective structures continues, but is progressively confined to an abstract interchange of images, avoiding or merely passing through the more material modalities of embodiment in place and time. The nation conspicuously traverses these modes and calls upon varying levels of integration. But, in the expansion of the global economy, there is an attenuation of that integration, thinning the social down to the bones of alienation. The reduction of integration from a manifold process to a 'single plane' is the reduction of sociality, a source of alienation. The confrontation of differing modalities of integration, in the nation, makes that intersection a site of cultural contradiction and opens social life to potential synthetic resolutions. But the singularity of disembodiment closes off the resources of hope with an enervating alienation, leaving an integration of fragments.

The intellectual form of life stands as the prototype for being in the nation, but its abstract integration opens the way for an expansion of disembodiment, which threatens to displace the differing modes held in tension by the nation. As such, the intellectual form is a contradictory one, but in dialectical fashion, its contradictions offer a chance for the production of the new. A key capacity enabled by the intellectual form is to be able to see beyond the level of the phenomenal, to comprehend subjective experience as part of some conditioning structure. If this reflexive gaze is not turned on itself and the tendency toward disembodiment not critically engaged, then the processes of abstract constitution and integration remain within their naturalising aura. In a non-reflexive view, the diminution of sociality and the associated rise in alienation are explained in terms of being left behind, hence increased access to technology becomes the catch-all remedy for social dislocation.[78] Characteristically this non-reflexive approach couples technophilia with celebratory globalism. Like the liberal view of capitalist expansion, the

[76] Zygmunt Bauman *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (New York 1998) p.81.

[77] Hinkson 'Postmodern Economy: Self-Formation, Value and Intellectual Practice' p.43.

[78] See Zygmunt Bauman 'The Work Ethic and the Prospects for the New Poor' *Arena Journal* no.9, 1997, pp.57-76.

achievement of the good society is represented as merely a matter of access to a free market in information and commodities. In the management of the global economy neoliberal economic doctrine holds to the article of faith: Structural Adjustment Program plus time equals general wealth. Similarly, the channelling of social integration and self-constitution into an exclusively abstract interchange, given its free expansion, is seen as facilitating a smooth transition to a new age of individual freedom. For the advocate of disembodiment, the precarious negotiation of profound alienation, which accompanies this process, tends to remain beyond view, like the deadly disparities of a mature global capitalism for the neoliberal apologist.

In the face of globalisation the members of the nation's abstract community, increasingly thrust into the intellectual form of life, might utilise the increased abstraction of sociality to fashion alternative cooperative formations, which counter the hyper-autonomisation of the market. A reflexive response, not least by the group Gramsci termed "traditional intellectuals", could critically examine both the role of the intellectual in the formation of the nation and the possible future of the nation as a bulwark against material and abstract deracination. Deterritorialisation and disembodiment are linked manifestations of the shift in the apprehension of space, consequences of high abstraction for the nation and the self. I want to turn now to two instances of this linked process: the first, a consideration of the forced deterritorialisation of the refugee and their strategic 'reterritorialisation'; the second, which brings us to a central concern of this work, the way the novel as a highly abstracted form also contains an ontological reterritorialisation.

Even as the social is extended to its global extreme, in which locality appears to have lost its place and proximity is transcended, integrative form still endures and the logic of community is still enacted. Outlining the possibility of a "postnational

geography", Appadurai points to the formation of "translocalities".[79] These are liminal spaces in which the new global imperative for human mobility is exerted on the old territorial boundaries of the nation-state: borders, free trade zones, refugee camps, tourist zones, centres of finance, urban war zones, guest worker neighbourhoods, etc. A translocality is, at once, a part of a particular nation (coming under some state's administrative jurisdiction) *and* a site containing people who hold many "translocal affiliations" beyond that physical locale. His description points to the current contests "between diasporic groups and the efforts of various states to accommodate them without giving up on the principle of territorial integrity".[80] State territory becomes explicitly discursive, detached from the materialised national trope of belonging: "soil". For Appadurai, the integration of territorial boundaries with "national ethnic singularity" will become an out-moded "utopian idea", irredeemably punctured by translocal infiltration. Yet, within the stream of global movement, he admits there is also a tendency to settle, to pause, to dispute, to work, *in place.* If the world has become largely "deterritorialised", then this also tends to generate various small-scale forms of "reterritorialisation". He describes this process of reclamation as "the effort to create new localized residential communities ... that rest not on a national imaginary but only an imaginary of local autonomy or of resource sovereignty."[81] He is referring here to refugees in camps or "slum" residents who attempt to form "transit communities" in order to sustain themselves "under unstable conditions".[82] Such groups attempt to transform a "translocality" into a territorially-based affiliation, in the service of communal need.

In his proposal for a postnational geography, Appadurai has outlined a tension within the generalised dislocation of affiliation from territory. For those who find that displacement a matter of life and death, a strategy of *placing* themselves returns some visibility and control to their situation. One might extend this

[79] Arjun Appadurai 'Sovereignty without Territoriality: Notes for a Postnational Geography' in *The Goegraphy of Identity* Patricia Yaeger (ed) (Ann Arbor 1996) p.44.
[80] Ibid p.58
[81] Ibid pp.54-5
[82] Ibid p.55

argument to cover those who find that deterritorialisation and mobility are in fact aspects of their power. One such group are the intellectuals. The alienating consequences of living in a translocal society are significant even for this largely privileged group. Do its members make recourse to reterritorialisation? If so, would the forms be different from those mentioned by Appadurai? Would their forms of reterritorialisation reflect different material conditions? With these questions, I turn to the novelist as intellectual. The textual analysis which follows, in the next chapter, will explore the idea of novel writing as a practical response to absent territory and disembodiment, the novel itself as an abstracted and aesthetic reterritorialisation.

The Novel

This last section outlines a categorical schema, dividing the novels considered in the thesis into three paradigmatic groups which I will term, respectively, the novels of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, solipsism and liberal reconstruction. Each of these analytical categories represents a particular response to the ontological insecurity engendered within globalisation. Specifically, these novels manifest responses emerging from the Irish social context, conditioned by a relatively recent and partially successful nationalist revolution as well as the current politics of postnationalism. While not always referring directly to those political circumstances, they can be seen to articulate the representative contradictions in ideology and culture that accompany such a transitional moment. The conflict between modes of social integration, which characterises such a political shift, finds a confluence in the novel. Like the individual, the novel is an intersection of contrary social forms held in tension within a single *package* of space and time. And, like the nation, it traverses the binaries of material and abstract, subjective and objective. Moreover, as in the formation of nations and (increasingly) persons, the constitutive mechanisms of the intellectual form of life provide the mode for this difficult union, the mediating power of writing its means.

In Appadurai's examples of 'vivisectionist' violence and translocalism we see desperate attempts to materialise the abstracting effects of globalisation. But if we turn from the strategies employed by the deracinated to the cultural products of the globally mobile, entwined within their highly abstracted cultural products is a materialisation of social relations common across the power divide. In particular the "Utopian impulse", described by Jameson as the figuration of true collectivity in the alienated and ideological groupings of class,[83] can be discerned in the cultural representations of and for the privileged strata which most fully exploits the intellectual mode of life. Following Jameson's specific suggestion that the national form, like narrative form, exhibits just this simultaneously ideological and utopian make-up, this final section will set out to sketch tensions in the novel similar to those discussed previously in relation to the nation.[84]

Anderson's analysis of the rise and spread of nationalism is predicated on the link between novel and nation to which Jameson alludes. Anderson argued that the production and distribution of novels and newspapers by print-capitalism was a key part of the transformation to a modern conception of space and time, which allowed the nation to 'be thought'. The date at the top of the newspaper is a sign of the 'deep horizontal comradeship' of the national community. The daily ritual of reading becomes a kind of invisible mass-march into empty future time. The novel complements this temporal process, with an encompassing vision of lives enacted individually yet simultaneously within a defined common space. While the contents of novel and newspaper might define a common national interest, it is in their metonymic ability to stand as signs of the nation that their real power resides. To read the newspaper is to participate in a national community of interest, to practise a common ritual and to hold a fragment of this extended and intangible community in one's hands. So the quietude of individual internal experience is linked to the

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[83] Fredric Jameson *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London 1989) pp.288-91.
[84] See Jameson *The Political Unconscious* p.298. Jameson draws a parallel between his thesis and Tom Nairn's famous assertion that nationalism is "both 'positive' and 'negative' ... all nationalism is both healthy and morbid. Both progress and regress are inscribed in its genetic code from the start." See Tom Nairn *The Break-up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Natioanlism* (London 1981).

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similar actions of unseen others. With the expansion of print technologies the abstract community constituted in reading is no longer limited to a defined territory. The 'e-versions' of national newspapers escape the sovereign boundaries of the nation-state. This is an example of the continuation of the process of abstraction outlined above, particularly its tendency to intensify and, in its present phase, to shift toward disembodiment. As I noted, the processes that were a constitutive necessity in the formation of the nation are not bound to its products.

Like the newspaper, the novel also exhibits the shift toward intensified abstraction. And following Anderson, we find that the novel displays many of the ontological contradictions present in the nation. As an object of aesthetic containment, its bounded inclusion of disparate voices is homologous with the sovereign territory of the nation-state. Likewise, in its formal capacity to traverse the subjective and the objective, it is of the world, yet is only brought into being in each individual reading. Also, a key quality common to both forms is their functioning through material and abstract mediation. The palpability of the book mediates the abstract relation between the author, readers and/or other authors, just as the face-to-face experience of home is extended into the national territory and community. But if the novel is like the nation insofar as it is a product of highly abstracted social relations, so too is it subject to the continuation of the abstracting process. Indeed, the novel is even more susceptible to the ideology of autonomy.[85] In part, this stems from its status as a commodity, with the accompanying fetishisation of the author as producer. The privatised consumption of this commodity and its sense of linear communication from author to reader is the individuated understanding of the novel Barthes was so keen to dismantle. While the author might have been decentred, if not displaced altogether as the interpretative hub of the novel, the informing ideology of sovereign authorship has by no means been done away with by the much celebrated 'birth of the reader'. As part of the larger process of abstracted social integration, the novel, particularly in the variations on its voluntarist theme of the *Bildungsroman*, continues to be understood as a manifestation of the will to

self-constitution. A brief example of some recent literary criticism illustrates the survival of Barthes's ideological target, even in the writing of his scholarly descendants.

In an analysis of "the postmodern novel", Paul Smethurst outlines similar conditions to those described by Appadurai, pointing to "placelessness and lack of belonging" as aspects of the "material change in the size, shape, and form of the world ... related to the shift from industrial to post-industrial production."[86] Smethurst ventures beyond the material domain, however, stating that "placelessness has phenomenal and cognitive dimensions related to scepticism and post-structuralist elements of postmodern thinking".[87] Again like Appadurai, he argues that a combination of structural forces — geo-political and economic — has made untenable the integrated space of the nation and that consequently an "ontology of placelessness" has emerged. He finds a key example of this mode of being in the postmodern novel, where the apparent insularity and exclusivity of the national imaginary is ruptured by a tendency "to undermine place by presenting multiplicity through the unravelling of histories and by deconstructing place."[88]

In a reading of Don De Lillo's *The Names*, Smethurst speculates that the construction of "home", or "the traditional form of place", was fabricated from and for the needs of colonisers — "European middle-class men"— "to help articulate their particular role and mission in a modern age".[89] There is, here, a troubling conflation of the capitalist imperial project with tradition. Usually, the thrust of modernisation, as experienced from the eighteenth-century to the present, is characterised as a rapid transformation of pre-industrial communities made-up of

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[85] See Ian Watt *Myths of Modern Individualism: Faust Don Quixote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe* (Cambridge 1996).
[86] Paul Smethurst 'There is no place like home: Belonging and Placelessness in the Postmodern Novel' in *Space and Place: The Geographies of Literature* Glenda Norquay & Gerry Smyth (eds) (Liverpool 1997) p.373.
[87] Ibid pp. 373-4
[88] Ibid p.383
[89] Ibid p.381

traditional social forms, such as strong kinship relations, highly structured roles in the organisation of work, religious integration and, indeed, attachment to land. This re-naming of "the modern age" as "traditional" is effected in an effort to establish an incongruously teleological idea of "postmodernisation" as that which "destroys traditional place". For Smethurst, this new network of economic and cultural conditions manifests a transformative power, not unlike the technologically driven re-shaping of world-view in the early modern period. But unlike the modernisation of old — which witnessed the rise of instrumental rationality, the expansion of the commodity form and, consequently, the colonising push of the European powers — "postmodernisation", as presented here, has the potential to transcend the "dialectics of inside–outside". A kind of redemption is offered in this "more fluid" construction of place.[90] Echoing modernity's earlier promise of liberal revolution, Smethurst announces the hope of an aesthetically installed "ontology of placelessness":

> The postmodern novel points the way, I think, to a concept of place which resists the homogenising of global space that is an inescapable element of global economics, not by reasserting local difference, with its regressive and often aggressive values and histories [...] but by encompassing and welcoming greater diversity in a constantly redefining and portable world.[91]

As with the translocality of postnational geography, the portable world formed in the postmodern novel is represented as a provisional location of identity. The provisionality of both guards against any circumscribed or exclusive solidification of either the nation or the self: a condition considered synonymous with inequality and exploitation. Appadurai sees the enclosure of territory, and its national imaginary, as ruptured by physical human mobility; Smethurst extends this fissure into the very idea of the self formed in place, by substituting for it with the temporary frame of aesthetic form. Both are arguing for a multicultural future, inclusive of difference free from aggressively asserted identity based on negative definition. They are representative of a liberal strain in postmodernist thinking, each proposing variations on the theme of the 'provisional home'. But, in their critique of the exclusivity of modern formations of nation and self, they have only inadequately investigated the forms of this alternative 'fluidity'. If I can

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[90] Ibid p.382

characterise their thesis as essentially negative — a kind of ideology critique of the modern — then how does critique transcend itself and become the herald of a positive postmodernisation? What does it mean to live within the 'ontology of placelessness'? What are the characteristics of its forms? Or of being in the 'provisional home'? I would argue that such celebration of the fluid formation of the self and dismissal of the locatable home can only be achieved through a disregard for the individual pain and social damage posed by alienation, which stands as the obverse of this apparent freedom.

Smethurst's vision of the placeless individual — open in character and at home everywhere —requires an individuated co-ordination of meaning. In the theoretical terms set out here, this figure might be described as 'radically autonomous'.[92] Identity is formed through a discrete assemblage of practices and images, which communicate a psychic continuity of the self. As such, the mechanisms of characterisation in the postmodern novel mark a new archetypical mode of identification: making, unmaking and remaking character through fragmentary narrative; incorporating randomness by accepting repetition and congruence as structuring forces; and exposing the "conservative and constraining fiction" of place to "continuous redefinition".[93] Setting aside the difficulty of basing a politics of demystification on any framework which disallows 'the dialectic of inside and outside', this presumption can only afford the commentator a critical position hopelessly implicated in what s/he is uncovering. But Smethurst's call to model contemporary being on narration and novelistic characterisation is sure to ring true because he is, in fact, describing a phenomenon rather than prescribing a desired course. The transformation of the category of the individual into a figure of increased autonomy has strong connections with the expansion of an intellectual type of social interchange. Smethurst's model of the self, narrated into being in postmodern style, is an example of the uncritical description of the expansion of the

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[91] Ibid p.383
[92] See Sharp 'Intellectuals in Transition' p.86: "Individuality as set within more parochial contexts is lifted too; qua intellectual, the person experiences himself or herself as a creator of meaning as having passed on from individuality to autonomy".
[93] Smethurst 'There is no place like home' p.383.

intellectual modes and the emergent dominance of disembodiment. The distancing effects of intellectual practices, the process of 'lifting out' and non-interactive connections allowed by writing, are generalised across the social whole. Smethurst's peculiar universalist postmodernism thus serves as the exception that illustrates the rule. The totalising effect of an avowedly anti-total politics is unveiled in the pervasive structure of abstracted relations making up the very means of social life and conditioning the formation of the self.

As distancing practices, such as the various forms of print communication, expand beyond the intellectual groups, a naturalisation of the ideology of autonomy occurs which gives an otherwise relativist position an almost moral purpose. It drives the postmodern critique of integrated form; be it the nation, the novel or the individual. This critique is ideological insofar as it is blind to its own purposes: driving its destabilising effort deep into the self, pushing beyond individuation and on to a radically individuated autonomy.[94] The liberal-pluralist ethics of multiculturalism and anti-homogenisation, in their enactment of 'placelessness' and 'translocation', carry a profound extension of the ideology they seek to dismantle. If individualist voluntarism was a key to the consolidation of "white middle-class men" in capitalism's territorial phase, then the autonomy inherent in an 'ontology of placelessness' is not so much a departure from that trajectory as its apotheosis.

To some degree, the categories used to analyse the novels in this thesis represent three 'ideal-typical' responses to the 'ontology of placelessness'. Although each novel is distinct in content and themes, and to a lesser degree in their variations on the form, they can nonetheless be grouped according to how they fashion "alternative worlds".[95] As a prose form the novel can seem to incorporate the plain, rhythmic patterns of speech, but as an extended written enclosure of language it necessarily imposes an aesthetic shape that betrays all attempts at realism as yet more stylisation. The novel can capture language from many areas of life, as

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[94] See Sharp 'Constitutive Abstraction and Social Practice' pp.72-8.

Bakhtin stressed, but in the process of selection and arrangement an aesthetic order is overlaid on this language. To anticipate a theme of the next chapter, the frame is the border between art and life, but in the novel this boundary tends to be obscured by the abstract integration at work in language. The novel can be known only as such through its relation with other texts — the abstract relation of intertextuality — but this can in turn only be achieved through the recording technologies of writing. So, within the novel two forces are in tension: the expansive play of language and the aesthetic containment of the printed word. In this sense, aesthetic containment is a form of abstract integration, which can efface its own materially mediated constitution as well as its larger debt to the social basis of language. This theoretical point will be investigated through analysis of the particular novels considered in the next three chapters. Here, it is sufficient to indicate the contradictions and convergences that result from the interaction of a particular content and these formal tensions. An entry point is the representation of the formation of the self under the conditions of an 'ontology of placelessness'. As such, the categories of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, solipsism and liberal reconstruction are concerned with the particularly powerful way in which the novel conveys and constitutes subjective experience. But by shifting beyond the phenomenonal (categorisation being the first step), these chapters will explain how the novels also incorporate relations with objective structures. Within each category there is a pull to materialise social relations, to locate identity, to reground the self, often at odds with the explicit ideology of the content. To fashion aesthetically constructed 'alternative worlds', to channel the abstracted self in an attenuated network, is not necessarily to run headlong towards autonomy. There are, it seems, strong currents of material social relations entwined within the culture of the intellectual form of life.

A brief preview of the structural characteristics of the three categories and an outline of the theme of deterritorialisation will serve to conclude this chapter. The chapter 'Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism' considers texts that deal with the problem of

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[95] Rüdiger Imhof *John Banville: A Critical Introduction* (Dublin 1997) p.21.

self-constitution. In treating the formation of the self *as a problem*, these novels show a reflexive response to the process of lifting out from received circumstances, which characterises the generalisation of the intellectual form of life. The risk of madness haunts these narratives, a spectral threat of alienation lurking behind the bright promise of individual freedom. In their allusive construction and conspicuous stylisation, these novels draw attention to their own synthetic character. Their 'alternative worlds' are knowingly aesthetic inventions. Yet coded in their apparently abstract aesthetisation is a move toward the material world of the body or the book or the face-to-face relations of home. The limits of aesthetic constitution are seen in its provisionallity, in the frailty of its shelter.[96] In these novels there is a deliberate incorporation of the contradictions of the intersection of differing modes of being. The chapter 'Solipsism' considers texts that display an extreme contraction to the subjective. These novels are objects of a diminished social authenticity and as such cannot consciously incorporate the tensions of contradictory modes; they can only carry the mark of effects. Here the materiality of writing and the objectivity of language are at odds with the representation of an autonomous self. Broadly, these novels present abstract integration and disembodiment as processes enclosed within the self rather than recognising them as shifts in social form. There is a resignation to alienation at work in this group.

As Seamus Deane notes, there is an ascendant liberalism at play in the culture and politics of contemporary Ireland. The category of liberal reconstruction is intended to draw together texts that explicitly bear this ideology. These novels also often combine liberalism with an explicit postnationlaism, if not a celebratory globalism. They attempt to resolve the present contradictory relation between the subjective and the objective within an autotelic primacy of the individual. With the self as 'primary term', and source of authenticity, these works enlarge the sense of self-governed subjectivity, which is carried in the experience of the novel, to the characteristics of the novel form itself. The contraction of social integration to the single plane of abstract form, presented explicitly in the smooth departure from

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[96] Terry Eagleton *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London & New York

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located identity, is paralleled in the easy aestheticisation of everyday life. Alienation ceases to be a social problem, becoming instead a flaw in the self-formation of the self.

These responses to the contemporary ontological condition of placelessness are, as I have said, articulated in images of deterritorialisation. I will conclude, then, with a brief indication of how this manifestation of intensified abstraction functions in the novel, leaving the specific examples to the textual analysis in the following chapters. Philip Goodchild, in his introduction to the work of Deleuze and Guattari, provides a definition of deterritorialisation so entangled in metaphor as to offer merely a sweet image of tourism: "leaving home and travelling in foreign parts".[97] This benign characterisation is consonant with the happy vision of placelessness Smethurst offers and can, indeed, be traced back to the radical romanticism of Deleuze and Guattari.[98] Reacting against this celebration of dislocation and the apparently "subversive potentials" in the "dispersed, plural, constructed subject", Slavoj Žižek notes this form of life merely "corresponds to late capitalism". He continues:

> Perhaps the time has come to resuscitate the Marxian insight that Capital is the ultimate power of "deterritorialisation" which undermines every fixed social identity, and to conceive of "late capitalism" as the epoch in which the traditional

1995) p.270.

[97] Philip Goodchild *Deleuze & Guatarri: An Introduction to the Politics of Desire* (London 1996) p.218.

[98] See Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis 1987) p.454. While Deleuze and Guatarri certainly present deterritorialisation, nomadism and schizoanalysis as the means for releasing the flow of desire, they are also aware (perhaps more than many of their postmodernist followers) that the process of destabilising meaning and the apparent release from constraint is the working of a contradiction in capitalism itself: "capitalism has from the beginning mobilized a force of deterritorialisation infinitely surpassing the deterritorialisation proper of the State ... the State has been deterritorializing to the extent that it makes the earth an *object* of its higher unity, a forced aggregate of coexistence, instead of the free play of territories among themselves and with the lineages. But this is precisely the sense in which the State is termed "territorial." Capitalism on the other hand, is not at all territorial, even in its beginnings: its power of deterritorialisation consists in taking as its objet, not the earth, but "materialized labor," the commodity ... it could be said that capitalism could do without the State. And in fact capitalism is not short on war cries against the State, not only in terms of the market, but by virtue of it superior deterritorialization" See also Paul James 'The Nation and its Post-Modern Critics' *Arena*, no.69, 1984, pp.159-174.

fixity of ideological positions (patriarchal authority, fixed sexual roles, etc.) becomes an obstacle to the unbridled commodification of everyday life.[99]

This is closer toDavid Lloyd's understanding of deterritorialisation as "cultural and psychic dislocation", which is "the product of capitalism's unleashing of economic flows which were formerly 'territorialized'".[100] My own use of the term is an attempt to exploit, in Lloyd's phrase, its "metaphoric reach" across social, economic and cultural phenomena. The devaluation of national territory, in which "places no longer matter and ... home is literally anywhere",[101] which Jim Mac Laughlin sees as the present deterritorialising imperative of the world economy, can thereby also be recognised in the social dislocation that characterises John Banville's aesthetic search for authenticity.[102] Indeed, my use of 'deterritorialisation' attempts to bring into close relation the metaphysical and physical aspects of 'cultural and psychic dislocation' through analysis of representations of place, home and social relations of mutual presence.

The novel form holds in tension the representation of such 'physical' phenomena, as its inherent abstraction of sociality draws toward deterritorialisation. This tension, I have argued, is also played out in the figure of the intellectual/novelist, disembedded from their immediate social circumstance but re-integrated and constituted at a greater degree of social abstraction. The position of the writer, as part of this 'tension', was identified by Lukács as the source of "irony" in the novel form:

> For the novel, irony consists in this freedom of the writer in his relationship to God, the transcendental condition of the objectivity of form-giving. Irony, with intuitive double vision, can see where God is to be found in a world abandoned by God; irony sees the lost, utopian home of the idea that has become an ideal[103]

For Lukács, at the beginning of the twentieth-century, the epic contradiction of the novel lay in its attempt to overlay meaning onto an inherently meaningless reality.

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[99] Slavoj Žižek *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham 1993) p.216

[100] David Lloyd *Nationalism and Minor Literature: James Clarence Mangan and the Emergence of Irish Cultural Nationalism* (Berkeley 1987) p.226.

[101] Jim MacLaughlin *Ireland: Emigrant Nursery and the World Economy* (Cork 1994) p.34.

[102] Matthew Ryan unpublished interview with John Banville, 1999.

By 'giving form' to such a world, the novelist at once relocates meaning in the experience of the individual and, by so doing, points to the absence of meaning beyond the book. In the novel we see a provisional reterritorialisation, limited to the aesthetic. At the cusp of the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries, the cultural, social and political formations, which, like the novel, have stood in for the absent god, are now themselves being deconstructed and the apparently arbitrary nature of their form-giving meaning exposed. But if, like Jameson, we accept the Durkheimian notion of 'God' as the representation of the directly unrepresentable social totality, then we can glimpse in formations such as the nation and the novel the utopian collectivity to which they make "imperfect allusion".[104] The novel form is a crucial carrier of the generalisation of the intellectual form of life, with an ideological function in the constitution of persons as radically autonomous, but it is also an aesthetic form of 'translocality'. Its utopian character, as Jameson has it, binds together social relations at various degrees of abstraction within the space of the book, a formal allusion to the possibility of reterritorialisation of community, which is dependent on neither the absolute legitimation of god nor the lesser legitimation of the nation-state, but rather can be functionally justified around reciprocity and cooperation.

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[103] Georg Lukács *The Theory of the Novel* (London 1971) p.92.
[104] Jameson *The Political Unconscious* p.294. See also Emile Durkheim *TheElementary Forms of the Religious Life* J.W. Swain (trans.) (London 1976).

Chapter Three

Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism

Location is a cultural category. The corollary of this axiom is that in modernity the nation has dominated the cultural mediation of locale. Further, in this line of commonplaces, it might be added that individual identity has been, to a large extent, constituted within this national cultural-political frame. In Ireland, the particular history of colonisation and de-colonisation has shaped the forms through which the experience of location has been articulated. At certain points in this history, specific locations were seen to distil the cultural value of the nation. These evocative and emblematic places offered a point of entry, a site of integration, a *mise en scène* for the performance of the Irish self. During the Revival, this kind of cultural authenticity was often situated in a part-material, part-imagined place called 'the West', touching down in Connaught before being obscured by an Atlantic mist. This place continued to carry cultural weight throughout the postcolonial period, playing a formative part in the transition from Free State to Éire. It was exactly this decisively located cultural authenticity Flann O'Brien targetted in *An Béal Bocht*, written in Irish and published in 1941. (The English translation, *The Poor Mouth*, did not appear until 1973.) O'Brien, prefiguring Frantz Fanon's wariness of a fetishised national culture, parodied the attempt to secure Irish culture in the *Gaeltacht*. A speech by a "Gaeligore", or urban ideologue of Irish Ireland, illustrates the impoverishment locked in place by the idea of cultural purity:

> Gaels! he said, it delights my Gaelic heart to be here today speaking Gaelic with you at this Gaelic feis in the centre of the Gaeltacht. May I state that I am a Gael. I'm Gaelic from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet — Gaelic front and back, above and below. Likewise, you are all truly Gaelic. We are all Gaelic Gaels of Gaelic lineage. He who is Gaelic, will be Gaelic evermore.[1]

Writing in Irish, O'Brien here makes a reflexive turn on the mark of cultural difference. After colonial domination, the native landscape and language are in danger of being burdened with a genuineness or authenticity which, it was hoped, would redeem the nation. In *The Poor Mouth*, O'Brien demonstrates that the cultural

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[1] Flann O'Brien *The Poor Mouth* Patrick C Power (trans.) (London 1978) p.54. First published as *An Béal Bocht* (Dublin 1941).

resources of the language will be restricted to neither a territorial nor a conceptual enclosure.

The Ireland that required O'Brien's caustic reminder of the plurality of cultural resources is now almost entirely gone. The post-colonial state, of proclaimed economic autarky and cultural insularity, has been replaced by a nation open to the structural integration of the European Union and the dynamic insecurity of the global market. In the midst of this transformation, Irish culture remains multiple. Why, then, is it still important to recall O'Brien now? A critique of state-reified culture would serve well if this chapter were another attack on the excesses of nationalism, but this is not my project here. Rather, I want to investigate how some contemporary Irish novels manifest a relay between the constitution and dissolution of identity and to consider the aesthetic framing of the self. The first of these two related tasks addresses the present destabilisation of nationalist designations of identity. In this way I can enter the postnational milieu via novels which address the globalised imperative of individual self-formation. The second, on aesthetic framing, looks for a manifestation of those identitarian shifts in the mechanics of the novel form. O'Brien provides an apt point of departure for such a project in so far as his writing manifests a tension between the cultural specificity of his language and the expansive critique of parochialism that is its substance.

The examples have changed, the predicament remains. The works of John Banville, Mary Morrissy and Desmond Hogan are formed around a dialectic, running between the image of a self-formed self and a located relational identity, which plays between the abstract autonomy of the person and the down-to-earth material intrusion of the world. O'Brien might have taken 'the West' apart, but he did not destroy it: deconstruction is not obliteration. Again, the novels considered in this chapter can locate the self even as they strain against their own constitutive frame. The project of this chapter is to explore the tension between the desire to house the self in writing and the restless momentum of abstraction which keeps the shelter provisional. Despite the promise of 'home', these novels never quite integrate identity into the completion of an aesthetic order. The chapter has four parts. The first, 'Alternatives to Place', will address the problem of identity-formation in a cultural environment of increased globalisation. If the designations of place, set out in the nation, are theorised as losing

their capacity for the constitution of subjects, then what are the consequences of this 'deterritorialisation' of identity? The second section, 'Escaping the Frame', brings this postnationalist theory to the figurations of identity in the novels. Banville's insights into aesthetic form provide a way to recognise how the mechanics of the novel are an instance of the current tendency for the self to be attenuated within abstracted categories of meaning. The third section, 'Autonomy & Reflexivity', draws the theme of the abstracted self into the Irish literary conventions of Gothic writing. Here the novels of Desmond Hogan and Mary Morrissy provide a focus for the themes of de-stabilisation and re-stabilisation of a sense of self through the mechanisms of aesthetic form as intellectual work. Finally, the chapter concludes with the persistent question of authenticity which is threaded throughout: can a sustainable authenticity of self be constituted from the predominantly abstracted social interactions exemplified in writing?

Alternatives to Place

Recognising the simultaneous pull of location and translocation, Homi Bhabha has used the image of writing in the "interstices" to convey the problem of identity formation in the contemporary nation:

> It is in the emergence of the interstices — the overlap and displacement of domains of difference — that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community of interest, or of cultural value are negotiated. How are subjects formed 'in-between', or in excess of, the sum of the parts of difference (usually intoned as race/ class/ gender, etc)?[2]

Bhabha's question expresses what should be a key concern for those investigating how the self is formed in what is now global space. Yet "the emergence of the interstices" is often treated as an unproblematic change. Unlike Bhabha's expansive consideration, much postmodernist analysis merely describes cultural phenomena as in a straight-forward transition to the global register, without consideration of the possibility of a qualitative social transformation. As Jameson has argued, "the descriptive value" of such analysis can be admitted, without endorsing its conclusions or remaining within its limits.[3] In part, this chapter responds to this analytical limitation, as it considers images of identity formed 'in-between'.

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[2] Homi Bhabha *The Location of Culture* (London & New York 1994) p.2.
[3] Fredric Jameson *The Political Unconscious Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London 1989) p.125: "From a Marxist point of view, this experience of the decentering of the subject and the theories,

I want to investigate the predicament of aesthetic form and its bearing on the problems of identification of the self. The thematic continuity relating to this contemporary situation — manifest in Banville's *oeuvre* as a series of relations between art and nature, madness and meaning, chaos and order, authenticity and fakery — expands into the work of other Irish authors. Together this writing provides a touchstone of this aesthetic mode. The broader reading is not so much a search for an Irish cultural voice, as a consideration of aesthetic responses to the generalised problems of identification, formed in and from a particular Irish history. It is at once political, literary and social. If continuity can be read there (in, for example, the use of Gothic devices) then one might conclude that the desultory power of globalisation is not all it is often claimed to be. I will, for now, defer my conclusions on this larger matter.

As noted by Rüdiger Imhof, Banville's work is characterised by a desire for proper "shape" in fiction, to find a form adequate to the task of re-enchanting a fallen reality. The task for the novel, according to Imhof's reading, is no less than the act of "redeeming us from the disaster that is our age".[4] The novelist himself has emphasised the importance of form over content, stating explicitly: "I would say that I consider form far more important. Content, I would maintain, is an aspect of form, no more."[5] In Banville's novels we see Imhof's redemptive search enacted in aspects of form: in poetic language; in densely layered allusions; in a playful, self-aware approach to textuality and narrative. The novel form is extended, at once breaching

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essentially psychoanalytic, which have been devised to map it are to be seen as the signs of the dissolution of an essentially bourgeois ideology of the subject and of psychic unity or identity (what used to be called bourgeois "individualism"); but we may admit the descriptive value of the post-structuralist critique of the "subject" without necessarily endorsing the schizophrenic ideal it has tended to project. For Marxism, indeed, only the emergence of a post-individualistic social world, only the reinvention of the collective and the associative, can concretely achieve the "decentering" of the individual subject called for by such diagnoses; only a new and original form of collective social life can overcome the isolation and monadic autonomy of the older bourgeois subjects in such a way that individual consciousness can be lived — and not merely theorized — as an "effect of structure" (Lacan)"

[4] Rüdiger Imhof, *John Banville: A Critical Introduction* (Dublin 1997) p.17.
[5] See John Banville'My Reader's, That Small Band, Deserve a Rest: An Interview with John Banville' *IrishUniversity Review*, vol. 11, no 1, pp.5-12. See also John Banville *Eclipse* (London 2000) p.1. In *Eclipse* an awareness of the pervasive spectral power of form is asserted in the first line of its 'content': "At first it was a form."

narrative flow in order to establish a relationship with philosophy or to incorporate history consciously, while relying on narrative to offer aesthetic containment.[6]

This latter function is of particular interest to this study of identity in relation to Irish nationalism. If the novel can (or should) be "setting up analogues, parallel microcosms ... alternative worlds"[7], as Imhof has it, then art has taken on the mantle of a certain aspirational politics in Ireland's history. In that context, questions of literary form begin to acquire an explicitly ontological dimension. One could point to what I am calling aesthetic cosmopolitanism in these works. The writing of Banville, Morrissy and Hogan displays a restless constitution of subjectivity typical of literary modernism. In keeping with this modernist strain I will use the term 'cosmopolitan', following the idea of an identity extended beyond the scope of immediate social circumstances. Yet, off-setting this expansive movement, I see the 'aesthetic' as primarily a form of containment, a relocation of the signs of the self within the frame of written art. This limit is set reflexively in a conspicuous artfulness. The novel form thus becomes a site of the knowing play between freedom and restriction — writing escapes the immediacy of its practice, while it also locates the writer in a social relation. Together 'aesthetic' and 'cosmopolitan' describe an example of the contemporary predicament of the self caught in a dialectic between abstract and material formations of identity. This condition is not unique to the Irish experience — it is, as argued in the previous chapter, a generalised condition of our historical moment — but, as Lloyd has noted, it manifests in Irish culture with a "peculiar intensity". The Irish historical experience of "occupying multiple locations, literally and figuratively" is an "anomalous state" of being, now transposed to the contemporary instances of aesthetic cosmopolitanism.[8] It is a cultural formation that might begin to transcend the faded authenticity of national cultural location while it also seeks out a more rigorous grounding of social being than is offered in the liberal alternative of hyper-fluidity channelled into global space.

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[6] For a discussion of history and historiography in Banville's work, see Conor McCarthy 'Irish metahistories: John Banville and the revisionist debate' in *Modernisation: Crisis and Culture in Ireland 1969–1992* (Dublin 2000) pp.80-134.
[7] Imhof *John Banville* p.21.
[8] David Lloyd *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Durham 1993) p.3.

This sensibility manifests the crises of the self, marked out in a stylised search for authenticity amongst art and myth, as well as in narration. It represents a kind of aestheticism that values the constitutive power of transcendence through narrative. But it is a search for authenticity which, at its outset, has a knowledge of the provisionality of truth installed in its quest. Perhaps even more than O'Brien's immanent critique, Beckett's reconciliation between the inevitability of artistic failure and the continuing drive to articulate — "I can't go on, I'll go on" — is the clear antecedent to this.[9] There is acknowledgment of identity's indeterminacy, but here the knowledge continues to hold some terror. There is a wary hope for some transcendence, or figuration of alternative forms of life, installed in the novel form.

I am making my way towards the aesthetic worlds of Banville, Morrissy and Hogan, but I make the journey via a brief critique of two other interpretive frames, outlined in the previous chapter: Appadurai's 'postnational geography'[10] and Smethurst's 'ontology of placelessness'.[11] In their investment of fluidity and porousness as ethical categories, both can be characterised as postmodernist.[12] Their valorisation of fluidity in the construction of identity and place provides a critical background for my readings of the novels by bringing geopolitical problems into relation with the aesthetic — thus providing a cultural setting for the crises of the self found in the novels.

The endorsement of a global economic order, which defines space "as linkages, networks, flows, interaction, constituencies and fields of opportunity", has particular impact on Ireland as a locus of identification. As Mac Laughlin has argued:

> Such categorisations of place also take precedence over the political and administrative divisions of national territory. Ireland thus becomes the spatial articulation of a larger-than-national global economy, a place where international forces fleetingly intersect and de-construct places throughout the country. It is transformed into one 'node' in a dynamic international economy, a place where hegemonic *metropolitan* cultures, including the entrepreneurial and managerial

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[9] Samuel Beckett *The Unnamable* in *Three Novels* (New York 1991) p.414.
[10] Arjun Appadurai 'Sovereignty without Territoriality: Notes for a Postnational Geography', *The Geography of Identity* (ed.) Patricia Yaeger, The University of Michigan Press (Ann Abor 1996) pp.40-58.
[11] Paul Smethhurst 'There is no place like home: Belonging and Placelessness in the Postmodern Novel', *Space and Place: The Geographies of Literature* Glenda Norquay & Gerry Smyth (Liverpool 1997) pp.373-85.
[12] See Terry Eagleton *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford & Cambridge, MA 1996).

cultures of a globalised bourgeoisie, frequently take precedence over *local politics and national custom.*[13]

The emerging dominance of 'entrepreneurial and managerial cultures' is a core example of the expansion of the kind of radical autonomy I have been describing. Mac Laughlin warns that this form of global economic and social dominance could mean a dissolution of Ireland as a "container of Irishness". Rather than an innocuous shift to an easy translocalism, he is concerned that "the new Ireland runs the risk of being reduced to a veritable 'sci-fi' geographical space, a place where regions and places constitute nodes in a world order and function simply as circuits in a global hierarchy of flexible accumulation".[14] His concern is that an analysis which simply naturalises the dislocation of emigration and unproblematically poses the de-valuation of home as a locus of identity, will also overlook the currents of power structured into the global movement of people and capital. Within these phenomena there are continuing class divisions, emergent forms of alienating deracination and, as I argue, a cross-class ontological insecurity.

So there is a need for more thoroughgoing consideration of the attempt to resist the 'homogenisation of global space'. This resistance might lie in a reflexive turn on the relation between the categories of the 'portable world' *and* those of integrated place. In short, this relation is a dialectic seeking synthesis. My argument is that, rather than simply 'unravelling histories' and 'deconstructing place', these novels display the contours of this dialectic, complete with its contradictions. Like Appadurai's recognition of the transition between translocality and reterritorialisation, the novel form manifests the tension between abstract and material constitution. This argument might well appear at odds with Banville's own description of the nature of the novel:

> Of all art forms, the novel is in a particular way the purest, since it is the one which most nearly manages to contain itself adequately within its own limits. [...] what painter or spectator has not sensed the picture straining to burst the confines of its frame? And then there is theatre ... Novels, however, come to us practically raw: the printer is the most self-effacing of intermediaries.[15]

He proceeds to characterise the modernist project of the early twentieth-century as consolidating this hermetic enclosure of the novel, cutting it free of its "Victorian

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[13] Jim MacLaughlin 'The Devaluation of 'Nation as 'Home' and the De-politicisation of Recent Irish Emigration' in *Location and Dislocation in Contemporary Irish Society* Jim MacLaughlin (ed.) (Cork 1997) p. 193.
[14] Ibid p. 194

inheritance — ethics, manners, didacticism".[16] This movement towards a circular, internal referrentiality, finds its complete accomplishment in *Finnegan's Wake*. For Banville: "The *Wake* comes closest, perhaps as close as it is possible for a novel to come, to being utterly self-contained, where style is content, and vice versa."[17] He concludes this short discussion by appealing for a new departure from the novel into "writing": "some new and as yet unimaginable synthesis of style and content".[18] Here 'style' is shorthand for a conspicuous aestheticism, in which the novel displays its artificial texture, an art primarily concerned with Art. Conversely, 'content' is equated with what might be called the concerns of the 'life-world', such as ethics, belief or judgements of value.

Written in 1977, early in his career as a novelist, this call for a form "at once self-contained and outward looking" can be read as a statement of his project and, as such, after the completion of eleven novels, could be used to measure his accomplishment. But, as I have indicated, this study projects Banville's themes and concerns onto a broader cultural plane. The synthesis of inward/outward, containment/expansion, has a more than metaphorical connection to the critical constructions of space and place already outlined. The shared spatial imagery points to a common problem of how the individual might figure themself in the world: whether in a shifting translocality; or an individually autonomous 'portable world'; or through an aesthetic ordering of a complex life-world. The allegorical and constitutive links between the nation and the novel have been thoroughly pursued by critics and theorists.[19] It is this homology that makes up the common ground of the problem of the self set out above. If we treat the novel and the nation as instances of how, in modernity, aesthetic and political categories emerge as ontological frames, then the changing shapes of novel and nation can be used to investigate historical transformations of the modern, as well as to analyse present social conditions that situate the formation of the self. At this ontological level, questions of aesthetic containment, incorporation and expansion

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[15] John Banville 'It is only a Novel' *Hibernia* (11 Nov. 1977) p.23.
[16] Ibid
[17] Ibid
[18] Ibid
[19] Key examples are Homi Bhabha *Nation and Narration* (London 1990) and Gerry Smyth *The Novel and the Nation* (London & Chicago 1997). Also, Benedict Anderson's theory of print capitalism extends beyond the newspaper to incorporate the novel in the constitution of the nation's imagined

resonate with political questions of territorial integrity, sovereignty and plurality, because they articulate common problems of the self within the ubiquitous social forms of global capitalism. In this register, then, we can approach the novels via an almost anthropological method, considering them as artefacts of the continuous cultural process of locating the individual in time and space. We might see in them responses to the transforming material conditions of a capitalism, which add this present face to the many previously shown to Ireland.

Escaping the Frame

A theme that exercised Banville in all his writing is the human formation of order in the midst of a random universe. Re-ordering the real is the task he sets for art:

> The artistic endeavour is always formal, a willed attempt at creating order out of and within a formless reality. It is this process of constant formulation, this striving to achieve a structured whole, along with the failure to do so, which is the artist's contribution to the search for the being of Being, to use a Heideggerian locution.[20]

Beckett's aesthetics of failure obviously haunt Banville's faith in form. Yet, pessimism about an art adequate to the task of re-enchantment is coupled with a persistent desire for coherence or access to 'Being'. The play within this contrary coupling is, as Joseph McMinn has noted, "a crucial part of the narrative drama of Banville's fiction".[21] Importantly, McMinn has argued that Banville's allusive style and scepticism towards the redemptive power of science or art are traits readily associated with postmodernist thought and fiction, but that the admission of a *desire* for a form that redeems sets the work at odds with any doctrinaire denunciations of totalisation.[22] Tackling this category problem, McMinn renders Banville's incorporation of postmodern style, modern form and romantic aspiration as a "postmodern myth of the imagination's struggle with an estranged world and a diminished perception".[23] The gap between a continuing faith in humanism and the divided self of postmodern subjectivity is bridged by "the power and necessity of the imagination". Here, McMinn calls upon one of Banville's own recurrent references to

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community. Benedict Anderson *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London & New York 1991).

[20] Matthew Ryan unpublished interview with John Banville, 1999.

[21] Joseph McMinn *The Supreme Fictions of John Banville* (Manchester & New York 1999) p.3.

[22] Ibid pp1-2.

[23] Ibid p.4

Wallace Stevens' poem *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction.*[24] Stevens represented the poetic imagination as the replacement for theological order. The supreme fiction is thus the living production of meaning from human imagination and art. Or, as McMinn has it, a "humanist aesthetic, which displaces God in favour of human-kind, while retaining the divine attributes of the displaced centre of inspiration".[25] Or as Gabriel Godkin concludes in *Birchwood*: "I began to write … and thought that at last I had discovered a form which would contain and order all my losses. I was wrong. There is no form, no order, only echoes and coincidences, sleight of hand, dark laughter. I accept it."[26]

Where Stevens believed poetry to possess this kind of redemptive force, Banville has only a wary faith in the novel. He eschews the role of 'unacknowledged legislator' for the novelist, but retains a romantic hope for the novel itself:

> In our post-religious age people are inclined to take novelists and poets as priests, almost - as people who will tell you how to fix your life and save your soul. And maybe the work of art does do that - but the artist doesn't.[27]

The properties of the novel as art are thus seen to offer a formal replication of divine order, even if merely as an aspiration bound to fail. The author — in a cautionary nod toward heroic modernist excess or, perhaps, a concession to Barthes's dead author — is somehow outside this profound process of replacing lost meaning. Accepting the novelist neither as priest nor as a psychological centre, I would argue that the figure of the novelist *as intellectual* provides the link between the novel as a form that constitutes meaning and the social figuration of identity. Conversely, the transcendent power of the art object is partly derived from its being a form through which intellectuals constitute their own abstracted identity.

The novel, as *social* form, is analogous to the particular figuration of the intellectual. A book is an instance of textual inter-change in literary tradition or convention and it functions as the structuring conduit of a distanced relation with readers or other

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[24] See Wallace Stevens 'Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction' in *The Palm at the End of the Mind* (New York 1971) pp. 207-33. Banville has explicitly referred to the importance of Stevens in his own conception of the function of Art. See John Banville 'A Talk' *Irish University Review* (vol.11 no.1 1981) pp.13-17.

[25] McMinn *Supreme Fictions* p.3.

[26] John Banville *Birchwood* (London 1992) p.174. First published 1973.

writers. The book therefore does away with the immediate circumstance of face-to-face interaction and gives written shape to a social relation. It is in its textual content, in the formation of character and narrative, that the particular traits of the novel manifest this intellectual form of life. Drawing on cultural stores of images linked by metaphor, metonymy and narrative, the novel binds character and story together. Like the intellectual, the novel's characters are at once located within the confines of a written life and pieced together from invisible relations sourced elsewhere. In that numinous process of assemblage or constitution, the kind of ontological reformation Banville draws from Stevens appears to be effected. The process is not necessarily caught on the fetish of the author's personality; rather there is an impersonal resonance of type or form between author as intellectual and novel. This configuration and expansion of intellectual forms of social life has been described in the previous chapter. Here, I want to expand on how this essentially ontological formation, characterised by abstract constitution, registers in the novel as both enacted intellectual practice and discrete art object.

Writing both 'renders meaning' as a practice and locates meaning in itself. Intellectual activity more generally is, then, a combination of immediate discipline and abstract order. In the continuous interchange between these levels, life finds a richness: from the sensuous immediacy of writing to the distanced relation with readers in other times and other places. For example, both Morrissy and Banville have expressed the centrality of writing in the composition of their own identity. For the latter: "Writing is a total obsession. When people ask me how much time do I give to writing, I say '24 hours a day'. I may not be at my desk, but I'm a machine that writes."[28] Morrissy confesses to a similar permeation of her life by writing: "I just substituted writing for religion, because I needed something that renders meaning. ... I probably apply the same sense of devotion and discipline to writing as I did to being a good Catholic."[29] These novelists use writing as an activity that structures the self. Both emphasise its practice as a kind of ritualised or repeated behaviour that shapes life-activity into significance. Of course, it is also a form of work that extends beyond the moment of

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[27] John Banville quoted in interview with Arminta Wallace 'A world without people' *The Irish Times* (Thursday, September 21, 2000).
[28] Quoted in Arminta Wallace 'A world without people'.
[29] Matthew Ryan unpublished interview with Mary Morrissy, 1999.

its practice. As James has observed, the particular traits of intellectual work mean that it is:

> conducted in the main at the level of disembodied extension — that is, for example, via the medium of the printed word which materially transcends some of the limitations of time and space — intellectuals, perhaps more than anyone else, are pushed to find generalized, abstract categories which connect the vagaries of day-to-day life.[30]

For Banville and Morrissy, working with the 'abstract categories' of the novel — its intertextual connections, its distanced relations with readers and other writers, its mechanics of narrative — appears to give meaningful shape to life. These novelists are constituted as individuals within the invisible society of writing.

The formal resonance between intellectual life and the mode of intellectual interchange can be discerned within their novels, but this continuity needs to be placed in relation to its figuration of particular kinds of social relations. The intellectual form of life has expanded beyond its frame, into a manifold structure, incorporating areas once dominated by face-to-face relations. The progress and manner of this expansion can be charted in the texts themselves, revealed in a relay between aesthetic order and representations of the real. Again, Banville provides an illustration of the encounter between intellectual form and other territories of life. There is a plain but terrible epiphany[31] in his novel *The Book of Evidence*, when Freddie Montgomery first sees the woman who will be his victim:

> A maid was standing in the open french window. She must have come in just then and seen me there and started back in alarm. Her eyes were wide, and one knee was flexed and one hand lifted, as if to ward off a blow. For a moment neither of us stirred. Behind her a sudden breeze burnished the grassy slope. We did not speak. Then slowly, with her hand still raised, she stepped backwards carefully through the window, teetering a little as her heels blindly sought the level of the paved pathway outside. I felt an inexplicable, brief rush of annoyance — a presentiment, perhaps, a stray zephyr sent ahead of the storm that was to come. A telephone was ringing somewhere. I turned quickly and left the room.[32]

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[30] Paul James *Nation Formation: Towards a Theory of Abstract Community* (London: 1996) p.74.
[31] For an examination of the meaning of epiphany and its use in Banville's early work, see Elke d'Hoker 'Books of Revelation: Epiphany in John Banville's Science Tetralogy and *Birchwood' Irish University Review*, vol. 30, no.1, 2000, pp.32-50.
[32] John Banville *The Book of Evidence* (New York 1989) p.79.

In accordance with Joyce's definition of the epiphanic moment, this scene combines the commonplace with the sublime,[33] except that the latter is here a kind of Blakean diabolical inversion.[34] There is a type of transcendence in the prescient imagery which prefigures action — "as if to ward off a blow", "ahead of the storm" — providing a glimpse into the novel's own narrative store of future time. In another way, however, this moment separates itself from the novel's pervasive aestheticism. The image of the maid, momentarily framed in the doorway, stumbling backwards from interior to exterior, is contrasted with the apparent perfection of self-possession Freddie admires in the painting, *Portrait of a Woman with Gloves*.[35] At just the moment when Freddie finds a satisfyingly total aestheticism, in this picture, which is not 'straining to burst the confines of its frame', he is suddenly drawn out of its auratic security and into the shared world of face-to-face interaction. This moment might be described as an epiphany of the profane, in the way it pulls Freddie out from his life in the artistic sublime. If he is constantly engaged in the "caging of his world in literature, or art in general"[36], as Imhof has it, then the random imposition of the non-artistic, where life escapes his composing frame, is a kind of material epiphany, which reveals to Freddie the world beyond his erudite order. "Reality", as Joseph McMinn has observed, "always comes as a surprise to Freddie".[37] Such surprise at the revelation of the real could only be the product of a perception that dwells almost exclusively in the abstract. If one dares to attempt a summation of *The Book of Evidence*, then it might be described as a triangulation of the relation between the aesthetic, the world and the self. As such, this material epiphany is a deviation into the world. It is a momentary escape from an otherwise ubiquitous aesthetic intertextuality which permeates the art trilogy.[38] Of course, this referential quality only serves to accentuate the fact that the

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[33] See James Joyce *Stephen Hero: Part of the first Draft of 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man'* (London 1969) p.216.

[34] I am thinking of the inverted morality set out in William Blake's 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell' in *Poems and Prophecies* (London 1991) pp.42-55.

[35] Imhoff has identified the basis of the fictive painting as *Portrait of a Woman* (c.1658) doubtfully attributed to Jan Vermeer Van Delft, held in the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts. See Imhoff *John Banville* p.256. See also McMinn *Supreme Fictions* p.109 & 172-3.

[36] Imhof *John Banville* p.234.

[37] McMinn *Supreme Fictions* p 112.

[38] In *The Book of Evidence* and Banville's work generally, allusions abound. Nietzche, Proust, le Fanu, Gide, Stevens, Rilke, Nabokov and classical myth all appear. While the pursuit of refernces is an important reading technique for the critic, it can degenerate into a philological game and appear as an end in itself. For the purposes of this study it is more important to merely recognise that Banville's fiction is characterised by a deliberately allusive style. What is termed 'the art trilogy' is made up of

reader is provided with a break from Freddie's smooth aestheticism via yet more artistic play on the part of the novelist. The crafting of worldly imagery should be recognised as a representation of an 'outside', a calculated tonal change, rather than an insurgence of truth midst the fiction; it is a 'real effect'. This reflexive break and return, departing from allusive aestheticism to build the novel's own image vocabulary of the 'real' — its own world — echoes the mode of self-formation in Appadurai and Smethurst. Yet, in contrast, the self-conscious construction of a makeshift life-world, in Banville's novels, is at once reflexive and aspirational. It acknowledges a desire to bridge the separation between the inside and outside: going beyond a liberal satisfaction with difference or radical autonomy and on to write the self into the world of the other.

Imhof has noted that the trilogy, in its "multiple forms of self-reflexivity and intertextuality", is a long "love letter to art".[39] This reading is persuasive in its recognition of the "self-contained" aspect of Banville's avowed project in the novel, but gives insufficient emphasis to the "outward looking" component of the dual function. In each book of the trilogy, there is a drive to acknowledge fully some woman's presence in the world, a redemptive movement towards the replacement of the woman murdered in *The Book of Evidence*. Imhof points to *Athena* and the Saturnal "head-birth", through which both the protean Freddie/Morrow and the novelist himself are struggling, but this difficult production of the other seems to go beyond what he terms the "Frankenstein parallel".[40] While the constitutive capacity of the aesthetic is a consistent refrain in the trilogy, there is an equally consistent reference to excess that refuses to be contained within the formal confines of art. This excess might be referred to as 'the real', keeping in mind the caveat I have expressed about this category. The "Frankenstein parallel" is an inadequate description of the trilogy's *approach toward* the real, because the real effect or material epiphany is not seen merely in the 'creation' of another who goes out into the world beyond the laboratory. Rather, there is a movement toward recognition of the other already

the novels: *The Book of Evidence* (New York 1991), *Ghosts* (London 1994) and *Athena* (London 1995).
[39] Imhof *John Banville*, p.221: "the trilogy represents a triple love letter, ostensibly to a young woman, though ultimately to art in its so splendid insincerity that manifests itself in multiple forms of self-reflexivity and intertextuality."
[40] Ibid p.214.

solidly embodied in the world — possessing a "thereness" of being which does not rely upon some auratic endowment from the aesthetic.

This is the alternative authenticity which haunts Banville's writing in general. We see science and art always and everywhere shaping chaos into meaning, but running alongside that value of artifice, craft and calculation there are glimpses of an inarticulate presence — to be accessed via material epiphany. These visions of the 'real' leave the synthetic somehow lacking, an absence or loss that drives Banville's damaged protagonists toward some redeeming, relational constitution of self. I will leave the figurations of authenticity and their connection to the material to the conclusion of the chapter. For the moment, let us consider how the self might be formed between the world and the frame. There is something of this 'in-between life' in the figure of the intellectual, intimately integrating abstracted relations in the process of identity constitution. The novel as a mediating structure for the intellectual manifests this social form in a revealing way. It displays the mobility of association through intertextual connections, while it constitutes its figurations of identity by confining them to its narrative borders. The next section considers how, as both an aesthetic form and as a manifestation of a social form, these contemporary Irish novels are able simultaneously to transcend and locate. The theme of madness here appears as the sign of an ambivalence between liberation and alienation, an emblem of the pitfalls of an abstracted form of life.

Autonomy and Reflexivity: Madness and Meaning

In his study of contemporary Irish novels, *The Novel and The Nation*, Gerry Smyth begins his chapter 'Themes' with the sub-title 'Madness and Dreams'.[41] He asserts that this motif "spans all aspects of the Irish novel from the most intellectual to the most popular", proceeding to consider why these themes have "played such important parts in Irish fiction for so long, and why … they persist into the present".[42] Certainly, the image of madness appears a key component in the writings of Banville, Morrissy and Hogan. Smyth identifies the sources of its thematic recurrence in Irish writing thus:

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[41] Smyth *The Novel and the Nation* p.48-62.
[42] Ibid p.43.

the violence of colonialism and decolonisation: the experimental possibilities afforded by an invented or rediscovered tradition of myth or magic; the nightmare of an alienated, 'Gothic' history as manifested in religious, architectural and familial discourse; and the 'unreal' or 'anti-rational' nature of literature itself.[43]

I will leave aside the 'tradition of myth' for the moment and consider only the other three sources. As Smyth notes, Fanon established the link between colonisation and mental illness.[44] We can now add, as an overlay across the historical post-colonial mind, the post-structuralist description of 'schizoid' subjectivity in late capitalism.[45] This extends the enduring Irish historical store of images of madness into the contemporary anxiety about, and experience of, the precariousness of the self under the conditions of the newer geopolitics of late capitalism. Likewise, the 'Gothic' history of alienation and its 'unreal' representation in the novel can be incorporated into an understanding of contemporary conditions, via the figuration of the self in transition towards radical autonomy through the expansion of abstract social forms. Regarding the history of Irish Gothic (which may be characterised as a "Gothic history"), a social transformation read in literary form could be marked out in the dissipation of 'Protestant Gothic', its last practitioner Elizabeth Bowen. The post-independence period witnessed an expansion and empowerment of the Catholic middleclass. This group, producing and enduring the mixed blessings of the post-colonial state, began to articulate its own 'Gothic' anxieties. Now, in the contemporary renderings of 'madness and dreams', we can observe something of the same tone familiar from the dissolution the Ascendancy. Eagleton's description of early Gothic could now be applied to the works of Banville, Morrissy and Hogan:

> the art-form of a class no longer even assured enough to distinguish fact from fantasy, seized by an unreality which now infiltrates the texture of its most commonplace experience.[46]

The intensity of ontological doubt displayed in the Gothic novels of Le Fanu or Maturin, a questioning of "the very reality of identity and experience", can also be recognised in recent novels. This raises a question about the effects of economic growth in the Republic and the apparent incongruity of its middleclass suffering an

[43] Ibid
[44] See Frantz Fanon *Black Skin White Masks* (London 1970).
[45] Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis 1983) and Fredric Jameson *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London 1991).
[46] Terry Eagleton 'Home and Away: Internal Émigrés in the Irish Novel' in *Crazy John and the Bishop and Other Essays on Irish Culture* (Cork: 1998) p.220.

ontological insecurity akin to that in the Gothic writers of the Ascendancy. Perhaps the common experience of an uncanny life sits between the half-successful coloniser and the contemporary intellectual middleclass. Is there a congruence between the dislocation of colonialism and the translocation of contemporary global mobility? Like the literary manifestations of the Ascendancy's incomplete hegemony and half-formed sense of belonging, these newer representations from an unsettled social group draw on the historical discourses and cultural stores described by Smyth. In the particular example of Desmond Hogan, we can see the penetration of Gothic doubt extending into the possibility for a coherent formation of the self in Irish society. As Hogan put it in his novel *The Leaves on Grey*, "an ancient fear ambled in the streets of Dublin, fear of a vacuum always present in Irish life, rarely acknowledged".[47] In Hogan's novels, 'madness' — combining other Gothic motifs of sex, death and art — is the repeated refrain. Given the cultural precedent of the Ascendancy's own 'Gothic history', one could speculate that this recent Gothic style emanates from the social transition from the inherited nationalist order and the current de-stabilisation of class-based categories of identity. Yet this radical dissolution of identity is articulated via an established stylistic tradition, emerging from exactly the stony ground which apparently cannot sustain the self. Again, the dialectic of constitutive abstraction begins to be discerned. Hogan's characters, little more than figures of psychological drift, are secured by the cultural (extra-individual) moorings of the Irish Gothic novel.

In a reading of Hogan's *A Farewell to Prague*,[48] Smyth has asserted that "as a text" the novel "is 'mad' in its random, anti-linear, chaotic organisation".[49] Certainly, the movements of the central character, variously identified as "Des", "I" or "You", display madness as an explicit theme:

> There was mental illness on both sides of our family. I had often imagined what it was like, but now that I was on the other side, that I'd lost what was most precious to me — flow — I was faced with what seemed an undifferentiated future.[50]

From the grief of AIDS-related illness and death to the apparent ubiquity of psychological collapse, suicide and the looming destination of the "mental hospital",

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[47] Desmond Hogan *The Leaves on Grey* (London 1981) p.67. First published 1980.
[48] Desmond Hogan *A Farewell to Prague* (London: 1995).
[49] Smyth *The Novel and the Nation* p.154.
[50] Hogan *A Farewell to Prague* p.7.

A Farewell to Prague is replete with recurrent references to instability and madness. This theme is coupled with that of travel, as another critic has noted:

> Desmond Hogan has found a prose style which aptly conveys the schizophrenia of a changing continent, as well as the more personal, genetic madness of his narrator. *A Farewell to Prague* is a travel book of sorts, which reads as if its author has torn his richly detailed diary into small pieces, thrown all the pieces into the air, and stuck them back together again to make a novel. [51]

'Des' travels across Europe, haunted by the slow death of his friend Marek, by the possibility of his own 'breakdown' and by a generalised empathy with the lonely and excluded in the cities he visits. But to claim that the novel itself manifests madness in its structure is a misreading. It is exactly the textual form of the novel that holds the narrator out of madness. It communicates his desire to escape the hermetic individuation of meaning, which is madness.

In general, Hogan's characters present a negotiation of identity within a framework of received images — historical, mythical, literary — not merely a discrete individual order. Taking the composite make-up of the de-centred subject as a departure point, they are in the process of delineating the discourses located within them, as Smyth might have it. As noted by the occasionally omniscient narrator in *A Curious Street*, the subject/protagonist, Alan Mulvanney, is neither a sovereign self nor a free-floating figure:

> Alan realised as he approached O'Connell Bridge how many sources had contributed to what he was today; history, people, sounds landscape. He was born out of the dead body of Red Hugh O'Donnell as much as out of the harvest fields of Athlone. He carried the intricacies of influence with him.[52]

The predicament of self in Hogan's novels is located in the attempt to individuate meaning from the massed aggregation of history. This is rendered as both limitation and emancipation: the individual is freed from an illusory *sui generis* self-generation by the framework of an already extant culture. Hogan incorporates historical contradictions into the individual character by having them occupy the present and the past simultaneously, offering a contemporary critique of national culture formulated from the history of that culture itself. Instead of this producing a hyper-individuated "ontology of placelessness" or a destruction of "traditional place", it forms a reflexive

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[51] Adam Baron 'Book Review: *A Farewell to Prague*' in *The Richmond Review*, http://www.richmondreview.co.uk/.
[52] Desmond Hogan *A Curious Street* (London 1985) p.104.

engagement with the 'intricacies of influence': "an attempt not just to break with images that transfixed experience, but to break from an entire sense of stultifying national history, to create from it."[53]

Here the 'break' with national history reads like a revolutionary rupture. It is an outbreak of the future necessarily emanating from (and therefore in direct relation with) the contradictions of the past. This is akin to what Marx saw as the movement from pre-history to history proper, in which human potential is finally given its true scope. Of course, Hogan's characters — although often engaging with Irish history and culture as a daunting whole — represent an individualised instance of this immanent critique of formative conditions, so that the revolution is restricted to the self. Within this sort of radical disruption of the continuity of the self, madness lurks as the other side of the emancipatory experiment with received images. A cutting free from the weight of the merely *here* and the merely *now* might well offer the scope of a pan-historical potential, but also threatens to loose identity's assured grip on the particular, that is, the cohesion of the individual self.

It might seem that I am reading Hogan's writing against the grain. In representing Ireland, all his novels display some variant of Joyce's image of 'the sow who eats her farrow'. *A Farewell to Prague* incorporates the bitterness of exile, as a moment written back from London clearly attests:

> In you there is a longing for life, a longing for Europe, the invocation of the Flight into Egypt — the knowledge that there's never any going back to Ireland. The violation has been too horrible, too spiteful, the connivance too wicked.[54]

And, as Smyth has argued, the fragmentary structure of the text replicates the dislocation of an odyssey that has escape from Ireland as its only destination. Continuing with Smyth's line, the journey into Europe can be read as an allegory of the journey into the de-stabilised self, with Prague signfying 'madness' and a reconciled reorientation to Ireland representing a 'coming to terms' with personal and historical nightmares.[55] Extending this reading we find an 'ordering' limit on the random collection of translocal images of affiliation stretched between Prague and

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[53] Ibid.
[54] Hogan *A Farewell to Prague* p.157.
[55] Smyth *The Novel and the Nation* p.155.

Dublin: the binding motif of sexuality that provides some episodic movement to the narrative. But not even this is able to rid the self of its *all too Irish* repression and trauma:

> I touched the boy's hard pectorals as I touched the statue of David on the Piazzale Michelangelo in Florence — I called up an image of love-making, boy, boy, girl — his eyes were the turquoise of those Etruscan bays — I wanted to cross some border into sensuality land, and to make this transition I had to forget the country I was from and start again without a country — but country was too logged in me — a group of young people lingered outside the Golden Spoon on Grafton Street, one of the girls in a mahogany fur coat, a flock of gulls making a sea-scene — and the inhibition wouldn't go and there was a noise in the corridor and he flitted away.[56]

Like a neurotic version of mythic Bran and his crew, 'Des' finds that the pleasures of elsewhere cannot completely displace the formative bonds of home.[57] Here homesickness functions like the return of the repressed, finding its cue in some unrecognised aspect of desire. So, in the step beyond the national frame, the reformation of identity cannot be legitimated merely by the immediacy of the body. Although the intensity of the sexualised body appears to offer an alternative authenticity, particularly in the way it is constructed as Other in the Ireland from which 'Des' is fleeing, there is nonetheless no solid ground in 'sensuality land', neither in trans-national Gay solidarity, nor in the touristic logic of opportunistic consumption, nor even in a Bacchanalian devotion to pleasure. None of these can stitch Des's experiences into some psychic unity. His relocation of identity will not be restricted to the body. Rather, the metaphoric and metonymic links which make up the formal cohesion of the novel provide an abstract network that pulls together the discontinuity of space and time, while lifting his experiences out of their atomised moments.[58] These structural components of the novel are the abstract categories that shape Des's life into meaning. A coherence of self is constructed and (just) maintained in the intellectual form of life, a lived aesthetic practice of constitutive abstraction.

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[56] Hogan *A Farewell to Prague* pp.220-1.
[57] See Marie Heaney 'The Voyage of Bran' in *Over Nine Waves* (London 1994) pp.56-63. Bran sails to the Island of Women, where he and his fellow mariners spend one year. One of the sailors becomes homesick, so they return to Ireland. But when that sailor sets foot on shore he dissolves into dust. Bran learns that they have, in fact, been away for more than a century. Their home lost, the voyagers must sail away in search of the Island of Women once again.
[58] On metaphor and metonymy see David Lodge 'Analysis and Interpretation of the Realist Text', *Poetics Today*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1980, pp.5-22.

Here, the multiple selves of 'Des', 'I' and 'you' are bound by the same thread that binds Dublin to Leningrad: "the hair of an almost albino-looking boy, boy blue denim, blows this morning in Leningrad against the lavender blue over the Irish Sea, a ghost."[59] Chance images collected in travel, jostling in a disconcertingly porous psyche, find form in aesthetic associations. Colour, sound and coincidence function as metaphoric joiners, so much so that one might characterise the novel as a long poem, except that its metonymic component draws it back into the shape of a novel. This metonymic thread of stifled or restless desire links Des's sexual experiences and internalised repression with both Ireland's colonial history of oppression and its repressive post-colonial national culture. The apparently random or 'mad' selection of metaphoric connections is also given a more material continuity in the body menaced by the spectre of HIV. *A Farewell To Prague* is permeated by the dread of identity's disintegration, a fear that the self might be eroded down to nothing by wave after wave of hyper-significant images. And in many ways 'Des' is exactly the figure of the nomad described by Deleuze and Guattari, grappling with his intensely associative perception of an undifferentiated world. Yet the dislocated self, shifting between times and spaces according to a loose metaphoric structure, is countered by a solidification of identity around the specificity of a metonymic system linking the body, history and home. While the self achieves identity through its augmentation in the extra-individual orders of history and culture, it is held out of madness by the containment offered by exactly these grand abstractions. The interaction of metaphoric and metonymic associations is the novel's formal manifestation of constitutive abstraction. This is not so much an authenticity found, as a frame of meaning to extend or supplement the immediacy of the body.

Read in this way, Hogan's novel offers a surprisingly clear instance of the relay between materiality — of the body, of face-to-face social relations and of the world of objects beyond the self — and the intellectual formation of identity in abstract constitution. As a textual-social form, the enclosure of the book contains its narrative within its covers and locates the otherwise expansive connections made in the conceptual content. Even if the technique structuring this novel had been a random pastiche of travel notes approximating a postmodern narrative, then this remains a

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[59] Hogan *A Farewell to Prague* p.136.

means to cordon off some language aesthetically in the effort to establish meaning. On the other hand, the novel incorporates cosmopolitan mobility as its textual content, forming character from collected images and associations gathered through journeys across a Europe where borders and state-territories transform beneath the feet of the traveller. Yet, even in the midst of exile and deterritorialisation, with a fluid translocalism connecting the individual to many places via metaphoric association — and even to a profound destabilisation of the borders of the self— the result is neither placelessness nor a hyper-individuated enclosure. Rather, identity and character are constructed as synecdoche, a foregrounded part of a particular history and culture aesthetically parcelled in time and space by the novel form.

In Hogan's writing we can read a negotiation of the representations of madness Smyth schematically described. In particular, I have pointed to the way textual tensions between metaphor and metonymy are formal manifestations of the broader ontological problems of placing the self in time and space. In this way, the novel form provides 'shape' for a version of reterritorialisation. The trope of madness, in this formulation, works a dual movement for the development of character or the fictive self. In one aspect, madness is a drive inwards towards a completely internalised framework of meaning or a sign of the hyper-individuated construction of self. But, while madness represents this inward turn, it also gives momentum to a move outwards, in a typically modern sign of emancipation or of the familiar drama of self-formation in the departure from received images of history and home. The novel holds in place these contradictory thematic forces through their overlay onto its own formal union of abstracted, intertextual connections and the constitutive function of narrative. The representation of madness might have the self moving towards dissolution, but in the text it becomes another order of abstract constitution. Recalling again Smyth's schema of madness in Irish writing, Hogan can be seen to draw upon both the 'the un-real' or 'anti-rational' nature of writing and an 'alienated Gothic history', representing the self managing 'intricacies of influence' via an aesthetic order. Hogan presents the individual as both grounded and destabilised by the intimate influence of history, thereby showing identity as an altogether more discursive affair than the *Bildungsroman* normally suggests.

I have been pointing to the way a certain use of the trope of madness illustrates an example of the predicament of the translocal or cosmopolitan formation of self. A postcolonial reading might account for this as a residual historical effect of the displacement of the colonial subject. But, beyond the colonial designations of subjectivity, the newer globalised attenuation of the self calls for a reading that can account for the expansion of intellectual forms of life, particularly the abstract constitution of distanced social relations. If in the globalised facilitation of these forms we see an associated movement toward a radical autonomy of the self, then contemporary Ireland is not exempt from this social transition. And the particular intellectual position of the novelist offers a figuration of this phenomenon. Here, the novel becomes its material enactment and, in style, an articulation of the dissolution of a certain kind of ontological 'ground'. Paradoxically, in the way the Irish Gothic novel casts doubt on the very substance of the self, there might be a resource of relocation, an intimation of the re-framing of being in both a socially relational and individually particular manner. This cultural resource will be given more scope in the last section of this chapter, which considers the consolations of form and the rendering of authenticity. Before we attend to that more positive analysis, let us take another strand of this theme of madness and, now with Morrissy, again follow its line to the desultory liberation of identity beyond the frame. Like Hogan, she brings together these thematic components and formal tensions and applies them to the materiality of the body. But her novels bring the particular ambivalence and exigencies of the bodies of women into the foreground of aesthetic and social mediation.

As we have observed, Morrissy's substitution of writing for Catholicism can be interpreted as an extension of the self into an intellectual social form. The ontological security offered by religion is displaced by another order of abstract constitution — an instance of intellectual forms expanding into areas of life previously characterised by other modes of social interaction. After describing her personal transition in identity formation, she wonders about those "people who don't write, who don't have belief. What do they use to render meaning?"[60] In contemporary Ireland this question has exercised many writers. A parallel example from Northern Ireland is Bernard

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[60] Matthew Ryan unpublished interview with Mary Morrissy, 1999.

MacLaverty's *Gracenotes*, which explicitly poses the difficulty of transferring the model of a coherent self from the religious to the secular-aesthetic. The social transformation is encapsulated in the exchange between a mother, who remains a believing Catholic, and her daughter, a composer, who after admitting she no longer 'believes', explains that she nonetheless wants to write a mass:

'Then why do it? Why write a mass?'

'It's a great form, a great structure.'

'How dare you?'[61]

If we look to Morrissy's *The Pretender*, we can see how these offerings of form — both social and aesthetic — can be incorporated into the themes and structure of the novel. Like MacLaverty, Morrissy addresses the questions of transferral of identity and aesthetic reformation. She tells stories of those who, like the novelist/intellectual, 'dare' to extend their identity into their own orchestration of abstract forms. In *The Pretender* the social question of what meaning there is for those who have neither belief nor writing is given shape in the structure of the novel itself. In answer, Morrissy presents a replication of her own intellectual practice.

Like Morrissy's first novel *Mother of Pearl*, *The Pretender* takes the story of a real woman as its point of departure:[62] it is a fictional history of a Polish factory worker, Franziska Schanzkowska, who claimed to be the surviving Romanov Grand Duchess Anastasia. DNA tests after her death showed that she could not have been part of the Russian royal family. The story allows Morrissy to work with the explicit content of a tale about identity, exploring themes of deracination and alienation. At the same time, it also provides a formal resonance between a character who is authoring herself and the novelist who, actually, writes her. Likewise, the reader's desire for the story of a life, a novel-shaped narrative, is echoed in the character's desire to give form to herself. Morrissy's Franziska builds being from story, pulls random life into coherent quasi-myth, moves from memory to history — all by the mechanisms of the novel. Laying story over story, Franziska turns herself into art, just as Morrissy makes literary art.

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[61] Bernard MacLaverty *Gracenotes* (London 1998) p.89.

Like Banville's modulation of his referential aesthetic and Hogan's tense union of metaphor and metonymy, Morrissy's play between fiction as art and fantasy as personal delusion works towards a sense of the real. Again, there is imagery of traversing the gap between inside and outside here signalled in the movement between 'memory' and 'history'. As the workings of the individual consciousness, memory is essentially a process of the 'inside'. As in Hogan's writing, history is an extra-individual force that intersects with the particular instance of a life. Morrissy's novel is a juncture of the two structures, with dated accounts of places and events sitting alongside internal monologues and obvious fictions. Their proximity, their layered connection pulled together by narrative, transforms what would be a totally personal, internally formed, identity — madness — into an authentic embodiment of the period — history. Fittingly, for a reconstitution of the self, Franziska Schanzkowska begins the transition to historical authenticity with an obliteration of inherited self, a suicide attempt:

> Her intricate store of memories will drown as she enters the freezing water in an icy spray. It is what she wants. To escape memory. To become innocent. To enter history.[63]

In the workings of the narrative, this thwarted suicide (she is saved from drowning in a Berlin canal) provides an important hinge. The novel does not follow a linear chronological sequence, from earliest to latest, but rather re-orders events according an internal logic of episodes linked to place and differentiated by explanatory points of revelation. Three core sections make up the body of the narrative. They work their way backwards in time from 1922 in the 'Dalldorf Asylum', through the period 1914-20 in Berlin, and on to a childhood in Poland around 1900. The entire narrative is bracketed, beginning and end, by moments set in late twentieth-century United States. The suicide scene occurs in the middle 'Berlin' section and the reader is given explicit textual instructions to place it: "Berlin, 17 February 1920".[64] The scene is presented within the character-frame of Franziska Schanzkowska, but it marks a transition in identity, by retrospectively planting the seed of the Anastasia fantasy, while also contextualising the narrative's early 'Asylum' scenes.[65] The important aspect of this structure is its capacity to return to the same moment via a change in character-frame.

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[62] Mary Morrissy *Mother of Pearl* (London 1997) and *The Pretender* (London 2000).
[63] Morrissy *The Pretender* p.91.
[64] Ibid p.90.
[65] Ibid pp.20-80.

The moments on the bridge, before the attempted suicide, are presented earlier in the narrative, but told in the adopted (italicised) persona of the Grand Duchess Anastasia:

There are assassins everywhere. [...] All belonging to me dead or gone. Mama, Papa, my sisters, my beloved Baby. Gone. How can I explain? The waters of the Landwehr Canal promised rest. It's true. I wanted only to be dead. And I was saved. Again. [66]

The Anastasia version has the immediacy of a first person voice, while the textually later but original or 'true' Franziska version comes to the reader via a distanced omniscient narrator. These doubled, but different, events and characters suggest a successful transition of identity beyond the meagre facts of the real, the "small and sad [...] details of the suicidal",[67] and on to an intimately experienced, yet operatically lush, historical tragedy.

The Pretender gives us a version of the emancipation of being from alienation. Franziska occupies the marginal positions of Polish peasant and, later, the very figure of modern exploitation, the foreign factory worker. As a woman, her exclusion from power and security is only amplified. Shaking off these designations provides the kind of liberation of which social revolutions are made. Yet, like *A Farewell to Prague*, this freedom is not generalised, but rather fashioned from the circumstance of a particular life. Again, this is not a triumph of voluntarist self-will. The liberation into individuation is made via an augmentation of the self into a kind of archetypal image — the lost princess.[68] In this, even the body is turned from point of denigration to a mark of authenticity. The wounds the factory worker, Franziska, incurred in an industrial accident are transformed into the signs of attempted execution, left on the body of Anastasia by the Bolsheviks. Appropriating the image of the Grand Duchess is thus an act of self-formation that draws the alienated subject back into social worth, freeing the worker from the constrictions of the name 'Franziska'. The law of the arbitrary designation of the sign appears also to apply to the proper noun: its fluid interchangeability here endows the self with a profound mobility. This narrative progression — from constrictive and exploitative identity to free self-chosen self — might be read as an elucidation of the 'ontology of placelessness' or a parable of

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[66] Ibid p.80.
[67] Ibid p.91.
[68] See Mary Morrissy 'Mother of Invention' *Irish Times* (February 26, 2000). The novelist admits to the influence of this 'fairy-tale' image: "For myself, I cannot say why the story of the Romanov grand

translocalism. But that reading could only be achieved if the formal mediation of the novel were left unacknowledged. To formulate a reading that recognises and incorporates both the novel and the novelist, as aesthetic and social forms respectively, we must first consider the idea of liberal emancipation implied here.

This narrative of social mobility could be classified as a bourgeois fantasy of class unity, its ideological significance drawn out in the appearance of individuals as the sole authors of their own legitimation.[69] Even if this emancipation is limited to the individual experience and truncated by the offerings of class-bound aspirations, the narrative of mobility might not be reducible to a hierarchy of social position. It would, indeed, be a limited reading that detects straightforward wish-fulfilment in the transition from peasant to princess. Fluidity of self could be added to this class-allegorical reading. While emancipation is present in the narrative in the apparent escape from social designations, so too is the terror of cutting loose from the moorings of received identity. The narrative is conspicuously ambivalent toward the freedom gained from stepping beyond the frame of the socially constituted self and into the realm of the autotelic. Late in her life, Fraziska/Anastasia responds thus to a sceptical interviewer:

> 'How shall I tell you who I am?' she demanded crossly, when asked to declare herself.
> In which way? Can you tell me that?' She buttonholed the reporter. 'Can you really prove to me who you are?'[70]

The burden of a self lived as art lies in having continuously to synthesise authenticity from within. When identity can be exchanged, then the self moves towards the state of a fetish, or what might be called an image-object external to being rather than intrinsic to it. In that state the self, while apparently insulated from any constitution beyond its own telos, is in fact open to continuous revaluation according to an economy of image exchange. Radical autonomy becomes radical instability of the self. The liberal emancipation, which might be read in a story of individual liberation from constraint, begins to look fallacious. Rather than representing freedom from constrictive

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duchesses should have excited my interest. Blame it on a mixture of historical morbidity and a zealous and adolescent over-identification with the princess myth."

[69] Fredric Jameson might see here the fantasy of unity between classes that are actually in opposition. See *The Political Unconscious* (London: 1989) pp.87-89. *The Pretender* could be read as an endorsement of the idea that there is no other liberation aside from that offered within the aspirations presented in the social positions of capitalism. As I have written above, elements of the narrative could then be placed within the category of, what might be termed, an ideologeme of self-will.

foundations, *The Pretender* offers a series of levels of formation for the self. The narrative episodes mark constitutive movements to other, abstracted, limits. They are *abstract*, but they remain limits nonetheless. The freedom — here endowed by madness — to slough off one identity in favour of a more advantageous *chosen* alternative, is the freedom to occupy another valued image position. There is advantage, but this exchange cannot overcome alienation: there is no social integration, no stabilising sign of authenticity, no reconciliation of identity and being. This kind of liberal freedom is merely the ability to reconstrue identity as an exchange in forms for narrating the self, rather than a departure into the realms of total self-constitution or a thoroughly autotelic formulation.

A genuinely autotelic self would, I presume, require an internalised control of the processes of valuation grading the images of identity. This would involve the formation of images outside the economy and society of the market. These self-contained signs would then, somehow, have to remain beyond the appropriating reach of the commodity form. Even if this individual feat were achieved, then the totally internal regulation of the self — a liberal idyll of free being — would still be bounded by the constitutively social form of language itself. Self-authored authenticity stands as a contradiction insofar as it would be shaped by extra-individual structures of meaning. Here we have returned to Banville's revision of Stevens's aesthetic: a true autotelic being would exist only in the immediately symbolic realm of the divine. After the death of God, we moderns must now settle for its flawed human approximation in written art. In this formulation, the novel is installed with an autotelic germ and an inevitable falling short of self-enclosure. It captures meaning within its own formal limits but, simultaneously, also alludes to a real that exceeds its aesthetic 'world'.

If the liberal dream of self formation, in the departure from external designations, is a fallacy which continues to require ideological bolstering, why then should *The Pretender* not be counted as just one more adventure of the individual will? As noted above, recognition of how the textual mediation of the novel parallels the social mediation of the intellectual/novelist, offers a way beyond the limitations of such

[70] Morrissy *The Pretender* p.18.

liberal reading. We see in *The Pretender* a reformation of identity in a set of intertextual narratives combining archetypical and modern signs of freedom. Franziska is lifted out from her devalued and diminished identity and remade from, and in, the abstract order of narrative. Likewise, the novelist finds their own social form for self in the abstract interchange of writing. Yet, for both, the move to extend the boundaries of the self into interchangeable identities comes up against the located and material singularity of the body. If Banville uses material epiphany to convey the sense of an outside beyond the formal boundary of the novel, then Morrissy attempts a similar coupling by relating the text to the body. This is done in the explicit imagery of scars as writing, but more importantly the body also becomes the locus of the narratives. The continuity of the body allows doubling of character and layering of story. The body is a kind of formal limi⸱ like the novel or even the book itself. If the path through madness has led to a lib⸱⸱⸱ y transformation of self, then this is only held in place by the coherence of th⸱ ⸱ody. Similarly, if the social being of the novelist is extended beyond their i⸱⸱ ⸱ediate circumstances and constituted in the abstracted form of writing, then that attenuated formation of self also strikes a limit in the finitude of the book. The aesthetic object is at once a confluence of previous texts and readings and also a containment of a particular moment and space. The fluid formation and re-formation displayed in both aesthetic and social form is installed with a material core which brings the layered abstract orders back to the sensuous particular, the level of face-to-face social relations. For both, a foray into abstract constitution is necessarily accompanied by a material boundary — a territory for the containment of meaning. An immanent critique of the radical mobility of identity or the translocal can be found in the continued requirement of a material limit. Rather than simply displaying an unfettered movement between selves, *The Pretender* manifests the continuous relocation of identities within the frame of the enduring body. The body is both the site of individual vicissitudes and the conduit of history. It constructs a symbolic real which prevents the aesthetic order from contracting into complete internal referentiality. In this way, it replicates the formal practice of aesthetic constitution insofar as it must relocate its intertextual associations within the boundary of the book. Meaning, then, must be constituted in a relation between abstract movement and material location. With its narrative jumps working through a bodily core, *The Pretender* enacts an ontology of reflexivity, modulating the

constitutive qualities of the translocation of identity with the reterritorialisation of selves in the body and the book.

Authenticity in Social and Aesthetic Form

This chapter has addressed the precarious formation of the self in Banville, Hogan and Morrissy. I have referred to the formal characteristics of the novel as a container of meaning, which in these cases displays a relation to what lies beyond its constitutive frame: a dual movement to locate and to transcend. This set of traits is a manifestation of the conditions of intellectual work, which find the figure of the intellectual established in the attenuated social relations of abstract interchange, a process mediated and structured by writing. So both the intellectual as novelist and the novel itself provide examples of what I am calling aesthetic cosmopolitanism, a phrase that captures something of the way the intellectual form of life is at once globally mobile, while also requiring formal containment. I have run these theoretical descriptions and critical readings alongside the postnationalist assertions of an 'ontology of placelessness' and a generalised 'translocalism'. While the Irish novels I have chosen as examples resonate with strains of globalism, the movement toward relocation and figurative reterritorialisation, shows a persistent requirement of some limit to the diffuse movement of identifying signs. In particular, the portrayal of the individual as a discrete self-ordering entity has emerged as this limit. But the liberal freedom to cast off the designations of 'home' is also shown as radically unstable in these novels. With the ideology of autonomy haunted by the chance of a free-fall out of meaning, we see the trope of madness appear amidst the freedom. The mechanisms of constitution remain at work in narrative. There appears to be the "mechanics of authenticity" in the relation between a structuring containment of subjective meaning and a movement towards the 'real' beyond the aesthetic border.[71] It seems that the self-aware and auto-ironising "taking of thought", as Jameson might have it, is insufficient to exorcise the composite, decentred subject of spectral authenticity.[72]

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[71] See Colin Graham and Richard Kirkland (eds) *Ireland and Cultural Theory: the Mechanics of Authenticity* (London 1999).
[72] See Jameson *The Political Unconscious* p.153: "For the lived experience of individual consciousness as a monadic and autonomous centre of activity is not some mere conceptual error, which can be dispelled by the taking of thought and by scientific rectification: it has a quasi-institutional status, performs ideological functions, and is susceptible to historical causation and produced and reinforced by other objective instances, determinants, and mechanisms."

The focus of this concluding section is the persistent incorporation of authenticity in aesthetic and social form. We have seen the authentic reappear in various guises, but always as the space or instrument that brings the individual back from complete dissipation in the play of an apparently free self-constitution. In Banville the abstract categories of science and the auratic encapsulation of art function as explicit representations of this ordering authenticity. Yet there is another stream of authentication within the imagery of paint and physics. The material epiphany reveals this other order that continues to escape the transcendent systems set out and lived by Banville's intellectual protagonists. This other authentication of the self — its interpellation and self-recognition — can be seen in the potency of face-to-face interaction. This is the meaningful augmentation of the self in interactive relation with the other. It orientates the book to all that lives beyond its parcelled significance — the constitutive power of social form — the condition of which the novel is an instance. The novel itself can then become a reflexive exercise, moving between the explicit 'awareness' of its immediate enclosure (a conspicuous aestheticism) and the other encompassing level of formation, which it can only glimpse in part, the totality of the social and the historical store of culture.

I began the chapter with a short speculation about the possible provenance of this aesthetic cosmopolitanism, proposing a slightly awkward union of O'Brien's critical localism and Beckett's pessimistic Stoicism. As I conclude, with what I see as the persistent manifestation of authenticity in these contemporary novels, another Beckett looms. Lloyd's Beckett produces "an aesthetic of non-identity" that "writes out of inauthenticity".[73] This cuts off the chance for an easy symmetry. Rather than capping a neatly structured chapter, this conclusion draws a congruence between the precarious coherence of the self in these recent novels and the negation of identity in Beckett. Following from Lloyd's hope of a positive emergence from Beckett's negative program, the novels go some way to forming "another possible language within which a post-colonial subjectivity might begin to find articulation."[74]

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[73] David Lloyd *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Durham 1993) pp.41-58.
[74] Ibid p.56

For Lloyd the authenticity endowed by the nation, established via an imagined restoration of pre-colonial antiquity in the independent present, is in fact a replication of "the master narrative of imperialism", insofar as it enacts the same ideology of development. Not only is this nationalist "continuity of descent" derived from a wholly imagined origin, but the selfhood it forms is also rendered thoroughly inauthentic by the process of originary appropriation: a synthetic subjectivity is fashioned from the remnants of colonisation, now positioned in relation to an absent coloniser.[75] Lloyd describes a condition familiar to Banville:

> the quest for authenticity - must be a preoccupation of a people who have been colonised for eight hundred years, and naturally this preoccupation will figure in the work of Irish artists. When I was growing up, in the late 1940s and through the '50s and '60s, everything in this country was measured against things English; reality was always elsewhere.[76]

Working from a sense of "absent presence", Banville sees the aesthetic search for authenticity, which approximates the nationalist formation, as a consequence of colonial history. Lloyd, on the other hand, reads in Beckett a break with authenticity altogether. Beckett's aesthetic is a negation, not only of nationalist authentication of the subject according to origins, but also of the very possibility of a self integrated with identity.[77] Such a total metaphysical critique of integration bypasses the enforced inauthenticity of the colonised and dismantles the inherited developmental narrative of the nation, while also discounting the "perpetual decoding and recoding of ideological identifications" that is the mechanism of value for global capitalism.[78] Yet so thorough is Beckett's expulsion of the category of inauthenticity, Lloyd admits, and so complete his aesthetic of non-identity, that it "refuses to substitute any authenticity in its place". If this is the "threshold" of a future language of post-colonial subjectivity, then the step from "purely critical thinking" into positive articulation would need to take the form of an authenticity both beyond the reductive nationalist grasp and impervious to neoliberal globalism. Failure in this difficult dual task could mean, in the absence of any extra-individual authenticity, a contraction of subjectivity to the solipsistic boundaries of the body. This is intimated in Lloyd's reading of the perpetual cycle of anal/oral in Beckett's *First Love*. It is also a strand

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[75] Ibid pp46-7 and 54-5.
[76] Matthew Ryan unpublished interview with John Banville, 1999.
[77] For an analysis of Beckett's aesthetic of non-identity, without any explicit postcolonial application, see Leo Bersani & Ulysse Dutoit *Arts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais* (London 1993).
[78] Lloyd *Anomalous States* p.55.

wound into the current moment of Irish culture, an analysis of its manifestations will follow in the next chapter.

For the present, despite Beckett's deconstructive aesthetic, authenticity still survives in Ireland. Its culturally encoded endurance, as Colin Graham has observed, is associated with the nation. Identifying as citizen is a characteristic structure of authenticity, in the way it augments the self in relations with a particular history, a land and a people. As Graham argues, national authenticity as a form has a durability which might even outlast its origin:

> Authenticity may be traditionally reliant on the existence of the nation as the basis for political thought to the extent that it cannot, in some of its formats, be re-imagined beyond nationalism — alternatively, reviving a form of authenticity validated by the nation may be a way of resisting multinationalism, post-nationalism and any other contortion or disruption to the centrality of the nation as a political unit.[79]

He here suggests a *nationoid* authenticity that lives in the hollowed shell left in the nation's stead. He falls short of describing how this kind of authenticity might invest itself beyond the explicitly national. Rather, he poses a scale of reflexivity at work in contemporary Irish use of the images of the nation: 'Old', 'New' and 'Ironic'.[80] 'Old' authenticity is the anti-colonial variety Lloyd characterised as complicit with the Imperial logic of origins and development. The 'New' strain is the kind of fetishisation of cultural history concerned with preservation or simulation, deployed in the service of tourism. Finally, 'Ironic' authenticity is characteristically postmodern in style, knowingly referring to Irish images, but detaching them from any referent. Graham supplies an advertisement for Smithwick's beer, entitled 'Ireland', as an example: a series of 'Old' nationalist images of Ireland run along-side the 'New', mostly in the form of a North American diasporic nostalgia, combined with other images running from the Troubles to condoms, making up, as a whole, an 'ironic' pastiche. He is equivocal about the possibility of an 'alternative authenticity' emerging from this ironic mode:

> 'Ireland', in its joyous uncovering of myths or origins *as myths*, and signs of reality *as signs*, is able to question the objectivity and authenticity of old and renewed claims in Irish culture — its processes uncover both the mechanics of authenticity and the

[79] Colin Graham 'Blame it on Maureen O'Hara: Ireland and the Trope of Authenticity' *Cultural Studies*, no. 15, vol.1, 2001, p62.
[80] Ibid p.60.

cultural desire for authenticity. 'Ireland' toys with alternative authenticity, but finally cannot rest on anything but its ironic 'maybe that's just Blarney'.[81]

This is surely not the residual nation-shaped authenticity hinted at by Graham, but merely an example of the broken chain of signification famously identified by Jameson as the cultural logic of late capitalism. In the more specifically postcolonial Irish context, there is a congruence with Lloyd's Beckett, but without the thorough-going dissolution. While undermining received authenticity, the ironic mode cannot manage to clear a path beyond authenticity, but rather leaves the de-valued parts in place. This lacks the rigour of Beckett's Nietzchean step into the abyss. It is more cynical than self-aware, like a cleric who has ceased to believe, but who goes through the motions of the ritual regardless. It might be that an authentically postcolonial subjectivity is yet to be articulated in Ireland, as Lloyd suggests, and that the example of advertising pastiche therefore only adds weight to the argument. Are there, then, any resources of authenticity in contemporary Irish culture? Is there scope for a position that could move beyond the total critique enacted in Beckett's aesthetic, but which does not, in turn, succumb to the kind of cynical anti-nostalgia displayed in beer commercials?

In answer we can, again, look to the aesthetic cosmopolitan writing selected here. The characteristic depthlessness of postmodern style, seen in Graham's example, has something in common with Banville's writing. At first glance this might seem an unlikely parallel. The author from whom a reader might learn something of continental philosophy or art history is not immediately brought to mind by a jarring commercial montage of hackneyed *old sod* images. Yet, as McMinn has argued, Banville's work displays a similar restless scepticism and conspicuous allusiveness.[82] While there might be a postmodern stylistic link between the advertisement and the novels, I argue that in the latter there are signs of what Lloyd has termed the "resources of recalcitrance", not present in the former. For Banville's narratives incorporate absence. If Graham's ironic authenticity makes no space for an

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[81] Ibid p.74

[82] See Cheryl Herr 'A State o'Chassis: Mobile Capital, Ireland, and the Question of Postmodernity' in *Irishness and (Post)Modernism* (New Jersey 1994) p.226. In an exemplary collapse of the high/low culture distinction, Richard Kearney is reported as seeing the evidence of a thoroughly postmodern Ireland in: "*The Crying Game*, a U2 concert, country and western music in the west of Ireland, John Banville's fiction (especially *Ghosts*) or a Dublin family watching a soap opera like 'Dallas', 'Dynasty'

alternative, then Banville's sceptical strain points specifically to that aching gap. Consider this extract from the novel *Eclipse*, in which the character-narrator, Alexander Cleave, recalls a childhood encounter with "poor Peg":

> She wears a shawl and an old straw hat and a pair of rubber boots cut off jaggedly at the ankles. She carries a basket on her arm. When she draws level with me she pauses and looks up at me eagerly with a lopsided leer, her tongue showing, and mumbles something that I cannot make out. She shows me the basket, with mushrooms she has picked in the fields, which perhaps she is offering to sell me. Her eyes are a faded, almost transparent blue, like my own, now. She waits for me to speak, panting a little, and when I say nothing, offer nothing, she sighs and shakes her old head and hobbles painfully on again, keeping to the grassy verge. What was it in the moment that so affected me? Was it the lambent air, that wide light, the sense of spring's exhilarations all around me? Was it the old beggar-woman, the impenetrable thereness of her? Something surged in me, an objectless exultancy. A myriad voices struggled within me for expression. I seemed to find myself a multitude. I would utter them, that would be my task, to be them, the voiceless ones! Thus was the actor born. Four decades later he died, corpsed in the middle of the last act and staggered off the stage in sweaty ignominy just when the action was coming to its climax.[83]

The actor's stage-death is the germ from which the rest of the narrative can sprout, a metaphorical 'corpsing' as a glimpse of mortality. The prescient vision has something of Heidegger's "being towards death", the stimulus for the search for authenticity. Being must confront the certainty of non-being, so life must define itself in relation to it own absence. Cleave's return to his childhood home, in rural Ireland, and the series of recollections it triggers are the beginnings of a reformation around that incorporation of death. The result is a desire for lived authenticity: "the union of self with sundered self".[84] The remembered encounter with 'poor Peg', redolent with an intense and immediate presence yet wordless and perfectly insulating of the protagonist from an experience of 'thereness', is typical of Banville. The presence of absence is often played out in "thickening air" that quivers with some recent departure. Koppernigk's colleagues, in *Doctor Copernicus*, complain of the Canon's "nothingness — why, he is hardly here at all!".[85] Gabriel Godkin, rummaging through his Big House, Birchwood, has a Kantian moan to himself: "Still it eluded me, that thing-in-itself".[86] And, like Cleave painfully remembering his way towards a new self,

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or the Australian 'Home and Away'. These point, he said, to the 'exploding universe' and the reversal of values characteristic of postmodernism."

[83] John Banville *Eclipse* (London 2000) p.11.

[84] Ibid p.70.

[85] John Banville *Doctor Copernicus* (London 1990) p.124. First published 1976.

[86] John Banville *Birchwood* (London 1993) p.13. First published 1973.

Gabriel Swan suffers throughout *Mefisto* a "vague and seemingly objectless yearning."[87] Banville is like the fictive artist from the trilogy, *just* veiled in anagram as Jean Vaublin, "the painter of absences".[88]

If this incorporation of absence, this rendering of 'being toward death', shows Banville's novels as a rendering of the self's movement toward authenticity, then one can ask what form the authentic might take. How can the novel represent, or perhaps intimate, a form of Being as the "thing-in-itself"? I have suggested that this stream of aesthetic cosmopolitan writing moves beyond the 'ironic authenticity' described by Graham. The important difference is a formal coupling of the novel with the world, a kind of textual embodiment of Being-in-the-world. In *Eclipse*, the image of the mutely present Peg, remembered by Cleave, provides a glimpse into the broader structural inclusion of absence and this-worldly authenticity within the novel. The reader is explicitly presented with the 'impenetrable thereness of her' and this is set as the inauguration of the actor's desire 'to be the voiceless ones'. The mock-heroic tone targets the failure of artistic representation. Cleave's oxymoronic performance of authenticity has found its inevitable end in his stage-death, now he is stepping down from this abstracted relation and moving to reclaim a face-to-face relation that sees him implicated with the other rather than merely ventriloquising them.

To be sure, we see an attempt to solidify a face-to-face relationship, a moving towards the real, presented explicitly in the narrative. Stepping beyond the grief of his own indeterminate self, Cleave focuses his attention on a girl, Lily. Late in the novel, in a symbolically loaded symmetry, he rescues her from on-stage humiliation at the hands of his own sinister and clownish *Doppelgänger*, who uses her in a circus hypnotism act.[89] Cleave attempts to see Lily clearly, to view her as more than a type: "It is not a girl like Lily I am dealing with – it is Lily herself, unique and mysterious, for all her ordinariness."[90] This brings to mind Freddie Montgomery's explanation for his murder of the maid, Josie Bell, in *The Book of Evidence*. Freddie gives his own account in *Ghosts*, using the distancing third person pronoun to claim that he killed

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[87] John Banville *Mefisto* (London 1986) p.18.
[88] John Banville *Ghosts* (London 1994) p.35 First published 1993.
[89] Banville *Eclipse* pp.184-8.
[90] Ibid p.122.

her: "because she is there and he does not see her properly".[91] To remedy this failure of vision, to perceive others as fully present and inherently linked to one's self, is the task set for many of Banville's protagonists. The humanist romance is not quite moribund for this author.

Yet, the story of Cleave, finding empathetic clarity as a consolation against sorrow and loss, is only part of the interest of this novel. While the process through which he moves — from haunting by mnemonic apparitions to the care of a living other — is significant narrative content, formal components must be added to this reading. As noted earlier, the epiphany of the profane is the device through which Banville's novels approach the real. Supplementing this sense of the real is the incorporation of absence, an intimation of authenticity through the acknowledgment of death. In this combination the novels can be described as true humanist romance. Jameson writes that "by absence and by silence of the form itself" the romance of our time can express the pervasive modern ideology of "desacralisation".[92] Epiphany, in such romance, is a negative event revealing absence, rather than a providential vision. Within the reified world of capitalism, the hollowed-out epiphany reveals "radical impoverishment and constriction", rather than the guiding hand of god in the world. Like a radical critic in his own story, Cleave observes the recurrence of these emptied epiphany. Another numinous encounter recalled from childhood – buying apples from a local farm – reveals exactly nothing:

> Nothing happened, no grand vision was granted me, no blinding insight or sudden understanding, yet it is all there, clear as yesterday – clearer! – as if it were something momentous, a key, a map, a code, the answer to a question I do not know how to ask.[93]

Recollection, recording and retelling are insufficient to pull these memories into anything more than diffuse significance. They only serve to point to the 'radical impoverishment' of absent meaning. Banville's narrator-characters are writers themselves and their setting down of the story is never left unexplained. As contemporary writers, they encounter this absence of revelation. *Eclipse* is no exception to this pattern, with Cleave putting down his first person recollections and accounts in his notebook: "a sentence or two, a stray thought, a dream".[94] He is not only the immanent critic; he is also the novelist. But, as we have seen, under the

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[91] Banville *Ghosts* p.85
[92] Jameson *The Political Unconscious* p.135.
[93] Banville *Eclipse* p.144.
[94] Ibid pp.130-1.

conditions of the humanist turn to aesthetic order, the hoped for redemption through written art is a diminished deliverance, a fleeting re-enchantment.

The self-enclosure of the novel, which might be called its aesthetic sovereignty, is an illusion. Not only is it fissured with non-revelatory epiphany (like windows opening to a mist-obscured landscape), its constitution is also contingent. The autotelic aspiration of absolute self-referentiality is contradicted by the social fact of language: immanent in language is its social constitution. The novel, as an artefact of language, is therefore a social artefact. As written language it is an extended form of the social, but thoroughly social nonetheless. This social constitution of the form is the authenticity that haunts Banville's novels. It is the aura of promise never fulfilled in the aesthetic containment of the novel. The novel is bound by strands drawn from elsewhere, in history and culture; yet under conditions of alienation or ontological instability or disenchantment, it cannot fully incorporate the social world; it can only point to its degradation. The story of a movement toward face-to-face relation — an acknowledgment of the relational formation of the self — is not merely a wish-fulfilment of social restoration, but is a gesture towards an absence in the shape of authenticating social constitution. These novels, which I have labelled aesthetic cosmopolitan, at once dramatise the subjective experience of a self-constituted identity (the 'lifted out' quality of an intellectual form of life) and the formal regrounding of that identity in a particular cultural history that exists beyond the individual. In its provision of this social and formal 'ground', the novel offers an abstract reterritorialisation of the self, not unlike the extended form of the social found in the nation. The novel is nationoid, offering solidifying place while also always gesturing toward what lies beyond its borders.

Chapter Four

Solipsism

Into and Out of the Self: Wittgenstein's example

Quietly lamenting the shift toward idealism in nineteenth century Western philosophy, Bertrand Russell wrote that Kant's immediate successors "fell into something very like solipsism".[1] The 'fall' metaphor is a double warning: of a conceptual trap that might bring the activity of philosophising to an end and of a potential slip into a closed ego that could be the germ of social disaster. On the first, Wittgenstein sought exactly this end point in dissolving philosophical problems into language problems. In the *Tractatus*, having arrived at what he thought was a solipsistic still-point, he ponders: "how little is achieved when these problems are solved".[2] On the second, Russell singles out Fichte's subjectivism — "carried ... to a point which seems almost to involve a kind of insanity" — gesturing to the fact that this philosophy of intense individuation developed into an ultra-normative nationalism. In the nineteenth century the primacy of the ego gave way to the primacy of the German ego.[3]

Solipsism is the epistemological proposition that only the self is knowable: for the solipsist, the only reality is in individual consciousness. Even if there is an objective world, as the subjective idealist might admit, it is always secondary to subjective perception. I want to avoid the pitfalls of solipsism as a thought experiment and draw it out as a critical category for the investigation of a social thematic present in some contemporary Irish novels. Here it can function something like Jameson's metaphor of "schizophrenia" for a particular cultural strain in late capitalism.[4] To claim that the novels of Neil Jordan are solipsistic is not to label him a follower of Fichte. Rather, it is to identify in them a particularly radicalised version of 'autonomy', characterised by an

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[1] Bertrand Russell *History of Western Philosophy and its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London 1994) p.689.

[2] Ludwig Wittgenstein *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* D. F. Pears & B. F. McGuinness (trans.) (London 1961) p.4.

[3] Russell *History of Western Philosophy* p.690.

[4] Fredric Jameson *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London 1991).

increased degree of social abstraction and, in particular, the generalisation and fetishism of the intellectual form of life. These are dominant conditions and the effects of the present phase of global capitalism.

The themes I identify in these novels are aspects of the abstract figuration of the self. We can recognise, commonly enough, the liberal tenet of the individual as the author of the self, but here this finds extreme expression in the motifs of social betrayal and individual control. It thus emerges as a nihilistic liberalism in which representations of the self tend towards solipsism. While the character preoccupied with their own sensations is a standard and central trope of the novel, I read in these particular novels a deeper retreat into the self than conventionally fetishised individual experience. These representations of atomised selves are, at once, manifestations of cultural conditions and also ideologically charged interventions. In my analysis I incorporate both observation and critique. These solipsistic texts can be recognised as points of political contestation, when compared to other novels dealing with the problem of self-formation which offer escape from alienation short of a walled-in self. But I defer the task of ideological comparison until the next chapter. There the liberal assumptions underpinning these solipsistic novels will be seen in less radical instances and contrasted with other Irish novels that confront the contradictions of an abstracted self as a social, rather than individual, problem. Here, I want to restrict my investigation to the linked phenomena of the representation and cultural practice of retreat into the self.

Wittgenstein is an appropriate starting point for a consideration of solipsism, because his initial investigation of self and meaning led to a "problematic and unavoidable" solipsistic impasse he would overcome in his later work.[5] His early image of the solitary self intimates the radically autonomous figure to which I referred in previous chapters, so his resolution of this 'problematic' understanding provides a starting point for critical analysis of the more recent phenomenon. Proceeding from the Cartesian subject, Wittgenstein went beyond Enlightenment individualism and established a universal

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[5] Hans Sluga "'Whose house is that?' Wittgenstein on the Self" in *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, Hans Sluga & David G. Stern (eds) (Cambridge 1996) pp.320-53.

solitariness for human consciousness, a "transcendental solipsism" placing the subject beyond the bounds of the world, even as it experienced the generalised logical conditions of language.[6] The self could not therefore be confronted as an object: it was limited by an inability to perceive itself directly and knew itself only through a language "bounded by the range of logical forms available to it ... only capable of echoing, mirroring, the structure of inert, pointless, meaningless and isolated 'facts'".[7]

The much-discussed transition in Wittgenstein, from the idea of language's logical core as enclosed within individual consciousness to the expansion of linguistic meaning into a communally-established type of use-value, is a trajectory outlining both the solipsistic subject and its refutation. This is the journey from the *Tractatus* to the *Philosophical Investigations*, mapped with customary concision by Gellner:

> *Tractatus* appears to be an autistic work in which there simply are no others ...
> There is a certain irony in all of this: much later, Wittgenstein was to acquire fame as the man who had shown, or so his converts claimed, that there could be no 'private language', that community was imposed on us by the very fact of speech.[8]

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein established what Gellner terms a "solitary confinement" in language:

> The world is *my* world: this is manifest in the fact that the limits of *language* (of that language which I alone understand) mean the limits of *my* world.
>
> The world and life are one.[9]

The singular enclosure of the world is left in no doubt when Wittgenstein proceeds to the next remark, "I am my world. (The microcosm.)"[10], finally concluding:

> Here it can be seen that solipsism, when its implications are followed out strictly, coincides with pure realism. The self of solipsism shrinks to a point without extension, and there remains the reality co-ordinated within it.[11]

Wittgenstein brings together what he sees as the twin limits of the world: language as the expression of the ubiquitous structure of logic and the more circumscribed borders of

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[6] Ibid p.330.
[7] Ernest Gellner *Language and Solitude Wittgenstein, Malinowski and the Habsburg Dilemma* (Cambrdige 1998) p.59.
[8] Ibid p.63.
[9] Wittgenstein *Tractatus*, remarks 5.62 & 5.621, p.57.
[10] Ibid, remark 5.63.
[11] Ibid, remark 5.64, p.58.

consciousness. Language provides access to facts that are manifestations of logic rather than representations of the world. There is no sense of the objective, or that which is beyond the individual, as anything other than the abstract structure of logic experienced by the individual. So even death, the common and inevitable leveller which appears so often in Shakespeare, is shut out: "Death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death. ... Our life has no end in just the way in which our visual field has no limits."[12] But it is here, in this extreme mono-vision, that we pick up the thread leading Wittgenstein out of this conception of self. One might well concede to the solipsist that death cannot be fully known because it is the end of consciousness, but we know, nonetheless, that death *is* an 'event in life', since it is communicated to us through collective human knowledge. The capacity for language and culture are human characteristics that carry the knowledge of our mortality. We are the animal that knows its time is limited, a universal datum wound into all our stories.

Death does not survive the philosopher's radical doubt, remaining as it does in the unknowable realm the early Wittgenstein "must pass over in silence".[13] Here he "seems to be talking not about the world", Gellner observes, "but about a single stream of consciousness, as if it were the world".[14] How, then, is death a concept with meaning? The Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* could not answer this question because he could not pose it. But the writer of the *Philosophical Investigations* turns from the idea of the logical core of language, and from its restriction within the (universalised) individual, and opens out to the language community using the concept. Here he dismantles the private language argument he presented in *Tractatus*, so that meaning is conditioned by use, rather than a function of logic uncovered by the solitary inquiring mind. Consider his own example of the experience and description of pain. If a man identifies his pain is he presenting a unique and solitary experience? Wittgenstein continues:

> But what does it mean to say that he has named his pain?! And whatever he did, what was its purpose? — When one says "He gave a name to his sensation" one forgets that a great deal of stage-setting in the language is presupposed if the act of naming is to make sense. And when we speak of someone's having given a name to

[12] Wittgenstein *Tractatus* p.72.
[13] Wittgenstein *Tractatus* p.74.
[14] Gellner *Language and Solitude* p.63.

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pain, what is presupposed is the existence of the grammar of the word 'pain'; it shews the post where the new word is stationed.[15]

Articulation of this new and individual experience of pain requires it to pass through an already established structure of meaning or set of rules, which precede the individual. The individual enters into this structure or "language game" in order to make their subjective experience intelligible in the world. By adopting ´ · ϳ reed' rules of the game an individual can be understood by others, while convers… this structure enters the individual in a type of interpolative self-recognition. Pain is particular, but its expression or comprehension necessarily draws on jointly established meaning. Language ceases to be the domain of the solitary consciousness and becomes "an *inherently* gregarious, collective activity, one only possible in the context of an on-going community, a 'form of life'."[16] The private language of the solipsist is shown to be an impossibility, since there would be no teachable rules in such a language and therefore no verifiable meanings. An individually self-regulated language is effectively a rule-less language, as one interpreter of Wittgenstein observes: "Anything that you said would do. Therefore, it would not really be a language".[17]

'Forms of life' thus replace pure logic as the formative basis of language: meaning becomes pluralised, contextual and linked to social activity. Wittgenstein represents his imagined interlocutor as questioning this turn from logical verifiability to apparently arbitrary meaning: "So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?". He replies: "It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life."[18] Logic still has a place, but in tandem with social circumstance. For language and meaning to be possible requires, not just the representation of logical facts, but also the base 'agreement' of discursive convention. These conventions might be in the deepest sense arbitrary, but their specific location in forms of life lifts them above randomness.

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[15] Ludwig Wittgestein *Philosophical Investigations* G E M Anscombe (trans.) (Oxford 1968), remark 257, p.92e.
[16] Gellner *Language and Solitude* pp.83-4.
[17] David Pears *Wittgenstein* (London 1971) p.159.
[18] Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, remark 241, p.88e.

Gellner sees this recourse to the cultural category, 'form of life', as having the same sort of ineffability as the logical core of language. Like the always represented but never directly grasped logic, the particularity of a language game is a manifestation of a form of life that is never fully known: the speech community as another abstract foundation. Gellner proceeds to a sociological account of the structural similarity in the two approaches. Wittgenstein's two positions enact what Gellner calls the "Hapsburg dilemma", manifesting the duality of imperial culture in a tension between cosmopolitanism and parochial belonging. For Gellner, Wittgenstein is doubly trapped in the cosmopolitan corner. In the *Tractatus* he is the "transcendental ego", the hermetic intellectual or "pure observer" who, through analysis, kicks away the ladder linking him to the world beyond his own consciousness. But the philosopher is also a déraciné, Viennese Jew and as such, cut off from 'blood and soil' formations of belonging. For Gellner both are prisons. The first is the cell of solipsism, made by the philosopher himself when he asserts there is no place beyond the self to which one might escape. The second is an externally-imposed prison, for while the déraciné knows there is somewhere else to go, it is also unavailable to them. The rise of ethnic nationalism devalues their apparently rootless identity. Pluralist cosmopolitanism lacks the "authenticity" of "all those cosy communal *Gemeinshaften* with their village greens and folk dances and music".[19] The speech community is therefore an exclusive and perhaps fantastic recourse for the constitution and verification of meaning. Though the *Philosophical Investigations* might plot an escape from solipsism, there is in fact no safe-house of meaning for the 'rootless' cosmopolitan.

Gellner claims that Wittgenstein provides no examples of speech communities. At the level of 'organic' ethnicity this is so, but Wittgenstein does present a number of aspects of, or activities within, forms of life which could shape particular uses of language. Amongst others, he refers to the practices of mathematics, battle, construction and reportage.[20] Prominent amongst this list are intellectual activities, which suggests that the relatively enclosed speech community Wittgenstein has in mind is not the village, but

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[19] Gellner *Language and Solitude* p.82.
[20] Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, remark 23, p.11e.

rather the more dispersed group of cosmopolitan intellectuals. The sociality of such a group is more abstract in its relations, but remains relational nonetheless. By ignoring the sociality of intellectuals Gellner succumbs to the same 'autism' he identifies in the early Wittgenstein. To presume that the cosmopolitan and the intellectual are 'solitary' figures is to yield to the solipsistic view of the individual as the sovereign author of their products and of the self, which misrecognises the increased abstraction of social relations as an *absence* of social relations.

The dilemma in Gellner's stark dichotomy might well apply if one remained within the scope of stridently nationalist rhetoric. Though Gellner himself is keen to parody such polemics, he has in fact fallen into their orbit. As Russell notes of Fichte, the polar differences of the sealed solipsist and populist nationalist might be implicated in each other. Analysis of the intellectual form of life will be severely limited, whenever it starts with the presumption of asociality or solitariness, leaving unconsidered both the intellectual's assertion of self-authorship and the nationalist's criticism of perceived 'bloodless' detachment. Likewise, the parochial nationalist's claim that social legitimacy is based exclusively in face-to-face relations is also left unchallenged. Here I want to reapply this common polarity — between floating intellectual and grounded nationalist — within the theoretical schema of levels of social integration set out in chapter two. This will allow my analysis to consider how intellectual work might constitute a type of social relation set within a greater degree of abstraction. In particular, this approach opens up the possibility of reading the solipsistic text against its own grain. In the readings that follow, of novels produced by writers from the North and the Republic, a critique of solipsism will proceed without retreating to the parochial confines of village-life nostalgia. Responding to Neil Jordan's liberal critique of nationalism does not necessarily require a celebration of maidens dancing at the crossroads, nor an assertion of the hermetic life of the mind.

My analysis of these novels bears out Wittgenstein's later view of the link between language and sociality, but strikes some resistance in the content of the novels themselves. Some novels produced by writers from both Northern Ireland and the

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Republic represent a solipsistic self as a type of retreat from social betrayal. The different social and political circumstances in the two states make these texts particular in their responses, but I will argue that a common cultural process of disembedding is underway in them. The key authors here are Jordan and Patrick McCabe in the Republic, Robert McLiam Wilson in the North.

Social Hope and its Loss: Francis Stuart

Colm Tóibín writes that when Jordan published his first novel, *The Past*, in 1980, it "seemed natural" for Francis Stuart to launch the work.[21] The novel is a fragmentary quest narrative in which a shadowy and unnamed first-person narrator pieces together the events leading to his own birth. The men the narrator believes to be his father and grandfather were both sleeping with his mother, so his exact provenance remains unknown. This *ménage à trois* is set in a travelling theatre troop performing *As You Like It* for the rural Irish. The critical point of the novel is reached during heavily symbolic scenes, set in 1934, in which the pregnant girl, radiating fecundity, beguiles an audience that includes Eamon de Valera. Dev approaches Lisdoonvarna, where he will see the show, dreaming of nation-building — "turf-fuelled power stations" — while his glasses fog with the steamy heat of fresh hay, which seeps into his tight-shut car "through every crevice of the bodywork".[22]

Stuart's launch marked out a literary and political lineage for Jordan. The 'naturalness' of this choice of artistic father seems to lie in their perceived common cause, the critique of received pieties. *The Past* attempts to point out the shameful hypocrisy of the emergent Irish state's social policies and to represent the later generation of citizens as clear-eyed critics of the nationalist legacy.[23] For the generation of writers that emerged in the 1980s,

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[21] Colm Tóibín 'Issues of Truth and Invention', *London Review of Books*, vol. 23, no. 1, 14 January 2001.
[22] Neil Jordan *The Past* (London 1982), p.217-8.
[23] See Seamus Deane *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing Since 1790* (Oxford 1997) p.193: "The rhetoric of revisionism obviously derives from the rhetoric of colonialism and imperialism. It defines its nationalist opponent always in terms of an irrationality for which it is the saving alternative."

Stuart stands as the model "internal exile", at odds with the settled political culture of the Republic.[24] Remembering him, Tóibín remarked:

> sometimes when he spoke, especially about public life, there was a steely anger in his tone, a clear dislike for the liberal editorial policies of the *Irish Times*, for example, and a clear hatred for political leaders and politics generally. In his manner he was serene: in his opinions he was not. He was the exact opposite of every member of his generation I had known.[25]

For younger writers attracted to Stuart, he represented a conduit from Ireland's nationalist past to some as yet unformed future, providing a leverage point for criticism of the revolutionary generation. A fighter on the Republican side in the Civil War, he endorsed neither Fianna Fáil nor Fine Gael; from a Northern Unionist background, he had connections with both the IRA and the UDA;[26] a friend of W. B. Yeats and married to Iseult Gonne, he rejected the notion of an Irish national literature.[27] Moreover, Stuart also passed on "the mantle of dissent", as Eagleton describes it, an "anarchic-libertarian lineage" with a "venerable pedigree in Irish culture", stretching back through Joyce, George Moore, Kate O'Brien and beyond.[28]

Discussing the figure of the internal exile in Irish culture, Eagleton points to the writers and fictional characters making up a family tree of "lonely outcasts" whose rebellion is solitary. Images recur: "the alienated artist, the displaced intellectual, the victimised woman, the disenchanted idealist". Stuart's fiction certainly utilises this stock of outsiders, but as Eagleton notes: "Almost uniquely among Irish writers, he understands that individual dissent is impotent unless it secretes the germ of a new community at odds with the insolence of official power."[29] Stuart's novels represent the conventional modernist notion that art requires the abandonment of social constraint, but at the same time the narrative is often driven by the search for an elusive new form of social

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[24] Terry Eagleton *Crazy John and the Bishop and Other Essays on Irish Culture* (Cork 1998), pp.244-7.
[25] Tóibín 'Issues of Truth and Invention'.
[26] Tóibín 'Issues of Truth and Invention'.
[27] Ronan Sheehan, John Banville and Francis Stuart 'Novelists on the Novel' in *The Crane Bag Book of Irish Studies* (Dublin 1982) p408. First published in *The Crane Bag: The Idea of Tradition*, ed. Seamus Deane (vol.3 no.1 1979).
[28] Eagleton *Crazy John and the Bishop* p.244.
[29] Ibid

integration. It is this tension, in Stuart's person and work, that is difficult for his inheritors to maintain.

If we consider Stuart's novel/memoir *Black List, Section H*, we begin to appreciate the problem for younger writers in applying or even acknowledging the 'germ of a new community' therein. *Black List, Section H* recounts the early working life of H/Luke Ruark, aspiring poet and novelist, from a solitary adolescence in 1920s Dublin, to work in wartime Berlin and on to imprisonment in post-war Austria. H seeks out extreme experiences in the hope of developing an artistic consciousness, which he sees as combining a Gospel-inspired acceptance of the marginalised figure with a view of the writer as quasi-prophet. Association with criminals, cripples, prostitutes and rebels affords him a view from the outside. Living with the outsider, the artist enacts a critique of contemporary bourgeois society and then, with writing, points to an alternative future. Yet, in *Black List, Section H*, the marginal figures are accepted, neither because they are children of god nor, through some humanist secularisation, because they are intrinsically valuable as persons, but rather for the anti-status of marginality itself. Stuart would have us believe, for instance, that H takes up a lecturing position at Berlin University in 1939 because he is convinced Germany will lose the war. In his immediate postwar trilogy — *The Pillar of Cloud*, *Redemption* and *The Flowering Cross* — the possibility of social rejuvenation had been explored with some degree of hope, but the later *Black List, Section H* repeatedly dismantles such experimental optimism. Wherever marginality threatens to achieve some wider acceptance, there it also loses its redemptive potential. The effect, then is a fetishisation of rebellion, a veneration of failure and finally, when disillusionment is established as a mode of being, an abandonment of all prospect of renewal. The tense union of the artist and the community of outsiders ceases to provide a glimpse of the future and becomes instead a series of illustrations of the artist's inner state of resentment and alienation.

This inward turn appears in the form and content of *Black List, Section H*. Here the artist, who has abandoned hope, has recourse to the *performance* of transcendence, rather than its embodiment. H plays various parts: he is the Republican guerrilla who never fires a

shot and is repelled by de Valera; he is set up in a garden hut so he can play the mystic hermit; he is the expatriate novelist in bohemian London; later still, a decadent in Paris; finally, a neutral intellectual working in Nazi Germany. This might be interpreted simply as a rake's progress from adolescence to the beginnings of maturity, except that with each role and its abandonment there is a creeping foreclosure of access to the world. The one consistent aspect of H's personality is his channelling of all these roles and relations into his writing — they are endured or indulged for their contribution to artistic production, not for their enactment of any alternative form of community. Rather than moving from clumsy innocence to cautious experience, from masquerades to identity, from alienation to integration, H proceeds to an empty still-point between the self and the world. In a metaphor Gellner would recognise, the final paragraph is a reflection from his cell:

> The cell, on his return, appeared dim and shabby to the point of being uninhabitable, and it was hard to see how he'd ever looked on it, or his own corner of its floor, as a tolerable shelter. But soon he was reconciled to it again. Although he was still far from coming to understand the necessity for what had happened to them, he did begin to see the silence that he had entered as the deep divide between the past and what was still to come. Whatever it was that was at the other end there was no way of telling. It might be a howl of final despair or the profound silence might be broken by certain words that he didn't yet know how to listen for.[30]

The reader is left to conclude that those 'certain words' have indeed arrived and are recorded on the four hundred or so immediately preceding pages they have just read. The gesture towards some time and force beyond the novel, captured in the final phrase 'to listen for', is a rhetorical device that merely masks an inward turn; it marks the novel's moment of inception. The 'necessity' that gives these events their meaning is not sourced beyond the confines of the book, but actually comes from the aesthetic shape into which they have been fitted by the author. Even as he hopes for escape, H is 'reconciled' to the cell in which Stuart leaves him.

Although the writing in *Black List, Section H* is often awkward, as even Tóibín acknowledges, its affecting quality comes from a snug formal meshing of the apparently meandering story. The episodic narrative is interrupted with diary entries, fragments of H's work in progress, even excerpts from something called H's 'fictional diary'. This disparate set of texts is bound together, not only by the continuity of H as protagonist, but

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[30] Francis Stuart *Black List, Section H* (Carbondale 1971) p.425.

through the pervasive framing device of a third person omniscient narrator. This is not an unusual technique for an autobiographical novel, but here we have the added thematic levels of the central character 'performing' various experimental selves *and* the possibility of an author refashioning his younger self into a more acceptable figure.[31] An intimate and confessional tone characterises H's account of his actions, while the overarching narrative structure is held in place by the distant author who, we finally learn, is writing back to the silence and warding off the howl of despair. Stuart is H and not H. Like the character, its author was married to Isuelt Gonne, knew Yeats and went to Germany during the war. But, like H contemplating the Gospel of St John in his garden shed, Stuart is also performing himself or being himself at a distance. Many commentators of Jordan's generation have accepted H as Stuart — the holy fool who accidentally collaborates with a genocidal regime — and this, I would argue, points to a kind of naturalisation of the aesthetic enclosure of the self. With the diminution of social hope, a bleeding away *Black List, Section H* captures vividly through its sense of pre-installed betrayal, the radical transformation, to be enacted in the fusion of marginality and writing, contracts to writing alone. The language and experience to come from the community of the excluded now wells up from within the writer's own sense of isolation — the author becomes both the generative centre and site of transformation. This view of the exclusive bond between writer and text can then extend to the author's sense of himself as the producer of his own self, a route by no means restricted to those wanting to protect themselves from moral condemnation. This view of authorship and the self emerged as a response to the perception of societal failure, which is an altogether more general experience.

Black List, Section H is a marker of Ireland's transition into what Conor McCarthy has described, after Gramsci, as a "crisis of authority".[32] The sense of betrayal, which permeates Stuart's novel and is carried on by writers such as Jordan, is in part explicable by reference to the social context of the period since 1959, characterised by "the failure

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[31] See Brendan Barrington (ed) *The Wartime Broadcasts of Francis Stuart* (Dublin 2000).
[32] Conor McCarthy *Modernisation, Crisis and Culture in Ireland, 1969-1992* (Dublin 2000) p.12.

of the Northern and Southern polities".[33] McCarthy points to the unrealised dreams of the Free State:

> This great nationalist push has been exposed as a failure, as destructive and even a sham. Major post-Independence goals such as re-unification and the restoration of the Irish language have not been realised. Economic viability has been called into question, both at the end of the de Valera period and with the crisis that, since the 1970s, has affected the Lamass-inspired narrative of modernisation put in its place. The decision to join the EEC in 1973, and participation in the creation of a European Union since the early 1990s have raised the question as to what the worth of national sovereignty was in the first place, if it was to be so easily diluted again in international political arrangements. The ongoing problem of emigration, whether that of the 1950s or of the 1980s, has raised similar questions.[34]

The abandonment of economic autarky and the consequent precariousness of the connection to global markets left the nationalist vision of an independent Ireland severely truncated. Likewise, the constitutional assertion of a "whole island" national territory has given way to a more qualified claim on the six Northern counties.[35] In the Republic the desire for a reintegrated thirty-two county nation-state has waned, following a crisis in nationalist discourse caused by the continuing violence in Northern Ireland.[36] The failure of hegemony in the Northern 'statelet' has been self-evident from the beginning of the Civil Rights movement.[37]

McCarthy argues that these political failures generated an "ersatz" modernisation, which is merely reactionary. Irish modernisation appears radical only in relation to nationalism and is largely limited to liberal economic reform, rather than a thorough-going social and cultural engagement with the full dynamic and contradictory push of modernity.[38] A

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[33] Ibid

[34] Ibid p.33-4.

[35] See *Bunreacht Na hÉireann (Constitution of Ireland)* and *Duillin Leasuithe (Ammendment Slip), March, 1999.* (Government Publications Office, Dublin.)Pre-1998, Article 3 of *Bunreacht Na hEireann (Constitution of Ireland)* read: "Pending the re-integration of the national territory ...". After the British-Irish Agreement and the referenda of 1998, Article 3.1 now reads: "It is the firm will of the Irish nation, in harmony and friendship, to unite all the people who share the territory of the island of Ireland, in all the diversity of their identities and traditions, recognising that a united Ireland shall be brought about only by peaceful means with the consent of a majority of the people, democratically expressed, in both jurisdictions in the island."

[36] Jim MacLaughlin *Ireland: The Emigrant Nursery and the World Economy* (Cork 1994) p.33.

[37] See Paul Bew, Peter Gibbon and Henry Patterson *Northern Ireland 1921-1994: Political Forces and Social Classes* (London 1995), pp.145-191.

[38] McCarthy *Modernisation* pp11-44. See also David Harvey *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford 1990) and Marshall Berman *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London 1982).

particular absence from Ireland's modernism is Marxist critique,[39] which meant that nationalism has been overtaken by liberal modernisation. There was never a critical encounter that might have produced a more nuanced synthesis, but rather the simple supersession of nationalism announced in Ireland's current internal debates. These political and critical failures find their way into Stuart's novel as an in-built social betrayal, a post-Independence cultural shift in the image of the internal exile. This is the cultural-historical moment at which Jordan's career begins.

Ourselves Alone: Neil Jordan[40]

The review of Jordan's first feature film, *Angel*,[41] in *New Musical Express* announced that the director's "first masterstroke is to divorce his scenario from the all-engulfing shadow of The Troubles".[42] Jordan himself reiterated this sentiment of detachment in an interview in the same issue: "Irish politics are quite complex and I felt the place to make a comment on them wasn't in a feature film, and tried to concentrate on the consequences of a violent event on one human being".[43] The writers at *NME* were ignorant of how film and Irish politics might mix because they were already equipped with an array of stereotypical images of Irishness. In the two short pieces on *Angel*, many such clichés are rehearsed. But the most telling observation is the suggestion that the film "seems to come from no clear cinematic tradition" and that "Jordan's grasp seems entirely instinctual".[44] Here the tradition of misascribing Irishness is coupled with a new blindness towards the ideologically coded aesthetics of globalised style. I would argue, to the contrary, that *Angel* sits within a cinematic tradition drawing heavily from styles developed in Britain and the United States. But, as John Hill has pointed out in his consideration of images of violence in British, American and Irish film: "The representations of the Irish

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[39] Seamus Deane 'The Artist and the Troubles' in *Ireland and the Arts* (ed.) Tim Pat Coogan (London 1983) p.49. Deane notes: "The core of Irish nationalist feeling, orange or green, has been a moral, not a political passion. No political ideology is bound up with it by necessity; many are linked with it ephemerally or by opportunism. It might even be argued that the separation of Irish nationalisms from socialism left them ideologically lamed to such a degree that they became little more than exercises in introversion once the two States had been formed."

[40] Parts of this section appear in, Matthew Ryan 'Ourselves Alone: Solipsism in the Novels and Films of Neil Jordan', *Barcelona English Language and Literature Studies*, no.11, 2000, pp.187-98.

[41] Neil Jordan *Angel* (Ireland 1982).

[42] Richard Cook 'Angel of Death' *New Musical Express* 13 November, 1982, p27.

[43] Monty Smith 'Debut of Style' *New Musical Express* 13 November, 1982, p.28.

[44] Cook 'Angel of Death' p.27.

characteristically associated with sources outside of Ireland have now apparently become so natural and normal that they are providing a framework for certain sections of Irish film-making as well."[45]

Hill sets out an order of representations of violence in films thematically associated with Ireland: the British tradition shows violence as a self-defeating, momentary disturbance in the status quo; the US as a driving narrative force pushing towards resolution and affirmation.[46] Both employ what Hill calls an "individualising logic", which "favours the private and the personal at the expense of the public and the political".[47] *Angel* not only dissolves social and political questions in a technical play of surreal lighting, indistinct setting and montaged images, as Hill argues, but also effects this transcendence by thematically combining the very binary representations he identified. *Angel* re-creates Northern Ireland as an American fantasy-land (like the 'wild west') where individual violence can assume the aura of righteousness.[48] At the same time, the figure of the Jewish RUC detective, Bloom, reinstates the British state as the, somehow impartial and legitimate, repository of force, by invisibly having the last shot (from outside the frame, like the helicopter we hear throughout the credits) and putting a full stop to this all too Irish excess of passionate vengeance.

The way these two stores of images have slipped loose from their original national sources and settled within Irish self-representation will direct my analysis towards the global flow of images.[49] We can see something of the dynamics of globalisation in *Angel's* reception of disparate images, repackaging them in hybrid form and re-launching them into the globally accessible market of cultural commodities. But in the atmosphere of global exchange, more than narrative structure is refashioned. The formation of

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[45] John Hill 'Images of Violence' in *Cinema and Ireland* Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons, John Hill, (eds) (London 1987) p.178.

[46] Ibid p.152

[47] Ibid

[48] Terry Byrne *Power in the Eye* (London 1997) p.94.

[49] See Richard Kearney *Transitions: Narratives in Modern Irish Culture* (Manchester 1988). Kearney's analysis of *Angel* celebrates both the shift away from Irish 'heroic' images of violence and the exploration of 'unconscious' forces beneath ideological violence. Kearney sees a cutting through 'ideological conventions', rather than a manifestation of another level of ideological representation as I argue.

identity is also implicated — and transformation, in the conditions of self-construction, is a motif running through Jordan's work. Giddens connects the problem of constructing self-identity, amidst the movable feast of representative images, with narrative form itself.[50] This narrativising of the self is concurrent with the process Hinkson describes as the 'aestheticisation of social life'. These are related aspects of the increased level of social abstraction carried in the intellectual form of life.[51] Giddens argues for a reflexive narrativisation of identity, so as to re-establish a kind of personalised ontological order of the self in the world, thereby diminishing the risk of meaninglessness by wrapping identity in a reassuring, self-spun, story of continuity and personal development. Lash and Urry have developed Giddens's idea, positing an "aesthetic or hermeneutic reflexivity" as the way to shore up the self and community against a possible "postmodern dystopia" of the hyper-*Gesellschaft* kind.[52] The organising principle of the aesthetic is represented as an order loose enough to accommodate the constant flow of new permutations of identifying images, while remaining sufficiently cohesive to provide a frame of continuity and meaning which can hold self-identity out of madness. There is a striking resonance between this conception of identity in global space and the portrayal of self and action in *Angel*. But there we see the endemic risk in such self-directed narrativisation of the self and aestheticisation of social relations, in the turn from the 'reflexive' to the solipsistic. This occurs when the formal containment of the cultural object is taken as an individual aesthetic order, articulated in private language. A key aspect of Jordan's films and writing is the redolence of this aesthetic formation of identity, even going beyond explicit symbolic correlations like that between the armalite and the saxophone.

It is easy to list images of aesthetically ordered life in Jordan's work: jazz music and showbands in 'Night in Tunisia'[53]; the travelling theatrical troop in *The Past*; an

[50] Anthony Giddens *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford 1991) pp.181-208.
[51] John Hinkson 'Postmodern Economy: Self-Formation, Value and Intellectual Practice' in *Arena Journal* no.1, (new series) 1993, p.37.
[52] Scott Lash & John Urry *Economies of Signs and Space* (London 1994) p.322.
[53] Neil Jordan *Night in Tunisia* (London 1979).

advertising graphic in *The Dream of a Beast*[54]; a political role-play game and the film *Gone With the Wind* in *Sunrise with Sea Monster*.[55] The films offer a similar array: musical performance and carnivals in *Angel* and *The Miracle*;[56] sexual role-playing and prostitution in *Mona Lisa*;[57] kareoke and costume changes in *The Crying Game*;[58] tourist entertainment in *High Spirits*[59]; nursery rhymes, pop songs, and folktales in *The Company of Wolves*[60] and *In Dreams*[61]; even *Michael Collins*[62] has guerrilla fighters briefed in a disused theatre, sharing the stage with the eponymous 'Big Fella'.

These are Jordan's explicit representations of how aesthetic forms give shape to life and identity, but if we prize open the imagery we begin to see an internal tension. With theatres, carnivals and showbands we can read a play of surfaces: a fluidity of representation settling only in performance and with little continuity between one moment and the next. So, in the imagery, there is a correlation with the aestheticised subject described by Giddens, Hinkson, Lash and Urry. Jordan's characters orchestrate themselves and their world of objects around an aesthetic order which frames their actions as performance and their identity as changeable role. Jordan presents us with the triumph of the decentred subject: the ubiquitous hero of postmodernity's apologists. But if we lever the imagery away from the form, we see this celebration of fluidity bothered by a relatively old-fashioned search for authenticity.

The Crying Game is perhaps the clearest example of this pull between the apparent fluidity of identity under globalised conditions and the high bourgeois fantasy of the essential self. Defending himself against feminism, Jordan described how he sees characters choosing to escape the prescriptive binds of gender — violent/men and passive/women.[63] He emphasises the emancipatory power of individual choice in *The*

[54] Neil Jordan *The Dream of a Beast* (London 1983).
[55] Neil Jordan *Sunrise With Sea Monster* (London 1996).
[56] Neil Jordan *The Miracle* (Great Britain 1991).
[57] Neil Jordan (co-scripted with David Leland) *Mona Lisa* (Great Britain 1986).
[58] Neil Jordan *The Crying Game* (Great Britain 1992).
[59] NeilJordan *High Spirits* (USA 1988).
[60] Neil Jordan *Company of Wolves* (Great Britain 1984).
[61] Neil Jordan *In Dreams* (USA 1999).
[62] Neil Jordan *Michael Collins* (USA 1996).
[63] Marine Burke 'Celtic Dreamer' *Film Ireland*, April-May, 1993, pp.17-20.

Crying Game, where singular force of will is presented as transcendent of any bodily, social or political designation.[64] But this determinedly non-fixed construction of individual identity is coupled with another motif, strangely contradictory in its essentialism. The parable of the frog and the scorpion, told twice in the film, points to the inescapable determinacy of one's 'nature'. So, as other commentators have uncritically observed, we have characters who are 'essentially' non-violent, others naturally blood-thirsty, and still others programmed for selfless love.[65] We see a similar drive towards authenticity in *The Dream of a Beast*, where a character undergoes metamorphosis when an animistic essence bubbles through the surface of personality, a bestial spirit dissolving the body, revealing a new *truer* self. These naturalised resources of identity are a step beyond the structural dispositions instilled by culture, they seem rather to be carried in the genes or perhaps some immutable soul. How can this determinism sit alongside the radical relativism of aesthetic order? How can the natural, essential, self be coupled with the self encoded in changeable surfaces?

This is, of course, an old question in Western philosophy and I do not want to venture too far into that terrain. But the problem of self representation, played out as freedom versus determinism, was given renewed urgency by the accelerated and expanded transformations of cultural life in the late twentieth century. Bauman has described how this problem accompanied modernity from its beginnings. He sums up the paradox: "endemic indetermination renders man free to choose, yet this freedom is invariably deployed in frenzied efforts to foreclose the choice."[66] He argues that the freedom to choose — to construct both a self and a world — is experienced "not as a liberation, but as bereavement: identity appeared in human view first as the need to *fill a void*".[67] In Jordan's work, the void at the centre of modernity is articulated as desire, which is instilled in both the ephemeral liberation of aesthetic surfaces and the reassuring

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[64] Sean Dunne 'Reviews: The Crying Game' *Film Ireland*, November-December, 1992, p.25. See also McCarthy *Modernisation*, p.179. McCarthy observes, in *The Crying Game* the contraction of the social to individual experience produces a structure "as ahistorical, depoliticising and even reactionary as anything in *Angel*".
[65] Byrne *Power in the Eye* pp.93-7.
[66] Zygmunt Bauman 'Searching for the Centre that Holds' in *Global Modernities* Mike Featherstone, Scot Lash & Roland Robertson (eds) (London 1995) p.143.
[67] Ibid p.146.

enclosure of authentic, unchanging, essence. But where Bauman described a historical desire to augment the self through relation with the world, which can be recognised as identity, Jordan's desire appears as a sufficient condition of identity itself. As a shamanistic bat tells the reader in *The Dream of a Beast*: "To fly cleanly you must learn pure desire, a desire that has no object".[68]

Contrary to this objectless desire, I would argue that Jordan's combination of fluidity and fixity represents a *cycle* of desire, requiring a procession of objects which can know no end. If choosing identifying images, and collecting them in a loosely bound aesthetic order, is plagued by an elusive essence, then the result can only be yearning and a non-identical self. In this, Jordan's representations of identity manifest the conditions under which, and from which, they are formed: as image commodities in the global cultural market. Just as detachment from the circumstance of place made for an easy mix of British- and US-style imagery in the aestheticised world of *Angel*, in the individual detachment from the circumstances of place facilitates a contradictory blend of essence and artifice. Desire is kept in motion by the individual constantly processing new identifying images — forever stitching together and then unpicking a fetish-self in a representation of the search for the absent, 'true', self. Jordan's desiring subject begins to look like an archetype for consumption, with the individual body becoming the place where globally available objects — language, culture, identity — touch down and reach their market. Reification thus pushes back the frontiers to find purchase in areas once guarded by gender, nationality, class or ethnicity, all categories that have been exploited by capital before, but now superseded by the generic right of the individual to consume.

Keeping in mind the representation of self-formation I have described, I will consider how it informs Jordan's treatment of nationalism in the novel *Sunrise with Sea Monster* and the film *Michael Collins*. The problem of nationalism distils the paradox of desire, which lies at the heart of subjectivity under the conditions of late twentieth-century globalisation. It resides in the knowledge that national location now neither fully contains

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[68] Jordan *The Dream of a Beast* p.84.

nor creates us, yet no durable social forms fill the space left by its powerful absence.[69] In both film and novel, Jordan articulates the anxiety inherent to a global identification, which is conscious of modernist failures and structured on the presumption that we stand hubristically upon ourselves alone. The modernity wrought by nationalism, in particular, betrayed the future with its impossible desires. *Sunrise With Sea Monster*, largely set in Ireland during the 'Emergency', is narrated in the first person by a character living in nationalism's betrayed future. He attempts to devise an ontology based on this present sense of lack. The modern moment of authenticity has passed with the Irish War of Independence and now only a fetish can fill the gap between prosaic present and exotic past. A gun becomes the connecting object, but, as it endures outside its time, it can only give a *sense* of the concrete experience.[70] It becomes the simulacrum of a vanished authenticity. As such, it is ready property for a kind of political role-play game involving 'cloak & dagger' meetings with comically caricatured IRA men. Such is the state of revolutionary politics in the fallen present.

The novel follows Jordan's established narrative device of conspicuous aestheticisation, an alienated character patching images together to form identity. It thus fits the category of *Bildungsroman*, with the implications of personal development. But here the idealisations of voluntarist self-will, to which the form is predisposed, are coupled with a kind of mytho-poetic movement towards integration with the eternal. We are presented with a supernatural denouement of reconciliation with a dead father, redolent with animist and Christian imagery. The father, emerging from the sea, assures the son that all the possibilities of the self, all the desires which might be pursued but are limited by the exigencies of the body, are enacted after death. An inversion of Hamlet's Ghost tailored to the postmodern age, the dead father decrees: free your self from "purpose", which is only certainty masking randomness, change your self at every turn, but maintain your desire for integration, by imagining a space beyond "accidence", where all things are

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[69] McCarthy *Modernisation* p.31. Conor McCarthy argues that the Lemass/Whitaker program detached the nationalist superstructure from its economic base. Economic transformation was effected in opening Ireland to international investment but the ideological dominance of nationalism was left untouched until the late 1960s with the crisis in Northern Ireland.

[70] Jordan *Sunrise With Sea Monster* p.52-3.

placed and all actions purposeful.[71] It is a philosophy of *being*, which denies the desire for *becoming*, a hymn to the potential of fluidity, which continues to hold authenticity at its core. Again we see the immutable and the changeable bonded together. One could read this as a persistent representation of psychological need, the intensely personal progress of a wounded personality.[72] But why this need for the mythic or at least the late-modern approximation of mythic form in the surreal?[73] The narrative course could be read as acknowledgement of the unrepresentability of the psyche. But, following Jameson, it could also be read as utopian infiltration. The supernatural resolution would then fall within a scope that includes the psychological by exceeding it.[74] In Jamesonian allegorical mode, the Romantic imagery of an afterlife which fulfills the self, located in the expanses of a numinous sea, could be read as the human totality of social relations and history — the inescapable scope of language and culture. The longing for resolution of self in this sum of all possibilities would then be the yearning for a realisation of the, as yet unimagined, potential of our need for community. But the utopian hope would have to be seen beneath the other fantasy, presented here, of the enduring sovereign self.

The nostalgia for integration, which began as desire for the past, is recast and contracted to a bodily image. The free-standing individual forms a bodily integrated synthetic self, using *but defusing* those residual historical images which still hold the integrative aura of collective imaginings. In this way Jordan subverts the Romantic nationalist attempt to integrate individual and collective desires under the mystical bond of land and cultural continuity. But, writing in 1994, he fictively injects a postmodern sensibility into a historical moment seen as the beginning of the end of the nationally-centred self, an end advocated in postmodern versions of the postcolonial project. The theory of the decentred self — the "poststructuralist position"— is properly a critique of the historical construction of the bourgeois individual subject.[75] This subject position never had a particular foothold in the nationalist formation of Irish identity and was certainly not the

[71] See *Hamlet* (I. v. 1-91). Instead of being called to filial duty by his father's ghost, the son in Jordan's novel is freed from fate and encouraged to pursue the *actualisation* of his 'indomitable self'.
[72] Byrne *Power in the Eye* p.105.
[73] Brian McIlroy *Irish Cinema: An Illustrated History* (Dublin 1988) p.114.
[74] Jameson *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London 1989) p.23.
[75] Jameson 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* Hal Foster (ed) (Seattle1983) p.115.

ideal citizen of the postcolonial state.[76] In any case, I have suggested how tenaciously Jordan holds to the essential self, surely only a thin 'New Age' guise for the "unique, autonomous, self-identical and self-determining individual" which, as Eagleton notes, "remains a political and ideological requirement of the system" even as it appears "embarrassingly out of gear with certain versions of subjectivity which arise more directly from the late capitalist economy itself".[77] In his rendering of the decomposition of nationalism Jordan adopts the poststructuralist position, but rather than responding to the legacy of Romantic nationalism, he seems to be refashioning the mechanisms of identification in exactly this binary image of the late-capitalist economy. Here post-nationalism slips towards celebratory globalism.

Jordan contracts the nationalist figuration of identity — recoiling from the betrayal of its revolution and the stultifying cultural paralysis in the formation of its State — and relocates its integrative aspirations within the individual. The single figure unifies a procession of allusions and images — here historical and political — in the manner of the typical protagonist of the *Bildungsroman*, binding the language and motifs of a disparate cultural inheritance into the formal whole of the novel. Realisation of self-identity remains the goal, but the location of authenticity has contracted from the continuity of land and people and become the enduring desire itself, somehow located at the heart of the autonomous self. This is a total kind of individualism, which recognises only the indissoluble solidarity of the self and the body, conflating all else (history, ideology, society) under the terms of individual desire. Jordan's work thus exemplifies what has been described, in another context, as the "crisis of nihilism within postmodernism – its weakening of the subject, its erasure of difference and the establishment of the economy of the global mall."[78] Jordan's own postmodern nihilism, and its formation of the solipsistic desiring self, stems from the way he dismantles the idea of the national subject

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[76] Terry Eagleton *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London & New York 1995) pp.149 & 277.
[77] Terry Eagleton *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford 1990) pp.374-7.
[78] Shaun Richards 'Yeats's Theatre and the Contemporary "Crisis of Nihilism"' *Irish University Review* vol.2, no.24, 1994, p.208.

without erasing its sustaining myth of integration.[79] In *Sunrise with Sea Monster*, the critique of nationalism mutates into an apology for exactly the kind of postmodern dystopia Lash and Urry warn against. The novel offers simultaneously the fluidity of identity and a re-establishment of the sovereignty of the individual (celebrating choice as it forecloses it, as Bauman has it). It is, in the end, an amalgam of reactions to nationalism, which leaves a static liberalism in its place. The order of the desiring self remains unchanged in the course of the novel. In *Sunrise With Sea Monster* the formal romance of character development borrows authenticity from the utopian desire for natural and historical integration — all in an effort to endorse, or to frame, the condition of identity as continuous consumption.

Perhaps Jordan's most ambitious attempt at combining the postmodern figure of the free-floating subject with the purely internal order of authentic self-identity is in the film *Michael Collins*. As in *Sunrise With Sea Monster*, lived authenticity is here safely locked in the past. The setting is a historical moment in which identity has coalesced with political commitment, a difficult combination for Jordan, resolved through jump-cut scenes of justified violence. Recalling Hill's description of US-style violence as narrative propellant, the first half of the story is told in the globally recognisable film language of underdog-strives-and-wins. (As an advertisement in Australia assured: "If you liked *Braveheart*, then you'll love *Michael Collins*".) But, as in *Angel*, a British-style conclusion to violence marks the final shot. It ends the war (and the moment of authentic politics), showing the whole bloody episode as largely futile, leaving behind a de Valera almost as repellent in his bathos as the Castle British in their detached cruelty. Violence gives urgent movement to the narrative and consolidates viewer sympathy for the committed hero. It also concludes the delirium of its own presence — a momentary unity of action and self — halting the dangerous momentum and leaving everything almost exactly as it was. This modulation of narrative is characteristic of how the image commodity repeats recognisable traits and regulates desire by rehearsing satisfaction,

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[79] See McCarthy *Modernisation* p.31. This is a cultural echo of the disjuncture between economy and ideology that formed with the Lemass / Whitaker reforms. McCarthy describes that 'turn' as: "marking the definitive separation of state nationalism from its traditional ideological underpinnings … it was not recognised that a critique was also needed of the dominant state ideology: nationalism."

even as it forestalls fulfilment and reproduces the conditions of consumption. Here, Jordan has joined this principle of the transnational film market with stock-in-trade images of Irish violence.

Collins, as the *masculine* controller of violence (clearly delineated against the shrieking and *hysterical* Dev), is able to traverse this two-way narrative modulation.[80] As the man of action, he cuts across the genre requirements of the transnational film mode, while also serving Jordan's thematic binary of authentic self and fluid subject. The figure of Collins as rebel, rather than politician, pits the film image against the historical. It is an ambitious narrative trick to distance Collins from the power of the State, even as he launches the attack on the Republicans in the Four Courts. The same armoured cars that earlier embodied the grey face of imperial domination later enforce the power of the postcolonial State, already distant and anonymous. Collins emerges as the man of action whose pure energy is diluted in the service of a State. The image is of an individual simply swept up and cut down in the machinations of political consolidation. Jordan's Collins dances between image and history, maintaining the aura of organic rebel even as he actually personifies the new State. His character thus binds the narrative need for modulation of violence with the identity theme of a dualism unified by desire, enacted in an aesthetic resolution where the victim of history can, as image, escape it. Yet it is not disregard for historical truth that launches *Michael Collins* as global image commodity, but rather the way the film structurally incorporates the globalised conditions of its production. Globalisation is evident in the way a film, set amongst the mass mobilisation of a Romantic nationalist movement and the revolutionary birth of a postcolonial state, can be displaced and formed into a generic representation of the late capitalist construction of the desiring subject. Jordan tells us the test audience in New York gave it a ninety percent approval rating.[81] Perhaps they recognised the contradiction woven into the fabric of their own selves. Vanessa Redgrave emerged from the screening "actually

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[80] On the 'feminisation' of de Valera see Emer Rockett and Kevin Rockett *Neil Jordan: Exploring Boundaries* (Dublin 2003) pp.168-70. See also Matthew Ryan 'Michael Collins – Hollywood Hero' *Arena Magazine*, no. 27, 1997, pp.44–6.

[81] Neil Jordan *Michael Collins Screenplay and Film Diary* (London 1996) p.65.

weeping".[82] One wonders if she were exercising her 'hermeneutic reflexivity', crying over the irreconcilable contradiction of globalised identity she had just witnessed. It is certainly a sorrowful image: a hermetic self, centred on perpetual lack.

"How can your solitary finish?": *The Butcher Boy*

Jordan's film *The Butcher Boy* is an explicit attempt to consider the problems of an alienated individual.[83] As both self-conscious representation of the pitfalls of social disconnection and cultural artifact of the globalised image market, it illustrates the difficulties of managing aestheticised self-formation. The gothic tropes of murder, madness and existential isolatio are all transposed onto the life of a boy, Francie Brady, resident of a Clones-like town, in the early 1960s. The Ireland of the film is in the midst of what McCarthy terms, 'ersatz modernisation', the move to replace nationalist modernisation with liberalism. "It is part of the pathos of specific theories and projects of modernity", observes Mulhern, "that they can sooner or later be dated".[84] The fatality of the varieties of modernism lies in their inability to recognise continuities with their own predecessors. De Valera's vision is a key target or point of differentiation for revisionist historian and the liberal novelist/filmmaker alike. But, for Mulhern, early twentieth century Irish nationalism was a typically modern project in its cross-cut production of the 'new' and the 'old':

> Ireland's foremost modernist was de Valera; the historical project he embraced and sought to implement was *sinn féin*, ourselves alone. ... The Irish revolution was 'new' in one simple sense: it inaugurated the anti-colonial history of the twentieth century[85]

Yet, parts of this 'new' society also came to be critiqued as 'traditional':

> The official imagery of the emerging society was ruralist, as in the imposing case of sport, where organizational principles valorized county and provincial identities, and all but effaced the social reality of urban settlement; and the state not only shunned the liberal cultural heritage of the Enlightenment but harried those who claimed it,

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[82] Jordan *Michael Collins Screenplay and Film Diary* p.65.
[83] Neil Jordan *The Butcher Boy* (USA 1997).
[84] See Francis Mulhern *The Present Lasts a Long Time: Essays in Cultural Politics* (Notre Dame 1998) p.20.
[85] Ibid.

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subordinating public and private life to the mysteries and disciplines of the Holy See.[86]

Patrick McCabe's novel, on which Jordan's film is based, is an element in this temporal critique, an enactment of the transformation of post-colonial Irish modernism into tradition. It is the reassertion of a shunned liberalism but also, I will argue, a document of what three decades of liberal modernisation has done to the relation of self to society.

Both film and novel represent Ireland as moving darkly through social transition. The novel manipulates the subjective sense of time within the text, but the historical moment of its setting is never in doubt.[87] Much of the narrative is set in 1962, the year of the Cuban missile crisis and the introduction of a national television service in the Republic.[88] The technologies of television and nuclear weapons are wound together into Francie's story, as parts of a new level of abstraction offering him an alternative but insufficient frame for being. The highly abstracted sense of sociality and self Francie extracts from film and televisual images comes from the same technologically mediated formation that puts human life within reach of machines delivering death from a distance. Broadly, the intensification of abstraction that accompanies globalisation — of war, of the market economy, of images — is played out in the story of Francie's slide into murderous self-enclosure. But in the formal differences between novel and film there is a divergence in how this abstracting process is represented and deployed. These differences are linked to different levels of social abstraction and in the representation of the self. Novel and film flicker between representations of alienation and enactments of a solipsistic logic. The play and contradictions between mediated and face-to-face sociality gesture to a path out of radical autonomy not actually taken in these texts. The conditions that can force the powerless into alienation — here the failure of the institutions of family, church and state — are laid out for critique. But the allegory of the child lost in images of *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* and *The Fugitive* goes further than Jordan and

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[86] Ibid p.21.

[87] Patrick McCabe *The Butcher Boy* (London 1992).

[88] See Luke Gibbons 'From Megalith to Megastore: Broadcasting and Irish Culture' in *Irish Studies: A General Introduction* Thomas Bartlet, Chris Curtin, Riana O'Dwyer & Geróid O'Tuathaigh (eds) (Dublin 1988), pp.221-234. See also Ellen Hazelkorn & Henry Patterson 'The New Politics of the Irish Republic' *New Left Review* no.207, September/October 1994, p.57.

McCabe perhaps realise, representing the aestheticisation of self-formation as inevitably terminating in solipsistic enclosure.

If *The Past* had contained the seed of contradiction planted at first formation of the post-colonial Irish state, then McCabe's *The Butcher Boy* sees this twisted vine at full bloom. Writing back from 1992, the transition from nationalist to 'modern Ireland' is crystallised around the ways post-nationalist Ireland designates its newness. Francie is 'let down' by the town community, his family, the church and the state in a now familiar list of failures late twentieth century critics sheet home to the nationalist project.[89] Comparing the idyll evoked by de Valera in his famous St Patrick's Day broadcast in 1943 with the dystopian Clunes of *The Butcher Boy*, Tom Herron notes:

> If The Butcher Boy ridicules de Valera's utopian vision, it should also be stressed that this vision bore little reality to an actual social formation which ruthlessly concealed such problems as mental illness, alcoholism, misogyny, domestic violence and child abuse, as well as social stagnation and economic underdevelopment, all of which are factors in the production of Francie as the eponymous Butcher Boy.[90]

Herron concludes that: "McCabe's vision of the psychopathological state of the nation leaves very little room for the possibility that a happy, modern life might be lived there."[91] The process of shifting from the mythical enclosure of hearth-and-home nationalism means both an acknowledgment of the many internal deficiencies of post-colonial Ireland and an apocalyptic uncertainty in the threat of nuclear war. The boy's crime is played out against the background of collective panic over the Cuban missile crisis. So "Francie's madness does not seem so extreme after all: it is in fact, complementary to global imbalance, an instance of local colour".[92] This temporary insanity in the social whole might be tied to the transitional moment when the

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[89] Mulhern *The Present Lasts a Long Time* pp.21-2: "The phrase 'modern Ireland' commonly describes the society that began to take shape from the sixties, after the abandonment of that autotelic nationalism ... Economic policy was reconstructed on Keynesian — later, neo-liberal — bases. With the growth in industry ... came a population shift from the country to the towns. ... the Treaty of Rome secured these changes ... it also favoured the cultural conditions of escape from a collective identity cramped in defensive bipolar relations with the older colonial power. ... The nationalist claim to the North, though remaining a constitutional tenet, ... was in practice rewritten to mean a diplomatic duty of care in respect to the minority there. The clerical prerogative could no longer be excercised without challenge."
[90] Tom Herron 'ContamiNation: Patrick McCabe's and C... Tóibín's Pathographies of the Republic' in *Contemporary Irish Fiction* Liam Harte & Michael Parker (eds) (Basingstoke 2000) p.176.
[91] Ibid p.188.
[92] Ibid.

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'traditional' Ireland of Marian devotion was awkwardly saddled to cold war paranoia (in a kind of peasant-Catholic version of the alien invasion movie).[93] Writing back from *liberal* modern Ireland, McCabe and Jordan make it clear that religious primitivism is part of what is being left behind, a cultural hang-over whose residual powers are comically inadequate to the task of social integration or subjective ontological security. Both the novel and the film energetically satirise the culture that generates apparitions and the church that exploits them. But it is not at all clear that the new Ireland, foreshadowed in both texts, will have the cultural resources to respond to a world of pervasive risk. McCabe sees the boy as caught between these cultures: "the Francie character has a foot in either camp. He's growing up in his mother's and father's time — and also, if things had gone a bit better for him, he'd have moved into the exciting, kaleidoscopic world of Ireland as it is now."[94] I would argue that, in having to negotiate the intersection of 'old' and 'new' Irelands, Francie assumes a characteristic position in the cultural market of globalised capitalism. He behaves as though he has already entered the 'kaleidoscopic world': he lives out the painful and destructive contradictions that come from the interpenetration of two worlds, rather than simply stumbling at the doorstep of the future.

We see in this figure what the new global register has to offer. He fuses free-floating images with the scraps of local culture. He is a deft *bricoleur*, assembling a compensatory self-identity from what is at hand: comics, television shows, images of JFK, *as well as* ballads, religious iconography and de Valeran visions of home and family.[95] As an outsider in the local community, the latter images reveal themselves to Francie *as image* because they are denied him in experience. Through this exclusion, he occupies a position familiar to the intellectual and the exile: he is lifted out and can see, or is forced to see, his home as a particular context in a larger frame. Through alienation, the exile at home is thrust into the position the intellectual occupies through abstracted practice. Francie is the figure of the self-synthesising broker of identifying images, but this

[93] For a discussion of the critique of the construction of sanity see, Clare Wallace 'Running Amuck: Manic Logic in Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*' *Irish Studies Review*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1998, pp.157-63.
[94] Richard Kerridge 'Meat is Murder: Patrick McCabe talks to Richard Kerridge' *Irish Studies Review* vol.3, Spring 1993, p.10.
[95] See Claude Lévi-Strauss *The Savage Mind* (Chicago 1966) pp.16-22.

freedom reveals itself as a burden to those without the resources to integrate themselves in a more abstract social formation. His self-enclosure is, in structure, homologous with the intellectual form of life, but without the formal conventions of abstracted sociality that integrate the intellectual at levels beyond both the face-to-face and the nation-state. Francie's mediated experience of social life, locked within town and nation, puts him at a distance from community, but without benefit of entry into other more abstract relations. A closed, self-referential, singular system of meaning becomes the frame into which he must fit the world. Such self-enclosed cosmology might serve as a definition of madness, but here we see his self-formed identity as a compensatory order overlaying a society of insecurity and diminished integrative power. So, idiosyncratic symbolism is heaped onto the assemblage of images — pigs, Flash Bars, the garage — within which he wraps his sense of self. These come together as a science of the concrete for a culture of one, a private language.

Cultural analysis must guard against the beguilements of narrative coherence. Francie's private language is a cultural object made available to the reader/viewer as they are wrapped in its closed circle of meaning. While both novel and film represent alienation, they are also aesthetic enactments of a solipsistic logic. As cultural objects they are not products of alienation, as such, but rather manifestations of a highly abstracted cultural practice and ideological representation of alienation. We are thus presented with images of alienation via the abstracting mediation of print or film. That is, modes of the intellectual form of life capture images of a marginal figure, package them aesthetically and re-present them. In this relatively commonplace process of cultural production, ideological transmission reproduces and generalises the conditions of its production. The reader/audience is presented with a representation of alienation, but the intellectual form of life and its conditions of abstraction are also wound into both form and content. Here my analysis of *The Butcher Boy* must differentiate between the two forms of narrative, since film and novel mediate these abstracting processes in different ways.[96]

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[96] See Jonathan Crary *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (London 1992), for a discussion of the relation of modernity to the increased abstraction of the theory of vision and the transformation of visual experience in the observer — in particular the rise of "autonomization of sight".

If print tends to obscure its materiality and sociality through the intimacy of its consumption, film tends to efface its own abstract qualities. Because film has an objective 'life' (it happens out there before us)[97] its effects are different from the internal experience of reading. Its objectivity gives a strong sense of material sociality: the echo of face-to-face interaction rings out in film. Its success as a form — as propaganda tool, manipulative tear-jerker, avant-garde affront — rests on the simulation of direct real-time involvement in a social scene. Of course, film production is a highly abstracted process, calling upon technical training and much technological mediation. Likewise, its consumption is often a matter of deploying sets of complex reading techniques that rely on the intertextual competency of the audience. This intertextual characteristic is also, of course, an aspect of reading print but the time limitations in film demand a speedier processing of images. The semiotic density of film requires continuous interpretation: without pause, a stream of packaged signs, bundled into second-order signification, must be made into some type of sense.[98] Film narrative is mythic, in the Barthesian sense, in the way its speed requires an associative and iconographic reading technique. The common anecdote, of first-time visitors to New York feeling they already know their way around the much-filmed city, suggests how the viewer can build up a technologically-mediated abstract relation to a material locale. This is in part a result of repetition, but also comes from the immediacy and sense of materiality bound up in viewing a film. The experience of film expands the aesthetic boundary to such a degree that the frame appears to vanish: the aesthetic object and the world appear to converge.

This convergence is evident in Jordan's film of *The Butcher Boy*. As in McCabe's novel, we are brought into a private language, but here this language overlays the world, encompassing it. The film attempts to overcome the separation of self and world by conflating the objective into the subjective. If Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* has it that "I am my world", in Jordan's film the qualifying 'my' vanishes as Francie's individualised iconography captures the world in filmic frame. We thus see the world transformed into

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[97] See Roland Barthes 'The Reality Effect' in *The Rustle of Language* (New York 1986).
[98] Roland Barthes *Mythologies* A. Lavers (trans.) (St Albans 1973).

the terms of an idiosyncratic and individual lexicon. Jordan himself notes the transition from the internal voice of the novel to the overlaid quality of the filmic voice:

> the boy's voice entered my brain and I couldn't stop writing it. The way he talks about things and the way he sees the world became totally compulsive. What I had to do was re-create that inner voice in a film ... the voice of Francie Brady, which runs in counterpoint to the whole film, wraps it around with Francie's wonderful logic.[99]

In the film, hallucinatory scenes bridge the gap between Francie's particular obsessions and the world beyond him. At one point, while he is unconscious, we are presented with post-apocalyptic Clones, including the charred remains of its pig-people population. These shifts in imagery are between levels of representation, from the naturalistic to the surreal, contained within the text. But the movement is also between levels of abstraction: to recognise a fantastic or surreal representation requires that some increase in abstraction be detected.

We find here the thwarted sociality of Francie's forced abstraction of self, meshed with the formally abstracting characteristics of film. This blending of aesthetic and social form is, in turn, wedded to the ideology of autonomy, which concentrates all constitutive power in the figure of the individual. As private iconography is laid over the world the solipsistic logic of radical autonomy is enacted. The final scenes distil this confluence of social, aesthetic and ideological form. In an exchange between the Virgin Mary and the now adult Francie, the apparition, part of a private language, hands him a snowdrop. But the flower is recognised by a doctor sitting with him, so that the subjective overlays the objective. The film version finally presents us with a "solipsistic victory", to borrow a phrase from Jordan's early fiction.[100] Here, Francie's abstracted order presents itself as material social interaction. Jordan uses the sense of immediate sociality, carried in film form, to present abstract self-formation as material and to generalise that order beyond the individual. Here lies the contradiction. It is from his inability to find points of integration with this abstract assemblage that Francie's alienation stems. The solitary redemption of the conclusion, forging a link of recognition, betrays the film as a documentation of the intellectual form of life, rather than an investigation into the

[99] Neil Jordan *The Butcher Boy* website http://butcherboy.warnerbros.com/
[100] Neil Jordan 'Last Rites' in *Night in Tunisia* p.8.

alienating effects of 'old' Ireland. The intellectual alone has the power to misrecognise abstracted sociality as a solipsistic conflation of the world within the self. For others, loss and pain prevent such easy self-projection. Alienation, rather than assured solipsism, awaits those launched into abstract identity when face-to-face community is pulled out from under them, but the net of abstract social formations is also denied them.

McCabe's novel deploys the solipsistic logic differently. My critique of the film version arrives at the conclusion that this representation of Francie turns out to be, not so much a failure of old Ireland, as a projection of the perils of abstracted self — a kind of dread-wish fulfilment for the intellectual form of life. True to its general formal propensities, Jordan's film 'distracts' the viewer from its own high abstraction with the strong sense of material sociality carried in the immediacy of the visual world. The triumph of the ideology of autonomy is finally pushed home with the resolution of the world in the singular consciousness of the individual. To this extent, the film merely holds the line running out of the novel. But McCabe's version works within different formal constraints, which also point to the potential reflexivity of print and the novel. Where the formal characteristics of film allow idiosyncratic iconography to be generalised, the novel turns abstracting power in the opposite direction. As I argued in chapter two, the aesthetic containment of the novel is a form of abstract integration, which tends to reduce the sense of its own materially-mediated constitution, while also turning away from its larger debt to the social basis of language. The singularity of narrative voice, which so haunted Jordan, is an explicit rendering of this self-enclosure within the confines of McCabe's novel. This is an unsurprising rhetorical device in a story of madness and disconnection from community: the novel appears as a portal into another consciousness, ironically one unable to make or keep social connections with others. So it represents the internal monologue as a language of Francie's own making, reducing the sociality of language even as it draws on the most *hetero* of heteroglossia, from movie-speak to Monaghan dialect. Francie is always collecting images and utterances: even during a police beating, he is less concerned with broken bones than with the music of the phrase,

"seven different kinds of shite", spoken in a Dublin accent.[101] The idiosyncrasy of his voice feels like a private language reciting in the reader's mind. Yet as Francie names his particular pain he actually draws in from the world disparate and socially particular constructions of language.

Common to film and novel is the ideological misrecognition of the individual as the limit of self-formation. Both represent a solipsism that is a cultural manifestation of the ideology of radical autonomy, which intensifies and generalises the abstraction of social formations, extending the reach of capitalism in its latest globalising phase. The aestheticisation of the self, so necessary to the reproduction of the consumer market, loses much of its hoped-for 'hermeneutic reflexivity' under the pressure of this ideology and slips towards either a solipsistic version of the intellectual form of life or alienation. Due to formal characteristics rather than ideological difference, the novel faces up to the failure of reflexive incorporation, leaving Francie enclosed in his particular aesthetic frame. The bounded materiality of the book and the intimately experienced abstraction of the novel can bear the solipsistic logic of radical autonomy. But, unlike film, the novel has difficulty expanding to encompass the world. So McCabe's own novel has the greater sense of an outside, an objective realm beyond the self, even if inaccessible or experienced as loss. At its conclusion, in what is perhaps the beginning of reflexivity rather than mere self-consciousness, Francie asks: "How can your solitary finish?"[102] McCabe might see this as a question applying only to those who somehow missed the wave of 1960s modernisation: those for whom 'traditional' or nationalist Ireland cannot be left behind, because the past is hooked into their lives through the social failures of domestic violence, mental illness, religious irrationality, educational brutality and sexual abuse at the hands of priests, brothers and nuns. *The Butcher Boy* might be *about* these social problems, but they are not what *constitute* the novel and the film. The reality of these social problems notwithstanding, the kind of 'solitary' Francie endures stems from the cultural contradictions of pure subjective abstraction. His life is constituted solely within this plane, without the intersection of other levels of social integration. Stripped of

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[101] McCabe *The Butcher Boy* p.202: "That finished me off altogether. I started saying it the way he said it. Seven different kinds of shoite! For fuck's sake!"
[102] Ibid p.214.

its modes of sociality, this diminished version of the intellectual form of life transforms the self into a prison-house.

Naming Pain

I will return to the problems of abstraction of the self in the next chapter, where I will also consider the potential, intimated in some other Irish novels, for a reflexive reconstitution of social relations in the intellectual form of life. By pointing to how other writers reinstate the social in their writing, I will also pursue a deferred engagement with those critics who read these texts as documents of liberal pluralism, rather than manifestations of the solipsistic strain I outlined. Here I have investigated examples of liberalism reacting against the perceived failure of nationalist modernity. Although not exclusive to Ireland, this reaction is more distinctly drawn in a society passing through postcolonial modernisation into neoliberal globalisation. The sense that the nation has betrayed its own community delineates a more widespread shift, a contraction of the self into perceived auto-authorship. This contraction is a function of the global image market, a cultural requirement for the reproduction of the global economy. To conclude this part of the analysis, I will now trace the solipsistic line Northward. One strand in the representation of social betrayal is the crisis in nationalist discourse triggered by the conflict in Northern Ireland, which began in the late 1960s. This shift in the perception of the nation coincides with the wider reconfigurations of sovereignty and nationality underway in the European Union and the workings of trade and financial agreements in the global economy. In Northern Ireland, the adoption through referendum of the Belfast Agreement by a 71% affirmation clearly marks some other course, between 'no surrender' Loyalism and 'thirty two county' Republicanism. But it has still not solidified into an organising principle for a viable regional polity, much less a community of identity. The difficulty in implementing the Agreement is a warning to those who read the 'yes' vote as an unproblematic shift away from irredentist conflict and national conceptions of region and identity (Loyalist Ulster-nationalism included). Any adequate analysis of the formation of identity in Northern Ireland would require more space than I have at my disposal. Here I will use the work of Robert McLiam Wilson merely to draw together the strands of the analytical category of solipsism.

The Belfast Agreement guarantees "the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both, as they may so choose".[103] In response, O'Toole announced: "The Joy of the agreement is that uncertainty has become a source of liberation rather than one of fear."[104] Yet this new 'uncertainty' about citizenship and sovereignty might, paradoxically, overemphasise the capacity of state (or state-like) structures to contain the longing for form the national abstraction once attempted. O'Toole's postnationalism sets out to exchange the national frame of identity for the apparently borderless being of global flows. But this ideal configuration is held in place by a series of state-like structures. While many have theorised the state as the primary term in the origin of the nation-state, O'Toole also gives it the last word. Even if we set aside the difficulties in transforming modes of identification conditioned by territorial and cultural history, a political resolution to the irredentist conflict in Northern Ireland will surely require more than a celebration of uncertainty. O'Toole's position is a kind of triumphalist postmodernism. As Eagleton has observed, its borderless future treats "the unstable and open-ended" as "virtues in themselves".[105] It also fails to distinguish the groups which most stand to benefit from this 'fluidity'. Mobility is required of all those who might wish to exploit the continued opening out to the flows of global capital and images. The rhetoric of fluidity, ephemera, contradiction and the elusive may work well as a counter to the grey history of national disappointments, but it also speaks directly to a free-ranging globalisation that values and de-values individual choices solely according to the exigency of the market. The vertiginous delights of 'not knowing where one is going' mask a bureaucratic state-like need to manage a regional sector of the global economy.

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[103] *Agreement Reached in the Multi-Party Negotiations, Belfast, 10 April 1998*, sec. 1 (vi), (Dublin, 1998) pp.2-3.
[104] Fintan O'Toole 'Fear of the future set aside as Ireland embraces its present' *Irish Times*, http://www.irish-times.com/irish-times/special/peace/results/analysis/analysis3.html, accessed April 1998.
[105] Eagleton 'Ireland as God's own melting pot' *Guardian Weekly*, March 15 1998, p.29.

The failure to integrate nation and state — a circle that refused to be squared even in de Valera's constitution — drives much postnationalist critique.[106] Reacting to this failure, O'Toole favours dissolution of nationalism's integrative aspirations, thus heralding an expanded and diversified state in direct relation with autonomous and reflexively *choosing* individuals. The past has betrayed the future with its impossible aspirations, but, rather than grieve, he would have contemporary Ireland leap into the fissure that has opened in its history. To redeem deterritorialisation and displacement, he calls upon the image of the exile at home: "Exile is no longer a process in which a fixed identity is traded for an anonymous and impermanent one."[107] Here O'Toole claims that the trade of 'fixed identity' for 'exile' is not an abandonment of the coherent self, because the individual becomes the locus of a singular and continuous coordinating narrative of identity.

In the previous chapter I considered the difficulties of relying on aesthetic order to maintain the narrative of self: aesthetic cosmopolitan writing sails close to a nihilist wind. In Wilson's work, we step into the abyss. This Belfast-born writer provides a visceral representation of the 'exile at home', not as the comfortably hybrid cultural broker of identifying images, but as a figure of physical and psychic homelessness. The novel *Ripley Bogle* provides a diabolical version of O'Toole's blissfully formless future. Described Smyth as "a scathing attack on the calcified and disabling discourses of identity foisted onto young Irish people by their forbears",[108] the novel seems to share O'Toole's analysis. As a child the eponymous anti-hero even dubs himself "Ripley Irish British Bogle"[109], nicely anticipating the even-handed hybridity of the Belfast Agreement whilst echoing the cultural tautology of McLiam Wilson's own name.[110] But O'Toole's pleasure in 'not knowing where one is going' is replaced by the despondency of having nowhere to go. The narrator-protagonist is a native of Belfast, now homeless on the

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[106] See Richard Kearney *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy* (London & New York 1997).

[107] Fintan O'Toole *The Ex-Isle of Erin* (Dublin 1997) p.178.

[108] Gerry Smyth *The Novel and the Nation* (London & Chicago 1997) p.132.

[109] Robert McLiam Wilson *Ripley Bogle* (London 1989) p.16.

[110] Bruce Stewart'*Manfred's Pain* (1991): Remarks by Bruce Stewart' (Eire Data 1995) http://www.pgil-eirdata.org/html/pgil_datasets/authors/w/Wilson,RMcL/rem.htm: "McLiam Wilson, after all, says the same thing in Irish and in English".

streets of London, recounting his life to ward off cold winds and nicotine cravings. While the critique of nationalist figurations of identity is explicit, no alternative is presented.[111]

Respectively, Wilson's three novels are cynical, tragic and satirical. His second, *Manfred's Pain*, is a personalised history of violence in the twentieth century, bringing the Second World War, the Holocaust, wife beating and street crime into one frame. In its historical sweep and inexorable movement toward death, it is generically tragic.[112] *Eureka Street*, the third novel, is a satirical attack on the sectarian politics of Northern Ireland. Despite Wilson's claim that satire can maintain a kind of positionless position,[113] Richard Kirkland reads it as deeply ideological in its attempts to represent the "liberal voice" as neutral.[114] I will analyse *Eureka Street* in the next chapter, in relation to other texts dealing with the reconstruction of Irish society along liberal globalist lines. In contrast to the two later novels, *Ripley Bogle* provides neither liberal assertion of neutrality nor a reconstruction of home and family, neither cathartic death nor aestheticised-self reaching for authenticity. All these attempts at reformation are relentlessly torn down as it proceeds. The formlessness O'Toole is so eager to evoke is present in Wilson's iconoclastic novel, but instead of a limitless possibility flowing from global space, *Ripley Bogle* frames it as an aching, desolate, absence where self should be.

At one level this is reminiscent of Beckett. The figure of the philosophical tramp is familiar from *Waiting for Godot* and *Molloy*. In Beckett's trilogy — *Molloy, Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* — narrative, character and most other familiar components of the

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[111] See Eve Pattern 'Fiction in Conflict; northern Ireland's prodigal novelists' in *Peripheral Visions: Images of Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction* (Cardiff 1995) p.139: "what is the overall acheivemnt of writing which which hinges almost entirely on pastiche, ironic deflation, caricature and subversion? ... [*Ripley Bogle*] succeeds chiefly as a comic study of contemporary alienation."

[112] Wilson now distances himself from *Manfred's Pain*. It could be the strong ethical claims carried in the structure of tragedy that embarrasses the author as he moves toward the less explicitly ethical position that he sees in satire. See Richard Mills 'All stories are love stories' *Irish Studies Review*, vol.7, no.1, 1999, p.76.

[113] See Mills 'All stories are love stories' pp.73-7. In that interview Robert McLiam Wilson states: "I think satire is good fun. Satire is irresponsible in that you can criticise without having to suggest alternatives." p.75.

[114] Richard Kirkland 'Bourgeois Redemptions: the Fictions of Glenn Paterson and Robert McLiam Wilson' in *Contemporary Irish Fiction: Themes, Tropes, Theories* Liame Harte & Michael Parker (eds) (Basingstoke 2000) p.219.

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novel are dismantled.[115] Absence and death can be incorporated in these structurally humbled novels, yet this works to disclose the mythic, almost prayerful, power to contain such absolutes amongst the words. But where Beckett offered solace in the act of telling, Wilson displays a postmodern incredulity toward metanarrative and narrative alike. Words are strung together in playful imitation of styles, pointing to their emptiness and exhaustion. Bogle ponders "What would Charlie Dickens have said about this" and the Dickensian evocation runs throughout the novel's style and subject.[116] *Ripley Bogle* builds a story, and thereby constructs a self, only to exhibit its artifice and ultimately its debilitating deception. Throughout, any suggestion of sincerity or belief is quickly subverted by asides or parenthetical comments on style: "(More, more, pile it on.)".[117] Even its grand conceit — "where we are all going. You, me and my story (such as it is). That quest. My search for final, fundamental goodness in the world."[118] — is merely an elaborate rhetorical trap, set to catch and kill the unrealisable desires loosed by the *Bildungsroman*. Towards the conclusion, Bogle admits the impossibility of the destination prescribed by the "punitive moral guidance of Victorian novels". He concludes:

> I suppose (wait for it) that my wisdom ball will grow perpetually. I suspect that no one gets to be like those guys in the books at the end. It doesn't seem to be how it works in the cold objectivity of reality. No final settling scene, no pudgy benefactor anxious to dish out the dosh and I most certainly don't get the girl on the final page.[119]

Instead of character development — "truth, honour, wisdom and beauty"[120] — the reader is assured of stasis, whilst the narrative eventually reveals itself as a tissue of lies. As the unreliable narrator admits: "the sad truth is that I wouldn't recognise the truth if it came up to me wearing a personalised T-shirt".[121] The novel is a narrative experiment, simulating devices (episodic autobiographical recollections) supposed to produce resolution and coherence. But at the end of the excursion, the fabrication is dismantled

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[115] Samuel Beckett *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (New York 1958). See A. Alvarez *Beckett* (London 1973) pp47-69.
[116] Wilson *Ripley Bogle* p.6.
[117] Ibid p.10.
[118] Ibid pp.8-9.
[119] Ibid p.324.
[120] Ibid p.9.
[121] Ibid p.317.

and its conspicuously ersatz order only serves to accentuate defamiliarisation. The neutral order of passing days is the only formal structure remaining intact throughout.

As Wilson kicks away the props of national politics, social relations, aesthetic forms, he builds up what Lloyd calls an "intensely political ambivalence".[122] The deeply embedded self-estrangement, carried in form and content, becomes a figuration of the alienated individual. The novel is thus a thoroughly manifest critique of present conditions. Exile at home might mean freedom from the strictures of place but, in its parodic reversal of the *Bildungsroman*, *Ripley Bogle* shows that liberation does not stop at the borders of the self. The mechanisms of dislocation, the delirium of horizonless choice, are processes of severance that can separate self from identity. When one is sheltered by the ideological (and therefore wilfully invisible) structures of globalisation — a position from which one can channel the flows of either capital or information — then an open-ended future probably means a pleasant continuation of the present. If, on the other hand, one is somehow unable to tap that current, if one is a "flawed consumer"[123] of global commodities and images (Bauman's "new poor"), then internal exile becomes much less metaphorical. In that case, a formless future promises only to dismantle the already frail shelters of the self.

Wilson has claimed that "all stories are love stories"[124] and in *Manfred's Pain* he applies this formula. Manfred's story, told in retrospect from his last days, is of a Jewish Londoner who survives combat in the Second World War, to pass through post-war hope, onto the disappointment of familial disintegration, finally reaching death amidst the societal disarray of 1980s Britain. The love story is a fractured one. He brings home a fragment of the violence he experienced in war and viciously beats his wife Emma, a survivor of the eastern European Holocaust. The marriage ends, but she allows a monthly meeting in a park, whilst forbidding him to look at her. This arrangement points to a solipsism in the text, which both emerges from the individual and is also a condition of

[122] David Lloyd *Anomalous States* (Durham 1993) p.1.

[123] Zygmunt Bauman 'The Work Ethic and Prospects for the New Poor' *Arena Journal* (new series) no.9, 1997, pp.57-76.

[124] As a single line paragraph, this assertion begins *Eureka Street*. The author iterates this as "profoundly true" in Mills 'All Stories are love stories' p.77.

external structure. If the love relation stands as a micro-instance of social relations in general, then Emma's presence-in-absence marks out a lost sociality. *Manfred's Pain* points to this *as loss*, rather than overlaying idiosyncratic vision as adequate replacement. Likewise, Manfred's pain, tumorously growing in his stomach, is a concentration of the human failing in violence. War, genocide, racial attacks and domestic violence all contribute their cells to the malignant growth. There is a messianic aspect to Manfred's death, in that he not only suffers for his own sins, but also takes on the sins of the world. Sprawled on his frontdoor steps, "he remembered Emma. His wife. The whole point. He was dying for her. ... There was a reason in her. A reason for this. His death was a consequence. Nothing happened without a cause."[125] After the thoroughgoing dislocation and alienation of *Ripley Bogle*, this redemptive humanism appears surprising. As Bruce Stewart notes: "For a novelist whose first award-winning book was so brilliantly cynical and systematically facetious, it is extraordinary how close this comes to a quasi-religious profession of faith in human nature."[126] But there are continuities. Along with the conspicuous isolation of the two eponymous characters, we also find the manifestation of a grammar of pain in the individual instance. While their respective pains are idiosyncratic and represented through the novel's formal focus on individual experience, Ripley and Manfred come to the reader with all the "stage-setting" of meaning in language. As Wittgenstein puts it: "when we speak of someone's having given a name to pain, what is presupposed is the existence of the grammar of the word 'pain'; it shews the post where the new word is stationed". Manfred's dying vision of Emma "loved by God" is an internal, hallucinatory, solitary representation of resolution, since violence and sociality remain unreconciled. *Manfred's Pain* represents as fantasy social reconciliation that is enacted within the individual alone.

At the same time, the novel does tend to conflate the sources of violence and conflict under a universalist humanism. Wilson has explained, with a partly rhetorical reduction, what he sees as the common cause of violence in Northern Ireland, New York and Iraq:

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[125] Robert McLiam Wilson *Manfred's Pain* (London 1992) p.196.
[126] Stewart '*Manfred's Pain* (1991): Remarks by Bruce Stewart'.

"It's easy. We like it."[127] In this essentialist assumption of human aggression, he remains firmly within the bounds of a state-of-nature liberalism, incapable of identifying social mechanisms as the source of problems as well as solutions. Yet, in the same brief reflection on violence, he moves from aggressive essence to sociality:

> The dying hurts but the killing isn't painless. That act diminishes something in all of us, that wakeful human part. I live in Belfast and that makes my hand as greasy with blood as any. Someone dies in this city and I lose part of myself. As the toll grows and my city is marred, I'm chipped away at more and more.[128]

I interpret this as a plea for what Marx termed "species being"[129]: the contradiction here, between an essential competitiveness and a socially enmeshed self, captures the cultural contradiction at work in Wilson's fiction.

Both *Ripley Bogle* and *Manfred's Pain* treat of the inability to establish or maintain the social relations of home, of the barriers that prevent the self from identifying itself in relation to the intimate or distant other, of the consequent self-estrangement. Wilson not only confronts the 'calcified' remains of national belonging, but also draws on the common pain of the failed statelet of Northern Ireland. These texts are articulations of this pain, via the abstract sociality of the intellectual form of life. This is the 'political ambivalence' in his work. These are narratives of the intellectual process of 'lifting out', yet they are troubled by a debilitating dislocation. The reaction against violence pushes away from nationalist formations of belonging, a response aided by the abstraction of self and social relations. But in these novels, the free-floating drift of the autonomous individual brings either cynical resignation or delusional reconciliation. Trawling this form of alienation, Wilson begins to uncover sources of social renewal. Intellectual formations, *despite and because* of their exilic propensity, could provide a vantage point enabling the abstraction of self and society as means of connection and augmentation as well as a scaffold for self-assembly. The possibility that social hope sits within the intellectual forms is better developed, however, in some of the novels considered in the next chapter.

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[127] Robert McLiam Wilsor 'Cities at War' *Irish Review*, vol.10, Spring, 1991, p.98.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Karl Marx *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* David McLellan (ed), (Oxford 1977).

The failed sociality of Ripley and Manfred — psychic and physical homelessness, violence, self-estrangement — are forms of self-imprisonment. Their solipsism is presented as conspicuous disaster. They stand as instances of the failure of structures of integration within a social formation that presumes a self-synthetic self. The alienating consequences of such sociality return through a dissipation of social cohesion, which Wilson presents with caustic relish. By avoiding redemption and showing self-enclosure as exile from sociality itself, his work articulates the pain of the internal exile. These novels represent the pain of solipsism without succumbing to solipsistic logic. In their structure and content they provide an instance of that pain. Here the triumph of radical autonomy, so readily rehearsed through the formal enclosure of language in the novel, is pushed against the limits of aesthetic containment. The sociality of language itself insinuates the desire for escape from the cell of the self.

Chapter Five

Abstract Homes

Horizon: infinity. – We have left the land and taken to our ship! We have burned our bridges – more, we have burned our land behind us! Now, little ship, take care! The ocean lies all around you; true, it is not always roaring, and sometimes it lies there as if it were silken and golden and a gentle favourable dream. But there will be times when you will know that it is infinite and that there is nothing more terrible than infinity ... Alas, if homesickness for land should assail you, as if there were more *freedom* there – and there is no longer any 'land'!

Friedrick Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*[1]

The modern enthusiasm for constructing the future holds a revolutionary potential for channelling human energy and the realisation of freedom. But the obverse of that modern coin is in the disastrously effective ways this energy has led to the forms of un-freedom which have paraded through the twentieth century and into the twenty first. Here, I will not rehearse all the triumphal postmodernist indictments of modernism and modernity. Rather, I want to ask: now that Ireland has well and truly set out on the modern journey, and come to a historical moment which requires the re-evaluation of its particular forms of modernity, what alternatives might be gleaned from contemporary Irish novels especially those presenting a post- or anti-national position? In the journey from the "ex-isle of Erin", what if homesickness does strike? What form would it take? In the present globalising moment, is home/land, in Nietzsche's prescient image, now merely a charred memory?

In this chapter, I turn from solipsism to consider ways the novel form can incorporate and represent the social constitution of the self: a presentation of the self as set within some objective formative structure. Like the novels discussed in chapter three, those analysed here represent processes of self-formation, in a state of reconstruction in which those structures are being re-ordered. I read this shift in novels that are not conspicuously utilising the aesthetic itself as a frame for meaning, in the manner of Banville, Morrissy

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[1] Friedrich Nietzsche *A Nietzsche Reader* R. J. Hollingdale (trans) (Ringwood 1977) p.207.

or Hogan. Here a variety of uses of the intellectual form are enacted and represented through the novel. The texts are drawn from both Northern Ireland and the Republic. This politico-geographical divide structures the chapter, but does not set up determinative categories. The southern writers considered here — Dermot Bolger, Richard Kearney and Colm Tóibín — vary in the ways their novels handle this problem of the self. Likewise, the Northern writers — Deirdre Madden, Robert McLiam Wilson, Glenn Patterson and Seamus Deane — represent differing deployments of the intellectual form in the novel. Throughout this thesis I have read fictional and critical work in relation to both national and global figurations of the self. Here, I consider specific responses which emerge from the different experiences of the national and the global in Northern Ireland and the Republic. The particular conditioning factors are the proximity of violence and its links to nationalism (both British and Irish) in the North and the critique of the post-independence national state in the South. Their influence has traversed the border, for example, in the way the conflict in Northern Ireland has come to be regarded as the historical terminus of the nation, by revisionist critics in the Republic.[2] Yet, the North/South division shows itself in the visceral representations Northern writers employ, in the imagery of exile and in palpable absences in Southern novels. These differences are important to my readings, but I am also concerned with common manifestations of the intellectual form of life. The matrix of ideologies I have described as forming a key aspect of globalsiation is detectable in the content and form of novels from both Northern Ireland and the Republic. This common strand carries both the contradictions and potential of abstraction of the intellectual form of life: the tendency toward radical autonomy and the possibility of new forms of community that extend reciprocity and co-operation beyond relations of sameness or proximity.

Some commentators have drawn parallels between the state of transition, in which Ireland now finds itself, and the formative period at the beginning of the twentieth century. Kiberd describes the scope of change associated with the earlier Revival:

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[2] Seamus Deane 'Wherever Green is Read' in *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism 1938 – 1994* Ciaran Brady (ed) (Dublin 1994) p.241.

> That enterprise achieved nothing less than a renovation of Irish consciousness and a new understanding of politics, economics, philosophy, sport, language and culture in its widest sense. It was the grand destiny of Yeats's generation to make Ireland once again interesting to the Irish, after centuries of enforced provincialism following the collapse of the Gaelic order in 1601.[3]

Working from Anderson's concept of the imagined national community, Kiberd sees the writers of that period as amongst the 'inventors' of modern Ireland. His *Inventing Ireland* traces the competing and complementary inventions, mapped in twentieth century Irish writing, and sets out connections that might assist in "the current moment", when "Ireland is about to be reinvented for a new century".[4] Here, I will identify some types of 'reinvention' as they appear in novels from the late twentieth century. In their overt positions, many of these novels display the particular concerns of the "new Irish novelists", Smyth identifies as narrating "the nation as it has been and as it is, rather than how it should be or might have been."[5] In this, he observes, the 'new novelist' is "less of an intellectual and more of an artisan". The 'reinventions' I read in these recent novels are encoded in the form of an artisan-like rendering of 'the nation as it is'. If the role of the intellectual as ideologue or didact has been renounced by many contemporary novelists, at least overtly, their writing practice continues a type of production that comes from the intellectual form of life. In their formal replication of this form of life, the novels offer examples of how the nation 'should be' and how the individual should inhabit it. The novel itself becomes the material mediation of the highly abstracted sociality of this form of life; it functions in much the same way as 'sovereign and limited' territory does for the imagined community of the nation. Where this formal territorialisation displaces the nation, there is a mesh with the abstracting effects of globalisation and the ideology of neoliberalism. The extreme degree of mobility typical of the commodity form can then be installed as the characteristic figuration of the individual within such extended forms of the social. In this chapter, I will differentiate particular ideological strands, wound into the differences of geography and state, which present alternative versions of a 'new century' Ireland.

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[3] Declan Kiberd *Inventing Ireland* (Cambridge MA 1995) p.3.

[4] Kiberd *Inventing Ireland* p.4

[5] Gerry Smyth *The Novel and the Nation* (London & Chicago 1997) p.177.

There is a vision, in some of these novels, of a liberal reconstruction of the self and community, which sets the individual in direct relation to the global and portrays nation and state as diminished or absent mediators. Bolger, Tóibín, Kearney, Wilson and Madden all represent this view. Having done away with the national or state abstraction of the social, they rely upon other forms of integration: the body; the family; the text. By contrast, other novels represent the individual enmeshed in community through embodied sociality, usually in the form of locality and reciprocity, but also in intersection with more abstract social formations. This vision is present in novels by Patterson and Deane. The national category, as it appears in their work, is problematic *and productive* (not merely redundant), to the extent that it holds these embodied forms of community in tension with a more attenuated social imaginary. Here, the state is colonialist and/or coercive, unable to establish hegemony: the parallel with the Revival is more direct than a broad similarity between transitional times. There are many differences between the context surrounding these later works and that of the early twentieth century, not least the successes and failures of Irish nationalist politics in the intervening years, the collapse of the British Empire and the emergence of neoliberal globalisation. My main focus remains the cultural responses to and manifestations of the third of these, while incorporating the ways the others function as particular formative conditions of the present globalising moment in Ireland. The reinventions of Ireland I identify in these selected novels are, then, fashioned from ideological components drawn from liberal globalism or a reconstructed national imaginary, both of which are constituted within the frame of the intellectual form of life.

In the Republic

Where is Home?

Kearney and Tóibín provide the main topic for this part of the chapter but, I will introduce their respective variations on liberal globalism through a discussion of the contradictions and ambivalences in Bolger's *The Journey Home*.[6] This novel is often seen

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[6] Dermot Bolger *The Journey Home* (London 1990).

as representative of "Northside realism" or the "Dublin renaissance".[7] Along with Roddy Doyle and the writers involved with the Raven Arts Press in the 1980s and early 1990s, Bolger wrote of a Dublin "gritty and garish ... a typical large European city, with sex drugs and rock 'n' roll as its new currency."[8] This group produced a city-based fiction that sought to overturn the perceived pieties of 'official' nationalist Ireland, which placed the weight of authenticity on rural life. Set in the 1980s, *The Journey Home* tells of three young Dubliners, their lives controlled and stifled — via debt, drugs and (un)employment — by an older generation able to exploit cynically the nationalist rhetoric and clientism of post-independence Ireland. The Plunkett brothers represent this older power, one a *gombeen*/standover man, the other a corrupt junior minister in the Fianna Fáil government. The central character, Francis Hanrahan (Hano), leaves his suburban family home to share a flat with Shay, his street-wise bohemian co-worker. Katie, Shay's teenage lover, completes the story's triangular composition. With Hano, she escapes the city after Shay is killed and Pascal Plunkett murdered by Hano. They go on the run, first to her childhood home in Leitrim, then to his parents' home-country in Kerry, and finally take refuge with an "old Protestant woman" whom Hano had befriended years before during his adolescent journeys "to find Ireland".[9]

The Journey Home is a study in 'internal exile': Shay's family have been pushed from central Dublin to the outer northern suburbs; Hano's parents attempt to transplant rural Ireland to the same estates; Katie is brought there as a child after her parents' deaths. As they each come to realise, they are the "children of limbo": "We came from nowhere and found we belonged nowhere else."[10] The 'journey home' will not then achieve its destination, for as Smyth notes: "home is lost, the journey is all".[11] The novel ends with Hano (now Francis) imagining a Euro-Ireland where their child will live, pledging to the sleeping Katie (now Cait): "you are the only nation I give allegiance to now ... When you

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[7] See Ferdia MacAnna 'The Dublin Renaissance: An Essay on Modern Dublin and Dublin Writers' *Irish Review* no.10, Spring, 1991, pp.14-30. See also Conor McCarthy *Modernisation: Crisis and Culture in Ireland 1969-92* (Dublin 2000) pp.135-64.

[8] Smyth *The Novel and the Nation* p. 77.

[9] Bolger *The Journey Home* p.8.

[10] Bolger *The Journey Home* p.7.

[11] Smyth *The Novel and the Nation* p.78.

hold me, Cait, I have reached home."[12] This is a renunciation born of the same sense of betrayal evident in Jordan and McCabe. Smyth echoes this resentment of nationalist aspirations/failures in his own reading of 'the journey' as the day-to-day ontological condition of contemporary Ireland:

> In Lefebvre's triumvirate of 'past, present and possible', *The Journey Home* explores the extent to which modern Ireland has sacrificed the third in its fetishisation of the first and its corruption of the second. Journeying home in thus a metaphor of the search for a place that does not exist in modern Ireland, but whose possibility has to be affirmed as a prelude to the process of spiritual rebirth which will convert that possibility into a reality.[13]

For Smyth, Bolger's novel enacts the confusion of the plunge from "post-colonial lethargy" to the "postmodern world".[14] Its slips from demotic to didactic language, its overstatement of the power of the "old ideological guard" and its ambivalence towards urban life, together comprise a journey out of one social formation and into another. Although Smyth does not use the term, his interpretation places *The Journey Home* within the common postcolonial theoretical category of the 'liminal text'. The novel is thus seen to represent and reproduce a process of social transition which, while painful, will provide the ground for a new formation of home in Ireland.

What for Smyth is a prelude to the *post*-postcolonial or postmodern reformation of community and place, is for McCarthy:

> a dismal shrinkage of the geography of hope, resistance and the imagined future community. *The Journey Home*, it seems to me, narrates a return to putative origins that in its sentimentality, reconstructed traditionalism and attenuated historical vision is in fact a sorry shadow of the ideology and social system that Bolger set himself ... to oppose.[15]

He points to a debilitating division within *The Journey Home*, which places modernity and nationalism as opposites. This conception forces Bolger into contradiction as he replicates the tropes of the Revival by appropriating the rural Irish landscape, emptied of

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[12] Bolger *The Journey Home* p.294.
[13] Gerry Smyth 'The Right to the City: Re-presentations of Dublin in Contemporary Irish Fiction' in *Contemporary Irish Fiction: Themes, Tropes, Theories* Liam Harte & Michel Parker (eds) (Basingstoke 2000) p.26.
[14] Gerry Smyth *The Novel and the Nation* p.78-9.
[15] McCarthy *Modernisation* p.164.

its people and of their productive activity.[16] The dynamic city, corrupted by state power and rural-nationalist ideology, is renounced for a purified and purifying country.[17] The genuine modernity of post-nationalism will be launched by these disenchanted urbanites, from the refuge of a rural *tabula rasa*. From this pastoral vantage point, Francis's framing narrative can draw all the cross-cutting stories into a novel-shaped whole. There is an apocalyptic will at work in *The Journey Home*, seeking to break all historical and social ties and to remake 'home' with Francis and Cait as a post-urban elect. Their destination in Kerry, from which the novel is narrated, was once a demesne but has now reverted to a primeval site for the revelation of the elemental self:

> Even though nobody waited there for them, when they reached the wood there would be no place left to return to. Home is not the place where you were born but the place you created for yourself, where you did not need to explain, where you finally became what you were.[18]

Like a Revival text, it rehearses redemption but instead of the vision of a national community (re)formed beyond the reach of the state, *The Journey Home* promises only a micro-community of the couple, momentarily slipping below the sight-lines of the panoptical state. In its formal organisation of the narrative, containing Shay's and Katie/Cait's italicised voices within Francis's master-narrative, the novel becomes the enactment of 'home' or, in terms resonant with solipsism, 'the place *you* created for *yourself*'. In addition to the contradictions identified by McCarthy, *The Journey Home* also presents the problem of the 'ontology of placelessness' mediated by the intellectual form of life, at once insistent on the absence of home while giving it abstract form in the novel.

Smyth identifies the "embarrassing" mismatch of language registers in *The Journey Home* as an aspect of its representation of social change. By contrast, McCarthy sets out the internal contradictions and truncations of a portrayal of modernisation as the rejection of the nation and nationalism. These two readings can be brought together to establish the ambivalence of the theme of 'home', which re-surfaces, as we shall see, in the novels of

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[16] McCarthy *Modernisation* p.158-9.
[17] See Kiberd *Inventing Ireland* pp.609-10.
[18] Bolger *The Journey Home* p.264.

Tóibín and Kearney. In *The Journey Home* we find an attempt to reconcile the dynamism and mobility characteristic of modernity with an implicit desire for organically integrated community. As McCarthy points out, not only is the reconciliation itself a contradiction, but the conservatism of this desire, its 'reconstructed traditionalism', is at odds with Bolger's declared liberal cosmopolitanism.[19] This might be attributed to an incoherent politics, but such contradiction also betrays an unacknowledged need for, and use of, forms of social integration that reground the individual. The home 'you create for yourself' in place of the national abstraction appears to require an alternative abstract frame enacted through other material means. *The Journey Home* both portrays and performs this alternative: through the physical imagery of the body and land; and through formal incorporation in the novel. The journey itself can only be construed as meaningful movement, in the manner Smyth proposes, within the aesthetic frame the novel provides. This is the problem of Bolger's novel and perhaps the source of its embarrassing clash of tones. Poetic and demotic language jostle, as the latter is crammed into the frame provided by the former. Such aestheticisation of everyday life can be observed in Francis's calm renunciation of the nation, as he awaits the arrival of the full coercive force of the state. This concluding moment of quiet certainty does not emanate solely from the assurance of Cait's love or the patriarchal aura of fathering a child: it is enabled by the novel form itself, acting as a structural alternative to the nation. *The Journey Home* is 'embarrassing' and 'contradictory' precisely because this formal debt remains unacknowledged.

There are themes compressed here that can be unravelled in the analysis of other novels that attempt post- or anti-national reinventions of Ireland. This characteristic ambivalence about what constitutes 'home' can be traced from Bolger to Tóibín and Kearney. In *The Journey Home*, Bolger celebrated the heterogeneous city as the type of society that will produce the future Ireland. But, as we have seen, he can do so only with images of rural Irish landscape reappropriated from the nationalist imaginary, using the

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[19] See Dermot Bolger 'Introduction' in *The Picador Book of Contemporary Irish Fiction* Dermot Bolger (ed.) (London 1994).

language of Corkery, as Kiberd has it.[20] Eagleton observes the similar 'ambivalence' in Tóibín's fiction, which acknowledges 'the need for roots' while being on guard against 'their specious allure'.[21] Likewise, in Kearney's novels, the image of the ambivalent home appears as a tension between cosmopolitan intellectual life and the embodied relations of family. As we have seen in *The Journey Home*, this ambivalence might be read as emerging from the unacknowledged tension between the abstract inte___ ___ of the novel form, always at work fitting into social meaning these stories of di_ ___ al___. The formal reterritorialisation at work in the novel is at odds with the isolation ___ ___ie and dislocation (or deterritorialisation) described in its content. When this tension is coupled to a liberal aspiration for individual independence from the nation, then the form is called upon doubly to give social shape. This tension is then played out in themes of anxiety regarding the fragility of such reterritorialisation: the individual escaping/needing the family; the ineffable lure of place and the force of dislocation; tentative reconciliations concluding stories of rupture and betrayal. These ambivalences are thematic correlates of the process of abstract constitution and integration found in the material form of the novel. The formal and thematic structures of these novels manifest and represent the material mediation of abstracted social relations. The images of land and embodiment resonate with the material processes of abstraction which, in this example of the intellectual form of life, are enacted in the novel. Here, the tendency towards radical autonomy is furthered in the response to nationalism, a response framed around the liberal drive to place the individual as the primary term in social relations. The novels thus present liberal reconstructions of community which, while aspiring to liberation from place and the binds of reciprocity, are still haunted by location and the durability of face-to-face social relations. These are precisely the less abstract levels of the social that the national form successfully incorporates as it ranges across different levels of integration.

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[20] Declan Kiberd 'Excavating the Present: Irish Writing Now' Delivered as a lecture in the series Irish Writing Today (2001) presented by the Irish Writers' Centre and the James Joyce Centre.
[21] Terry Eagleton 'Mothering' *London Review of Books* vol.21, no.20, 14 October 1999, http://www.lrb.co.uk/v21/n20/eagl2120.htm, accessed 7 January 2004.

Reterritorialisation and Embodiment: Tóibín

Tóibín's second novel, *The Heather Blazing*, concludes with an Irish High Court judge wading in from the Irish Sea with his 'illegitimate' grandson on his shoulders. The judge trudges back up a face of the Wexford coast, which has been slowly eroding throughout the novel. The image of O'Toole's 'disappearing Ireland' is made explicit as the land itself falls away into the cold sea.[22] The reader is presented with a social transition. This Fianna Fáil stalwart, a state institution embodied in the figure of a man, experiences the difference between the image of the family as set out in his 'holy text', *Bunreacht nÉireann*, and the forms of the family actually lived in contemporary Ireland. But Tóibín's aesthetic representation of this transformation resorts to neither solipsism nor placelessness. The novel moves towards a liberal reconstruction of social relations, in which the categories of nationalist identity — family, home, cultural continuity, attachment to land — are not dissolved, but rather are reworked to accommodate the assertion of late twentieth-century fluidity of self-formation. In a tension typical of this novel, the unsettling image of the land disappearing beneath their feet is countered by a cyclical narrative structure, with the changeable family continuously returning to Cush. Transformation is balanced by continuity, as a cycle of loss and renewal is powered in turn by the twin individual desires for freedom and intimacy. The freedoms brought by globalisation and integration in the EU are celebrated here and the dissolution of national sovereignty is presented as a social fact — an exhausted *Bunreacht* coupled with the dwindling territory — but there is, nonetheless, no delirium of "not knowing where we are going".[23]

In my reading of *The Heather Blazing*, I return to O'Toole's assessment of the Belfast Agreement. The transformation in the conception of the nation, which O'Toole detected in the popular support of the Agreement, is consistent with much of *The Heather Blazing*. Yet, O'Toole's claims for, 'the radical notion that we could live quite happily without knowing where, in the long run, we were going' provides only half the story of Tóibín's fictive reinvention of Ireland. Many of O'Toole's critical positions resonate with

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[22] Fintan O'Toole *The Lie of the Land: Irish Identities* (New York 1998). See also Fintan O'Toole *The Ex-isle of Erin* (Dublin 1997).

[23] Fintan O'Toole 'Fear of the future set aside as Ireland embraces its present' *Irish Times*, http://www.irish-times.com/irish-times/special/peace/results/analysis/analysis3.html

Tóibín's fiction. Common ground can be found, for example, in: "the death of the national movement" (Fianna Fáil's fall from grace into corruption during the Haughey era); "the birth of a new morality" (symbolised in the legalisation of divorce and disenchantment of the Catholic Church); and (with some Borgesian sleight of hand) "the disappearance of Ireland" itself.[24] Elsewhere, O'Toole is alive to the ambivalence of emancipation in cultural fluidity. In *The Ex-Isle of Erin* he denounces Michael Flatley's *Lord of the Dance*, as "cultural vandalism", pointing out:

> how easy it is for Irish culture, in its adaptation to a global, commodified entertainment business, to teeter over the edge of boldness and into an abyss of banality, to mistake liberation from a repressive past for crass ignorance of the collective memory locked up in traditional forms.[25]

Here he is more comfortable with cultural boundary marking, drawing a fine distinction between the liberal delights of slumming it in kitsch and the poor taste of clumsy arrogance. While prepared to erect a protective enclosure around certain 'traditional forms', insulating them from global 'commodification' and the 'abyss of banality', O'Toole does not see the individual in need of any such framework. The individual is not even granted the usual postmodern recourse to an aesthetic order. The 'freedom to not know where we are going' is a relinquishment of the formation of self in history, a complete exchange of *becoming* for *being*. However, Tóibín's stated difference between the 'poison' of critical writing and the possibility for 'reconciliation', offered by fiction, comes into play here. While sharing many critical assumptions with O'Toole, Tóibín's fiction is less sure that a continuous present of being, over the potential of becoming, offers the chance to live 'quite happily'. Regarding what has *been*, in Tóibín's fiction the critical reassessment of the national imaginary does not escape the social categories of the nation. As Kim Wallace has observed: "Liberation from the past does not provide the autonomy that Tóibín appears to seek."[26]

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[24] See Fintan O'Toole *Black Hole, Green Card: The Disappearance of Ireland* (Dublin 1994). See also, O'Toole *The Lie of the Land*. See also Terry Eagleton 'Ireland as God's own melting pot' in *Guardian Weekly*, March 15 1998, p.29.

[25] Fintan O'Toole *The Ex-Isle of Erin* (Dublin 1997) p.155.

[26] Kim Wallace 'Dissent and Dislocation in Colm Tóibín's *The Story of the Night*' *Barcelona English Language and Literature Studies* no.11, 2000, p.268.

Tóibín's writing manifests a tension between location and dislocation characteristic of the intellectual form of life more generally. This tension is enacted in the novel form and Tóibín's fiction weds it with thematic content consistent with such ambivalence. While his novels are clearly critical of the nationalist past and its legacies, they also envince a reticence to dismiss the 'need for roots'. The image of erosion captures, at once, a sense of the inevitability of losing the past, of the liberation of the present and of trepidation about a future in which, following Nietzsche's metaphor, 'there is no longer any land'. Midst the 'golden dream' of a post-national future, Tóibín's fiction admits the problem of 'homesickness' in ways O'Toole's critical work on globalised culture cannot accommodate.

To understand how Tóibín maintains this ambivalence, it is worth considering the consistent use of land and sea imagery in his fiction. His first novel, *The South*, concludes on an Irish beach with a reconciliation between, Protestant, Katherine Proctor and, Catholic, Michael Graves.[27] *The Heather Blazing* opens with the High Court Judge staring at the Liffey from his office window:

> Eamon Redmond stood at the window looking down at the river which was deep brown after days of rain. He watched the colour, the mixture of mud and water, and the small currents and pockets of movement within the flow. … Later when the court had finished its sitting he would come back and look out once more at the watery grey light over the houses across the river and wait for the stillness, when the cars and lorries had disappeared and Dublin was quiet.[28]

This quiet longing for stillness, out of contemplation of the turgid river, bears a strong resemblance to the opening of the story, 'Portrait of a Lady', in the collection *Finbar's Hotel*.[29] Devised and edited by Bolger, this is a collection of interconnected short stories each by a different, unidentified, author. 'Portrait of a Lady' is, in fact, by Tóibín.[30] In what is perhaps a playful clue of authorship, the story begins:

> The city was a vast emptiness. He stood at the window of Finbar's Hotel and looked down at the River Liffey which was mud brown after days of rain. He closed his eyes

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[27] Colm Tóibín *The South* (London 1993)

[28] Colm Tóibín *The Heather Blazing* (London 1992) p.3.

[29] *Finbar's Hotel* Dermot Bolger (ed.) (London & Dublin 1997).

[30] Although the authorship of the stories is not attributed Tóibín confirmed, in conversation with me, that he wrote 'Portrait of a Lady'.

and thought about the rooms all around him, empty now in the afternoon, and the long empty corridors of the hotel.[31]

The allusion to the earlier, well received novel might suggest a reading game, but another repetition, in the later novel *The Blackwater Lightship*, turns it into a significant motif. Towards the end of 'Portrait of a Lady', which is predominantly composed of the internal musings of an art thief waiting to sell a stolen Rembrandt, there is a scene set in the mountains outside Dublin. The thief has retrieved the painting from a hole in the ground that was its hiding place. He stands alone in the woods at night:

> It struck him for a moment that he would be happy if everything was dark and empty like this, if there was no one at all in the world, just this stillness and almost perfect silence, and if it would go on for ever like that. He stood and listened, relishing the idea that in this space around him just now there were no thoughts or feelings or plans for the future.[32]

This moment of solitude and reflective being-in-landscape appears again, in changed context, in *The Blackwater Lightship*. In what Eagleton describes as, "the novel's only full-dress metaphysical moment",[33] Helen, the central character, stands on a Wexford cliff-top at dawn:

> For some time, then, no one would appear in this landscape; the sea would roar softly and withdraw without witness or spectators. It did not need her watching, and in these hours, she thought, or during the long reaches of the night, the sea was more itself, monumental and untouchable. It was clear to her now, as though all week had been leading up to the realisation, that there was no need for people, that it did not matter whether there were people or not. The world would go on. The virus that was destroying Declan, that had him calling out helplessly now in the dawn, or the memories and echoes that came to her in her grandmother's house, or the love for her family she could not summon up, these were nothing, and now, as she stood at the edge of the cliff, they seemed like nothing.[34]

My initial consideration of this repetition will be through 'nature/isolation' trope, leading, in turn, to the formal significance of repetition itself. Both 'Portrait of a Lady' and *The Blackwater Lightship* are set in a recent Republic of Ireland. In 'Portrait', a sense of the present is conveyed in asides, like the thief's trouble with the incongruity of the North Dublin heroin trade bringing small-time local criminals into contact with Dutch dealers in

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[31] Colm Tóibín 'Portrait of a Lady' in *Finbar's Hotel* (London & Dublin 1997) p.239.
[32] Ibid p.266.
[33] Terry Eagleton 'Mothering' *London Review of Books* vol. 21, no. 20, 14 October 1999.
[34] Colm Tóibín *The Blackwater Lightship* (London 1999) p.260.

contraband masterpieces. In *The Blackwater Lightship*, the characters own computer training businesses and discuss their encounters with Mary Robinson. Tóibín's accumulation of realist detail sets out a deliberately contemporary Dublin and Wexford. Yet these texts are punctuated with 'metaphysical' moments, triggered by the experience of numinous nature, which draw the characters out from the present into contemplation of timelessness and absolute isolation. Land and sea, in their indifferent otherness to the individual, function in the narrative to distil the solitariness of the character. This 'nature' imagery is a reminder of a lack of connection to the world, a consciousness of alienation in a version of "oceanic" numinousness that diminishes, rather than augments, the individual.[35] Here, 'nature' is a category with two aspects or modes. As a narrative image contributing to realist character formation it can be described as 'landscape'. When functioning as a category *beyond* narrative, it might better be termed 'land'. These aspects function differently. By gesturing to what goes on without regard for the social and temporal frame of the text — "without witness" and requiring "no one at all in the world" — 'land' punctures the formal containment of the narrative. By contrast, 'landscape' is anthropomorphised around the character's emotional state — 'untouchable', 'silent'— and is thus intrinsic to the narrative, contributing to its realism.

Within Tóibín's 'nature' motif there is an echo — in its duality, its binding of continuity and atemporality, immanence and transcendence — of romantic-nationalist categories of territory. Synthesising the distinctions made by Thomas Davis, Michael Davitt and James Fintan Lalor between "soil as a material-metaphysical possession and land as political legal entity", Deane points to the power of soil's priority.[36] Soil, he writes, is "the more powerful because it is formulated as a reality that is beyond the embrace of any concept." This distinction is useful for radical nationalist politics, not merely for its re-enfranchisement and mobilisation of a peasant tenantry, but also for its own ideological legitimation in soil-derived authenticity. Nationalism, Deane continues, was the "two-

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[35] See Sigmund Freud *Civilization and its Discontents* (New York & London 1961) p.11. Freud recounts a friend's description of the experience of religiosity: "It is a feeling which he would like to call a sensation of 'eternity', a feeling of something limitless, unbounded — as it were, 'oceanic'."
[36] Seamus Deane *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790* (Oxford 1997) p.77.

faced ideology" that could exploit both the metaphysics of 'soil' and the political-economy of 'land', "although in doing so it rarely interfused them".[37] So the unquestionable link between the people-nation and the soil was, in the last instance, the basis of postcolonial state sovereignty and its system of land holding. The categories are relatively autonomous, but inextricably linked.

Eagleton notes the near oxymoronic character of the compound term 'Romantic nationalism'.[38] The aspirational flights of 'Romantic' sit incongruously against the matter-of-fact state-building solidity of 'nationalism'. There is something of this difficult union in Tóibín's fiction. The echo is more than the similar doubling of 'soil'/'land' and 'land'/'landscape'. In otherwise realist texts, he inserts these 'full-dress metaphysical moments', linking the contemplation of Being with such mundane tasks as packing the boot of a car or buying a box of groceries. Like the bound-yet-distinct categories of 'soil' and 'land' in Romantic nationalism, Tóibín's metaphysical 'land' lends meaning to the prosaic setting of 'landscape', locked in relation by the territory of the narrative. If this kind of relation served the Janus of nationalism in the nineteenth century, what might be its ideological purpose in texts of the late twentieth? It could simply be read as a cosmopolitan stylistic borrowing from Romanticism: one might see shades of Karl Jasper Friedrich in the cited scene from 'Portrait'. However, the specific state and territorial concerns of *The Heather Blazing* establish this as a political motif engaged with post-colonial nationalism. Merely identifying traces of European Romanticism could not account for the modulation between romantic 'land' and realist 'landscape'. Together these distinct but related categories, each entering the space and time of the other only to give a sense of what exceeds it, replicate romantic nationalist constructions of belonging in the avowed attempt to subvert them. Does this narrative formation then serve the revisionist ends of Tóibín's non-fiction and so celebrate globalisation in Ireland? Not quite. This modulation of territorial imagery is part of an aesthetic reterritorialisation, which is not confined to the apparent intention of its content. The deterritorialisation that

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[37] Deane *Strange Country* p.72.
[38] Terry Eagleton *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London & New York 1997) p.287.

accompanies globalisation, both in the shift of social relations toward disembodiment and in the dislocation of identity from place, is, in part, resisted by Tóibín's formal aesthetic rendering. A resonance between narrative territory and national territory disrupts any direct progress toward a post-national reconfiguration of the self-authoring individual in global space.

While Tóibín's modulation of 'land' and 'landscape' bears a structural similarity to romantic nationalist conceptions of territory, the attempt at aesthetic reterritorialisation also has historical precedents. Deane points to early twentieth century writers whose work enacted a "redefinition" of the territory of Ireland, amounting to a "reverse act of 'colonial' possession".[39] This built upon the political "reterritorialisation of Ireland in the nineteenth century" to achieve a "reterritorialization of the aesthetic category".[40] The foremost example is Joyce's representation of Dublin. Here, there is a retrieval of Irish territory from the anomalous condition of being simultaneously a colony and element of the Union: "a nowehere, a territory not yet represented, a place caught between geography and history."[41] In particular, the metaphysical or sacral power of 'soil' is transposed to writing itself:

> The sacralizing agency in Joyce, as in others, is displaced from the territory, or the nation, to the action of representing it. Representation becomes the auratic process by which a place that had been misrepresented or not represented at all finally achieves presence.[42]

Tóibín's own regard for fiction as the space of 'reconciliation' rehearses such a 'sacralizing agency'. Incorporating the category of 'land', he appropriates the 'monumental and untouchable' for the formally limited space of the novel. While Joyce effected a counter-colonial repossession of territory through writing, Tóibín's textual reterritorialisation appears to be a reclamation of 'soil' from the nationalist imaginary, to be deployed as 'land'. In this respect it has common cause with *The Journey Home*. But,

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[39] Seamus Deane 'The Production of Cultural Space in Irish Writing' *Boundary 2*, vol.21, issue 3, 1994, p.133.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

in its presentation of an ontological f··ν,·ε set in place and shaped by land, Tóibín's fiction calls upon the same base levε···meaning as that of the national form. The novel form is an aesthetic abstraction of language enacted through the material mediation of the book. The national form is a socio-political abstraction of community enacted through the material mediation of territory. Both serve to abstract relations from a proximate face-to-face level to a higher degree of disembodiment. Their success lies in their capacity to incorporate, rather than *displace*, the prior, more concrete, level of sociality. This is narrative as "socially symbolic act" or what Tóibín sees as its space of 'reconciliation'. Even if the novel is regarded as a 'bourgeois art form' *par excellence*, an aesthetic expression of the myth of the sovereign individual, its dissemination of this ideology is enabled by an affecting sense of intimacy conveyed in its extended simulation of social involvement. For both the novel and the nation, contradiction arises where the abstract form of social relation attempts to encompass sociality or serve as its sole mediation. This is a contradiction because it undermines the embodied social constitution of the individual, breaking apart the material and abstract manifold structure of our social being. One aspect of this manifold is denied even as the enduring power of its forms is drawn upon.

Of Corkery's three defining Irish literary characteristics — Catholicism, Nationalism and Land — Tóibín maintains that only land survives as a significant influence on contemporary Ireland.[43] Hence, his attempt to bring the 'sacralizing agency' of 'land' to the act of representation in the novel; to enable, within narrative space, social reconciliation and metaphysical significance or meaning for the character-self. This can be read as an effort to refigure located belonging against both the ontology of placelessness and nationalist designations of identity. Nonetheless, in attempting to go beyond nationalism and construct a liberal reformation of place, textual reterritorialisation is susceptible to the same monocular vision as the intellectual form of life of which it is a part. Remaking the social as the aesthetic opens the ground, so to

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[43] Matthew Ryan unpublished interview with Colm Tóibín, 1999. See Daniel Corkery *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* (Cork 19660.

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speak, for the transposability of place and belonging and offers a truncated sociality accessible only to those able to exploit the mobility of the intellectual form of life.

Tóibín's fiction attempts to reterritorialise the self via narrative, in an effort to bypass the tendency of the intellectual form to 'thin' social relations as it fits them into increasingly abstract formations. Part of this project of textual reterritorialisation is to trace the tension between tradition and modernity. But this is haunted by the possibility of social failure and isolation, as is evident in *The Blackwater Lightship*, where we see a liberal postnationalist re-working of Corkery's categories. Tóibín's hope for a 'modern' reformation of the family around homosexual relationships is not represented here as outside the moral frame of Catholicism. Rather, in what Eagleton describes as a "lavish piece of Catholic homosexual wish-fulfilment", gay marriage and the nurturing functions of the family are incorporated into contemporary Irish Catholicism.[44] The novel's premise, of a group of people brought together in their care for Declan who is dying of HIV/AIDS, puts the 'traditional' intergenerational heterosexual family into parallel relation with the contemporary homosexual 'family' of friends, lovers and carers. As with the High Court Judge in *The Heather Blazing*, Tóibín represents a contemporary Ireland in which 'tradition' and 'modernity' intersect rather than simply clash and supersede.

The category of 'mothering', as Eagleton describes it, is in Tóibín's rendering common to traditional and modern social formations. The risk of isolation or alienation appears in restriction to one or the other of these categories, that is to see them as purely temporal or phases in a teleological schema. In the theoretical terms I have been using, this is a question of reducing social integration and constitution of the self to a single plane. The glimpse of absolute isolation Declan's sister, Helen, experiences while contemplating the sea looms as the alternative to the more embodied relations that exert themselves on the family in the form of physical care. There is a difficult acknowledgment of the presence of prior social formations, here the family, in new circumstances. The relations of care, necessarily enacted as face-to-face relations, and the powerful reminder of being-towards-death that comes from those relations, call out the embodied sociality which sits

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[44] Eagleton 'Mothering'.

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within the more abstracted formations of contemporary Dublin or Wexford. Helen becomes aware of how these concrete relations have been marginalised or repressed in her life. As an image, 'mothering' then refers to more than Cathleen ni Houlihan or Patrick Pearse's suffering mother; it is an embodied social process at work within a context of increased abstraction of social relations. Drawing on this process, *The Blackwater Lightship* attempts to represent liberal modernity — a combination of sexual freedom, de-gendered self-realisation and accessible communication technology — in concert with traditional social formations of reciprocal obligation between people and attachment to place.

Tóibín's return to this stretch of Wexford coast, to versions of that scene, and the cyclic structure of *The Heather Blazing*, can be read as a mesh of thematic and formal reterritorialisation. The sacralising effect of 'oceanic' imagery and the category 'land' is coupled with the prosaic representation of the nation 'as it is'. Against a 'golden dream' of deterritorialisation, or the delirium of 'not knowing where we are going', the modulation of land and landscape, tradition and modernity, produces a textual reterritorialisation. The circumscribed space of the novel, usually limited to individual experience in the manner of the *Bildungsroman*, is brought into relation with social formations that both resonate with its limited and material nature and resist its flight into pure abstraction. Land and family provide examples of the persistence of, or at least the desire for, embodied sociality, even in conditions that push toward disembodiment.

Even when the setting is neither Ireland nor the Irish family, Tóibín still seeks to build some sheltering place in his novels. In *The Story of the Night*, the *Bildungsroman* is put to the task of developing a character from isolation and inertia towards a reformation of self in relation to others. In this case a gay protagonist, in a repressive society, is caught between British and Argentinean national identities. The integrative structures of national culture and nation-state are represented as already redundant: the nation is simply a category without community; and the Argentine state during the 1970s and '80s is at best anonymous, at worst arbitrarily violent. As in *The Heather Blazing*, nationalist designations of identity are represented as ostensibly superseded, or nostalgically

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grasping at enclosures soon to be dissolved by global waves of economic or political change. The populist nationalism of Carlos Menem is shown to be merely an extension of the foreign policy of the United States. Like O'Toole, Tóibín presumes that national borders are already effectively meaningless, with inevitable globalisation as the novels' *mise en scene*.

More surprisingly, in *The Story of the Night* homosexuality is not an alternative designation sufficient for the buoyancy of self-identity. Sexuality is often ascribed a subversive power at odds with the perceived narrowness of nationally-centred identity and is accordingly represented as a basis for alternative forms of community. While Tóibín has his character pursue a loving, sexual, relationship as the only way out of alienation, the aspirant form of inter-personal relation nontheless mimics the nuclear family. There are two factors which disallow this reformation of the family and stabilisation of identity: the first is social — prejudice which inhibits the articulation of self, momentarily overcome through money and power; the second is biological — HIV infection, structuring the novel as a tale told in retrospect as AIDS closes in and obliterates the self. The biological limit marks out the ultimate dissolution of the self, but beneath that shadow many of the current social crisis points of identity are also present. While anticipating death via its elliptical structure, the novel tells of life within an array of identity problems: urban alienation; useless accumulation and unsatisfying consumption; the neurotic manipulations of a heterosexual family; the meaninglessness of nationality; the limits of sexual community; betrayal and coercion by the state. But rather than opening to the potential of a free-floating construction of identity, these conditions cultivate the desire for a liberal reconstruction of social shelter, fashioned from the debris of those damaged forms. This is a rehabilitation effected at the micro-level of the inter-personal relation.

While responding ambivalently to the prizes and pitfalls of a changing culture, Tóibín's fiction never succumbs to a pure celebration or complacent description of present conditions. The will to reconstruct — for Ireland's history to coalesce in new formations — represents a longing for form that is not unlike the aspirant confidence of postcolonial

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nationalism. It certainly lacks the abandon and Bacchanalian pleasures of 'not knowing where one is going'. The representation of a liberal social reconstruction, where individual freedom can be realised against nationalist closures of identity or state repression, is framed by an aesthetic reterritorialisation. This reformation of formal integrative structure is acceptable to a postnationalist political position. It puts in place a formative boundary, beyond the individual, guarding against both alienation and the illusion of radical autonomy, while linking the formation of the self to a more abstract sphere beyond the state or locale. But the intersection of meaning-rich integration and individual transcendence is fashioned from the novel form itself. In Tóibín's fiction, the processes of abstract integration and constitution are at once grounded in the written narrative and presented *as such* in images of social embodiment in land and of the human body in need of care. The tension in this intersection moves toward contradiction whenever this process — deemed emblematic of the new Ireland in fiction — is deemed unacceptable if it takes the form of the nation.

The Territory of the Text: Kearney

Tóibín produces an ambivalent image of home, where the individual asserts a liberal self-formation but only in narratives that effect an aesthetic reterritorialisation. This confines the acknowledgment of a socially constituted self to the novel form while gesturing to extra-narrative categories of land and embodied relations. By contrast Kearney's novels, *Sam's Fall* and *Walking at Sea Level*, represent textuality as constitutive of the self and as the primary mode of social integration. The intellectual form of life is thus celebrated as a passage through and beyond nationalist closures of identity, which depend upon purity, fixity, exclusion and the negative definition of otherness. As it appears in Kearney's novels, this form of life offers an alternative figuration of the self in the play of doubling, international mobility, and extended sociality in writing and reading. In Kearney, aesthetic reterritorialisation is much more obviously restricted to the textual moment than in Bolger or Tóibín. The novels thus reflect his theoretical and critical writing on 'the fifth province' and 'the Irish mind', outlined in Chapter One. The textual character of Kearney's 'fifth province' is enacted in the novels' representation of self-constitution through the practices of the artistic intellectual, bound by the formal unity of the novel

itself. Kearney's novels are governed by a doubling logic, which he sees as characteristic of the 'Irish mind'. Together they make a single narrative told in two parts, about the entwined life-paths of twin brothers Sam and Jack Toland. Characters and events, across the two novels, are shadowed by their uncanny mirror image. Various binaries — purity/debasement, desire/repression, sacred/profane — are locked in a *pas de deux* of identity and difference. So thorough is the establishment of intimately linked or overlapping double images that *Sam's Fall* has been likened to "a fictional rendering of the philosophy of Jacques Derrida."[45]

In appropriately deconstructive spirit, *Sam's Fall* has a critical reader installed within the writing. The bulk of the novel is structured around Jack reading his brother's journal, after Sam's apparent suicide. The body has been found in the sea bellow the Cistercian monastery where the twins had gone to school, and where Sam was soon to take his final vows. Jack finds the journal in Sam's cell and reads it during the night before the funeral. The journal text is punctuated with Jack's reflections and doubts. So text and commentary run side by side in a structural echo of the ninth century manuscript which is a central image in the novel. Jack's interpretations and questions appear like the marginal jottings of a transcribing monk. Fv⁻ː, r, we read the original text through the reading/writing of another, via the omniscient narrator and Jack. Continuing in this poststructuralist vein, the brothers' shared childhood, set down in the journal, recedes as referent when Jack questions the veracity of Sam's recollections. Increasingly, the journal focuses on Sam's doubt in his vocation and desire for Jack's fiancée Raphaëlle. So the journal's signified, Sam's internal state, also becomes increasingly subjective and inaccessible. The reader is left with a collection of signifiers that never quite adds up to a revelation of cause or meaning. Sam's drowning remains mysterious, despite the trail of words leading to the day of his death.

Managing to be true to both the mystery genre and the novel's (anti)metaphysical themes, *Sam's Fall* provides an allegorical explanation for the death: it is a signal of the futile, and ultimately destructive, search for the Logos. In an unusually explicit and literal

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[45] Smyth *The Novel and the Nation* p.170.

instance of logocentrism, Abbot Anselm enlists Sam in the search for God's universal language, which he believes is coded within the *St Gall Priscian*, a Latin grammar transcribed by Irish monks in the ninth century. Divine language transcends difference since it is self-identical. It stands as a reunification of language and the world, a pure and binding relation between, not only signifier and signified, but also sign and referent. It stands as the end of all hermeneutics in the absolute stabilisation of meaning. The novel sets this quest for pre-lapsarian clarity (to which Sam aspires) against the celebration of desire and difference (Jack's chosen path). Between these opposites is Raphaëlle — "The ultimate and inelectable difference between Jack and Sam"[46] — more angelic *différance* than noiresque *femme fatale*. Like the semiotic games of Eco's historical murder-mystery, *The Name of the Rose*, the novel deconstructs its established binaries to develop a narrative that arrives at Raphaëlle's disembodied voice speaking within Jack. Echoing Molly Bloom, the voice affirms life amidst loss and calls him to desire: "Will you come to me Jack? Will you? Deep calling upon deep in a roar of waters. Living waters. Yes. Living. Swimming for life. To the far shore."[47]

Sam's Fall sets out in fictive form Kearney's view of the problem of the 'either/or' binary mode of thought, which characterised imperialism and continued into anti-imperial nationalism, thereby deforming the postcolonial nation-state. The image of twins calls up both the Ireland/England relation of formative antagonism and the geographically bound, yet territorially partitioned, relation of Republic/Northern Ireland. As in his critical work, Kearney's solution to the zero-sum-game of sovereignty is the 'both/and' hybridity of 'the Irish mind' and the transcendent unity of 'the fifth province'. Having established, a microcosm of the problem in *Sam's Fall*, Kearney attempts to solve it in *Walking at Sea Level*. Following an established philosophical technique from Plato's dialogues to Wittgenstein's engagement of his imaginary interlocutor, the second novel answers the questions posed by the first. Here, Jack Toland moves toward realising 'the Irish mind' and living 'the fifth province'.

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[46] Richard Kearney *Sam's Fall* (London 1995) p.5.
[47] Kearney *Sam's Fall* p.199.

This attempt to live the tension of the contradictions is signalled in Jack's name. For Kearney, John Toland, the seventeenth-century Irish philosopher, is emblematic of 'the Irish mind':

> Perhaps one of the reasons why Toland presented himself as a contradiction ... was because the Irish mind was a cleft-mind? Not uniform but pluriform. Not homogenous but diverse. Anglo and Gaelic. Catholic and Protestant. Native and planted. Regional and cosmopolitan.[48]

This is, of course, the ideal of the intellectual form of life. As characterised by Kearney, Toland's thought and life followed cosmopolitan and rational critical lines while, paradoxically, remaining embedded in the Donegal of his birth. This Toland is a 'demythologiser' able to maintain the aura of origin, identifying himself as "*Cosmopoli*", or "one who belongs to the world", and as "Janus Junius Edganesius ... indicating his place of birth on the Inis Eoghan peninsula".[49] Such reconciliation of contraries is Jack Toland's task in *Walking at Sea Level*; to extricate himself from assimilation into his brother's morbid quest, while preserving the parts of his self formed in relation to his brother. Kearney attempts to steer between liberalism's "affirmation of the autonomous self at the expense of the other" and the debilitating extension of the poststructuralist critique of the sovereign self to "infinite inflation of the Other to the detriment of the self".[50] Jack Toland must figure himself in the image of John Toland and so foster a continuous internal dialogue with the other, to arrive at a point of relational individuation where "the self walks at sea level with the other".[51]

At the beginning of *Walking at Sea Level*, Jack is a travesty of his namesake and a portrait of the intellectual as exile: a deracinated academic working in Montreal; his doctoral research on John Toland at a standstill; haunted by memories of home; estranged from Raphaëlle and their French-speaking daughter; drinking. By its end he is reconciled with his family through acceptance of his own non-identical self:

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[48] Richard Kearney *Postnationalist Ireland* (London & New York 1997) p.163.
[49] Kearney *Postnationalist Ireland* p.157.
[50] Jeffrey Kosky 'Review of *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*' *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* (12 July 2003).
[51] Richard Kearney *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* (London & New York 2002) p.11.

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> There was still a hole somewhere inside him, but he knew it was a hole no alcohol could fill. A cut that nothing could salve. A rent that neither hand of God nor man could ever stitch. A black gash. He tightened his grip on Raphaëlle's hand.[52]

Loss and fear of betrayal by the intimate other is, in the end, balanced by love and desire for the other. The disturbing unknowability of the other, their indeterminacy, is offset by the realisation of the self's own indeterminacy.

If the novels merely presented a passage to the 'Irish mind' as an acceptance of the play of contraries within the self, then they would have succumbed to Kearney's own criticism of the poststructuralist position, which sees an encounter with the other as always a diminution of the self. But Kearney's approach is a dialogical one, which requires 'remythologising' after 'demythologising', a disruption of complacent home pieties in the service of an augmented community. So the acknowledgment of the non-identical self, the recognition of 'gaps' and 'holes', is set within a wider frame of integration. Like Bolger and Tóibín, Kearney represents the reconfigured family as one such path of reincorporation for the individual. But, once again, this overt remaking of the image of the family is accompanied by a less explicit enactment of social integration through the novel form, as a mode of increasing abstraction. What is most revealing in Kearney's fiction is thus the thematic focus on the intellectual form of life, the implicit model of constitution and integration in his and the other novels.

The 'fifth province' is Kearney's stated integrative force, but this wide-cast net of imaginative and cultural unity can be recognised in its specific manifestation in this novel. In the initial editorial of *The Crane Bag*, he had posited the fifth province as "another kind of unity", an alternative to the political impasse of the aspiration to a unified Ireland. In his novels this 'other unity' takes the aesthetic shape first presented in the journal, where an enactment of the fifth province meant: "Each person would have to become a seer, a poet, an artist."[53] As I observed in Chapter One, this aesthetic unity, centred on the coordinating consciousness of the individual, is an alternative formation of

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[52] Richard Kearney *Walking at Sea Level* (London 1997) p.245.
[53] Richard Kearney and Mark Patrick Hederman 'Editorial', *The Crane Bag Book of Irish Studies (1977-81)* (Dublin 1982), p11.

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social integration ideally suited to the neoliberal ideology of integration through consumption. While the image of the artistic intellectual drawing from the common store of culture is a vision of freedom Marx would have recognised, under the imperatives of a globalised market economy such a reflexive intellectual practice is, typically reduced to the instrumental activity of the intellectually trained. The necessary disembedding involved in the intellectual form of life, which allows a critical or reflexive perspective on received culture, is emptied of volatile content in its encounter with the market and persists merely as valorised mobility, a mode of deterritorialisation. An aesthetic unity sufficiently portable and abstract to escape the essentialist designations of nationalism thus becomes an individuated reterritorialisation in the service of the larger, continuing, process of estrangement from more embodied relations enacted in emplaced community.

The abstraction of sociality in the formation of the nation-state has also played a part in the deterritorialisation of more embodied 'sub-national' social forms, as Gibbons and Lloyd have observed of agrarian insurgency and the street ballad.[54] In this respect, Lloyd sees the aestheticism of the fifth province as continuous with Irish cultural nationalism, rather than as a break with its restrictive mode of integrative identity politics.[55] He brings this critique of "aesthetic ideology" to his readings of Heaney's poetry, which Lloyd sees as responding to colonisation by relocating "individual and racial identity through the reterritorialization of language and culture".[56] Heaney's poetic evocation of a restored or enduring place-identity nexus is, then, a continuation of the debilitating "aestheticisation of Irish politics" that allowed state-centred cultural nationalism to displace recalcitrant nationalisms from below. Thus:

> Aesthetics, understood here to be ultimately the concept of man as producer and as producer of himself through his products, posits an original identity which precedes difference and conflict and which is to be reproduced in the ultimate unity that aesthetic works both prefigure and prepare. The naturalization of identity effected by an aesthetic ideology serves to foreclose historical process and to veil the constitution

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[54] See Luke Gibbons *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork 1996). See also David Lloyd *Nationalism and Minor Literature: James Clarence Mangan and the Emergence of Irish Cultural Nationalism* (Berkeley 1987).

[55] Lloyd *Nationalism and Minor Literature* p.xiii.

[56] David Lloyd *Anomalous States* (Durham 1993) p.20.

of subjects and issues in continuing conflict, while deflecting both politics and ethics into a hypothetical domain of free play.[57]

The continuity of cultural nationalism with the fifth province is in this 'aesthetic ideology' and its imposition or anticipation of a unity where there is, as yet, none. But the national unity imagined in the fifth province is even more abstracted from the territorialised and embodied social forms than pre-independence, state-aspirational, nationalism. Kearney's fifth province deconstructs the self-other relation, to deprive the irredentists of the idea of territorial sovereignty, leaving a *nationoid* formation that integrates the individual through dialogical reconstitution of the self. The abstracted sociality mediated by reading and writing, the intellectual form of life, is the point of access to such integration rather than the more embodied and located relations nationalism attempted to wed to its own abstraction of community. The novel thus becomes the imagined unity achieving an aesthetic, rather than territorial, sovereignty. This is not an allegory of a possible future; it is a practical representation of the already lived intellectual form of life. While, in Kearney's novels, there is a successful deconstruction and reconstitution for Jack and Raphaëlle, for those unable to exploit this form of life, such a process would have to be enacted through a denuded variation of abstract sociality, governed, not by a dialogical aesthetic, but by a deterritorialising market which offers reterritorialisation solely through consumption.

Representations of home in Bolger Tóibín and Kearney venture further than a mere rendering through text: their intellectual practice renders home *as* text. This is a sign of the dominance of the intellectual form of life, evident in how the novels exceed the formal tendency of fiction to aestheticise life, proceeding to transform the social world itself into aesthetic objects. In the manner of Bourdieu's "aesthetic disposition",[58] they assert the dominance of the intellectual form over other less abstracted formations, thereby remaking social relations as aesthetic relations between parts of the text. This formal remaking of the social within the text reflects the constitutive and integrative

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[57] Lloyd *Anomalous States* p.17.
[58] Pierre Bourdieu *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge MA 1984)pp.28-30.

power of the intellectual form and marks it out as akin to the deterritorialising effect of the global market. The liberal attempt to reterritorialise home in textual shape, which I have read in these novels and stories, is finally vulnerable to any shift in the form of life the global economic order might require. A more restrictive formation — perhaps of a neoconservative hue that would appropriate the myths of national community — might well be the favoured form of the future. Liberal reactions against the myth of the self-integrated nation have surely diverted the critical energies of these 'reinventions' of home. A sustainable reterritorialisation would be one that posits the integrative and constitutive powers of narrative as instances of the larger social constitution and integration, rather than the other way around. Such reterritorialisation might be resistant to a 'free-floating' or exclusively abstract aestheticism, continuously reforming itself around single components of community such as the body, narrative, family or individual experience. The integrating space of the novel is insufficient territory to hold in place such a manifold social formation. Where the intellectual form of life compartmentalises social life, as in these examples of liberal aesthetic reterritorialisation, it allows an easy appropriation of community by the ideologies of the market. The reformation of national community is only one type of reterritorialised social formation that might offer an alternative to deterritorialising ideologies. Such a social formation might enhance the development of a reflexive form of intellectual practice, able to resist the market's social deterritorialisation and radically autonomous figurations of the self. The key to this reflexivity would be a vantage point beyond the parochial enclosure of nationalism, still able to see the emancipatory potential of the nation.

In Northern Ireland

Transcending and Locating Home

In his introduction to the collection of autobiographical writing in *The Field Day Anthology*, Deane writes of how Louise MacNeice can "help us to understand the conflicts that exist within the North" because "he creates the self through that conflict

rather than by avoidance or an overcoming of it".[59] In this section I apply this approach to some recent novels from Northern Ireland, including Deane's own *Reading in the Dark*. Here, I will emphasise the part of written narrative, which risks becoming implicit by virtue of its apparent self-evidence. My adaption of Deane's approach is to ask how the self is formed through both conflict and the novel. This question is not intended as the first step toward construction of readings that knit biographical facts with fictive content: there is no straightforward step from autobiography to fiction. Rather, the analysis is continuous with my previous consideration of the processes of self constitution as represented and enacted in the novel, but here it incorporates the particular social experience of conflict in the recent history of the Northern statelet.

Longley has drawn attention to what she sees as a conflation of "personal history with a narrative of Ireland" in Deane's account of Irish autobiography. Where Deane sees a persistent writing out of "radical privation" and "the sense of a missing feature or energy", she detects only his own "obsession" with the impasse between local conditions and their transcendence through writing.[60] Focussing on *Reading in the Dark*, Longley suggests that it is largely the individual intellectual process of reading and writing, rather than the local historical or social circumstance, that is formative of the self:

> His [Deane's] "missing feature or energy", then, may ultimately have less to do with Derry or Ireland than with the neurosis that nourishes all creative spirits. Everyone reads — and writes — in the dark, but contemporary writing illuminates wider history if we can recognise the distinctive insights explicit and implicit, generated at the point where psychology and culture mesh.[61]

Writing itself seems sufficient evidence for Longley that a history of privation or the prescriptive limitations of colonial otherness are, at most, minor influences. Of 'psychology' and 'culture', the former is clearly the primary term. Deane's impasse between the local and transcendent is thus dissolved in the primacy of the writing/reading self or 'creative spirit', an intellectual figuration which subsumes the 'distinctive insights' of place within the over-arching structure of the writing life. Where Longley identifies

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[59] Seamus Deane 'Autobiography and Memoirs 1890-1988' in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vol.III (Derry 1991) p.383.
[60] Edna Longley 'Autobiography as History' *Fortnight*, November 1996, p.34.
[61] Ibid.

neurotic creativity as at the heart of writing, Deane refers to it as a dialogical process, in which the relation between the self and "the other force" makes "the self come into consciousness" and thereby gives "existence a pattern or the beginnings of a pattern of explanation."[62] This 'other force' is described ambivalently as "hostile or liberating energy".[63] Elsewhere Deane has explicitly linked the process of coming into consciousness in writing with the kind of anti-colonial repossession he sees in Joyce's aesthetic reterritorialisation. While wanting to avoid the "shadow" of Joyce, Deane places his own novel, as well as his other intellectual work, in the same mode of 'self-possession':

> One way of coming into self-possession, of overcoming any kind of oppression, colonial or otherwise, is to take charge of the interpretation yourself, not to allow yourself to be interpreted by others. This novel is a kind of parable of that attempt (and a painfully abortive attempt) on the part of a young kid. And that's what I do in my other work too (and that might be painfully abortive!).[64]

By evoking the difficulty of self-possession, or the struggle to "earn a name" made by his central character in *Reading in the Dark*, Deane captures the ambivalence of the intellectual form of life. A path beyond the interpretive designations enforced by others, it is a self-possession which can be generalised (by practical example and through alternati e identifying images) to all those who share that secondary status. But at the same time it is also a potential means for self-constitution in the solipsistic mode, for transcendence as a class-enabled retreat into radical autonomy. These poles mark the progress of action in the drama of anti-imperial nationalism as described by Fanon, the movement of liberation that stumbles into the pitfall of a domestic reproduction of the bourgeois social order. In the deterritorialised empire of global capitalism, exploitation of a national market requires, not so much a hegemonic 'national culture', as the mobility and flexibility celebrated in the ideology of autonomy. The old bourgeois sovereign self is thus now wilfully *self*-constituted. Longley provides an example of exactly this shift, displayed in the area of cultural production. Here, classical liberalism (psychology over culture) meshes with the new context of deterritorialised social and economic formations.

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[62] Deane 'Autobiography and Memoirs 1890-1988' p.380.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Carol Rumens 'Reading Deane: Interview with Seamus Deane' *Fortnight*, July/August 1997, p.30.

Transcendence of conflict through writing is the intellectual process of 'lifting out', understood as an ego reflex, put to the task of reproducing the cultural conditions for deterritorialisation. Alternatively, constitution of the self through writing and conflict is a specific attempt to synthesise the abstract sociality of the intellectual form with the face-to-face modalities of conflict and violence, to recognise these apparent poles as levels of the social. The constitution of the self through writing might then become part of a process of lifting out to see across the levels of social constitution, rather than an evacuation of that less abstract terrain of social life.

By drawing attention to the constitution of the self through the novel, I will attempt to explore the possibilities and pitfalls of the process of aesthetic reterritorialisation, considered as a response to, and means of incorporating, the conflict in the North. If the novel can function as a reterritorialisation of the self in more abstracted social relations — moving across the levels of social integration in ways that prevent its complete subordination to the deterritorialising drive of globalisation — then it may also offer a counter to the more locally deterritorialising effects of political violence. Can the novel, as an emblem of the intellectual form, provide a glimpse of viable alternatives to the territorially integrated utopias imagined by the paramilitaries?[65] Feldman's ethnographic investigation of "political terror in Northern Ireland", which considers practices of the body, space and violence as "forming a unified language of material signification", offers a way to understand violence — as exchange, as ideological sign, as a component of spatial systems — that might allow it to be narrated in forms other than reductive and exclusive sectarianism.[66] In Northern Ireland, political violence releases a relay of meaning across various established narratives: its material practice; the body; local communal space and the abstract national (Irish or British) territory. Like Appadurai, Feldman detects a logic of sociality even in violence. His ethnography is an enactment of the re-narration of violence at differing levels of abstraction, direct quotations from

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[65] See Allen Feldman *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago & London 1991) p41-2: "A profound retrograde dialectic emerged with the proliferation of chronic violence. The territorial violation of the sanctuary became a given condition of daily life, as redemptive ideologies of national territoriality promoted by the paramilitaries assumed greater and greater value. Deterritorialisation of the sanctuary entailed its ideological alienation-abstraction as a nationalist entity in tandem with its material effacement."

[66] Feldman *Formations of Violence* p.1.

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stories of violence told by his informants sitting beside his own interpretive writing: "Many of the texts transcribed in this book can be understood as a cultural-political project on the part of their authors and myself, to locate narrative in violence by locating violence through narration."[67]

How, then, do Northern novels re-narrate this stream of meaning? Deane's critical insistence on writing and self as constituted through the conflict seems a reaction against attempts to disregard the signifying power of violence and to contain it within the asocial and ahistorical categories of evil or atavism. Madden and Wilson provide examples of this effort at containment through their variations on the intellectual form of life as transcendence: a bundling of home within the confines of aesthetic abstraction, leaving face-to-face relations to the formations of violence. In Patterson and Deane, however, we find a re-narration of violence, utilising both the abstracting and material characteristics of the intellectual form. In their hands, the novel offers a vantage that lifts the self out, to see the relations — both embodied and abstracted — that constitute it in a social space at once infiltrated with an increased order and reach of abstraction and haunted by the appropriation by violence of the meaning of the body. They attempt a synthesis of abstraction and embodiment, re-appropriating a characteristic of violence observed by Deane:

> There's nothing more actual than violence, but the witnessing and experience of violence actually make the ordinary world seem almost unreal. And yet you know that violence is perhaps more real than a covered table in a quiet hotel, or whatever. It's got that kind of ferocity which lies at the heart of things, but because it makes the actual questionable, because suddenly the actual and phantasmal are seen not as opposites but as comrades, it has a very disturbing effect.[68]

The attempt to incorporate this destabilisation of the 'ordinary world' by violence, to recognise how the day-to-day has been rendered uncanny, is homologous with the effort to enmesh the intellectual abstraction of social life with other, less abstract, levels of social integration. These other formations are primarily formed in communities of proximity related to particular places. Deane and Patterson structure into their novels this congruence between the process of 'lifting out' and the violent 'disturbance' of the

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[67] Feldman *Formations of Violence* 14.
[68] Rumens 'Reading Deane' p.30.

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actual, while using the territorialising qualities of the novel to ground this dislocation in the particularities of place. I will conclude the chapter with a consideration how they attempt this synthesis. First, by way of contrast, let us examine the deployment of the intellectual form as a transcendence of violence and embodiment in Madden's *Hidden Symptoms* and Wilson's *Eureka Street*.

Novel as Disembodiment: Madden and Wilson

The theme of attempted transcendence runs across Madden's novels. Class mobility and religious mysticism are set against the social replication of class distinction and violence in *Hidden Symptoms*. Individual will struggles amidst intergenerational guilt in *The Birds of the Innocent Wood*. In *Remembering Light and Stone*, Italian exile enables its central character to, "forget all about Ireland, and then remember it, undisturbed."[69] A quest for artistic purity and fidelity to the self plague and fulfil the characters of *Nothing is Black* and *Authenticity*.[70] And early in *One by One in the Darkness* the reader is presented with an image of self formation detached from origin:

> When she'd started working in journalism, she hadn't liked the look of her name in print. Kate Quinn: it was too Irish, she thought, too country, she'd been delighted when she hit on the idea of changing the 'K' to a 'C'. Cate Quinn. It never crossed her mind that her family would have a problem with this, and she had been grieved and embarrassed when it became clear that they were hurt by what she had done, and saw it as a rejection of themselves.[71]

But an ambivalence in Madden's work makes these merely *attempted* transcendences. As Parker notes: "Madden's characterisations voice a variety of political and religious positions, none of which can be assumed to possess any final authority or authorial blessing."[72] In particular, *One by One in the Darkness* offers three different relations to home in the Quinn sisters, whilst *Hidden Symptoms* presents, in Theresa Cassidy and Robert McConville, two variant (but equally fragile) approaches to a violent Belfast. Yet,

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[69] Deirdre Madden *Remembering Light and Stone* (London 1992) p.2.

[70] Deirdre Madden *Authenticity* (London 2002). Deirdre Madden *Nothing is Black* (London 1994).

[71] Deirdre Madden *One by One in the Darkness* (London 1996) p.4.

[72] Michael Parker 'Self-Reflexivity in the Fiction of Deirdre Madden' *Irish University Review*, vol.30, no.1, 2000, p.87n.

despite this pluralism of content and restraint in the distribution of authority, the consistent appeal to transcendence a repeated message.

At the heart of *Hidden Symptoms*, Madden's first novel, is a sectarian murder. Francis Cassidy, whom the reader knows only through the memories of his twin sister Theresa, is the randomly selected victim of an anti-Catholic killing in 1970s Belfast. The murder precedes the narrative and is only gradually revealed in the course of the novel. Like Theresa, the other main characters are young intellectuals: students at Queen's; writers of criticism and fiction; "the new intellectually enfranchised, Catholic middle class."[73] The omniscient narrator describes Robert McConville's flat thus: "The room screamed of the persona he had created for himself: short of whitewashing the walls and writing I AM AN INTELLECTUAL in large red letters, it could not have been made to "say" more."[74] The first encounter between Robert and Theresa is a sharp impromptu debate about the nature of the then current burst of Northern literary production, in which the allusive term "omphalos" is deployed.[75] This self-conscious intellectualism is part of Robert's attempt to leave behind his Catholic working-class origin. He cringes from the religious kitsch in his sister's house, and responds similarly to the "vulgarity" of an Orange Order march on the twelfth of July.[76] Recoiling from their unsophisticated tastes, he finds his sister's Lourdes-devotional religiosity and her "Provo or Provo sympathizer" husband "pathetic, contemptible, even".[77] His response to the culture of ordinary life is to judge it in aesthetic terms, usually to the exclusion of the political or the social. Theresa reminds him that, more than a gaudy folk tradition, the Orange parade is predicated on hatred. His own grudging conclusion regarding his sister's family is that they are "undeniably real, united and happy".[78]

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[73] Parker 'Self-Reflexivity in the Fiction of Deirdre Madden' p.87.

[74] Deirdre Madden *Hidden Symptoms* (London 1988) p.25.

[75] See James Joyce *Ulysses* (London 1968) pp.13 & 24. Madden's intellectuals are allusively linked to Joyce's Stephen Dedelas, Buck Mulligan and Haines. Theresa is dismissive of the literary pretensions of the Northern Ireland renaissance and, by association, of Joyce's cultural revival through "new paganism".

[76] Madden *Hidden Symptoms* p.36 & 45.

[77] Ibid p.75 & 90-1

[78] Ibid p.90.

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Robert's intellectualism is represented as failed transcendence. In the initial encounter with Theresa his article is dismissed as "trash". "You're supposed to be a writer", is the exasperated criticism his sister and Theresa offer on separate occasions.[79] In this, Robert resembles the Dalkey accountant in *Authenticity* who cannot quite transform himself into an artist.[80] Stepping from his desk, to contemplate the reflected image of his self-made persona and place, Robert entertains the dismal fantasy of making 'real' the flattened surface of appearance:

> The reflection looked like him but it was not him: this is me, he thought, refined to perfection. A shadow upon glass could not feel worried or lonely. It could not have a sister or a girlfriend or a dull book to compile. Its body could not feel pain. ... The solution to the Irish crisis is for everyone to live by night, to put strong lights in their rooms and draw back the curtains and so make a whole new population identical to the one here now in all things but reality. ... For how can a reflection hate? Or be bigoted? Or kill? ... He wished he could stop being himself and become that double so that he could be dissolved into nothingness when the morning came.[81]

Aside from self-pity, this passage contains a telling image of the restriction of sociality to a single abstracted plane. Within the transcendental enactment of the intellectual form of life is a power to flatten sociality, to constitute the social at a remove from its embodied formations. Here, disembodiment of the social is envisaged as the way beyond political violence. Like the aesthetic distinction that is his escape from the designations of class and religion, sloughed off with the embodied sociality of family, his vision forfeits 'real' interactive community for the play of senseless simulacra. Madden presents such intellectualism as a blind alley: Robert is alone at the close of the narrative, ruing his secular monkish solitude, with "nothing to say" when faced with Theresa's grief; fearing that, if such loss came to him then "he would fall forever and forever".[82]

Theresa's Catholicism is the form of transcendence posed as the alternative to Robert's intellectual retreat. The contrast is evident in the arguments that run throughout the narrative, but is distilled in the parallel imagery of reflection:

> Stretching up she touched the mirror with the tip of her fingers. It was, of course, cold and smooth. What else, even now, did she expect? She withdrew her hand and

[79] Ibid p.104 & 113.
[80] Madden *Authenticity* pp.359-61.
[81] Madden *Hidden Symptoms* p.88.
[82] Ibid p.139.

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> gazed at her reflection. Me. The metal leaves framed her as she stood, still and dead as a painting. Could there be anything more wearisome, she wondered, than to stand alone, alone, alone before a mirror? How long would it be, she wondered, until she could go beyond reflections? For how long would she have to continue claiming the face in the mirror as her own? When would there be an end to shadows cast upon glass?[83]

Her vision extends the idealism of Robert's aesthetic fantasy. She desires is to go beyond what she sees as a second-order or shadow-reality of appearance, so as to reach the true source and hidden centre of all things, the divine. She hopes to fit her own grief-sick life and the brutal physicality of her brother's tortured and murdered body into the frame of divine intention. In this effort to explain suffering, the absent Francis assumes the figure of an ideal transcendence.

He is the emblematic character of the novel, as Smyth notes: "quiet, intense contemplation of God's will that he represents is offered as a counter to the hollow intellectual life represented by the other main characters".[84] The fact that he is a disembodied presence in the narrative, constituted purely in memory rather than in the 'action' of the novel, places him a step away from the embodied order of 'appearance' and closer to the purely abstract order of God's truth. Smyth argues that because *Hidden Symptoms* addresses the violent and religious elements of the Northern Irish conflict through "an essentially religious view", it should be understood as a "deeply conservative and reactionary novel".[85] Although Theresa cannot fully surrender her doubt and fear to faith, the novel's religious framework is evident in the centrality of metaphysical questions, such as the mind/body dilemma and the existence/non-existence of God. These relegate the Northern Irish conflict to a "mere backdrop" or an instance of an infinitely larger conflict between good and evil. The problem with this structure, Smyth writes, "is not that no solution is offered, but that within the world constructed by the novel no solution is imaginable".[86]

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[83] Ibid pp.141-2.
[84] Smyth *The Novel and the Nation* p.119.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid p.120.

Parker has criticised Smyth for the way "his analysis does not take into account ... the inextricability of religious affiliations and political identity in the North."[87] Citing the many signs common to religion and politics distributed throughout the novel, Parker argues that religion *is* politics in Northern Ireland. But this would seem to illustrate precisely Smyth's point. By setting out the spiritual emptiness of intellectualism and the pain of loss for those with insufficient faith, Madden's novel turns away from the ideological nexus of sect, politics and community. The proximity of the violence that emerges from this mix merely serves to add urgency to less site-specific metaphysical questions. Where Parker's reading is more fruitful is in his discussion of Madden's characters as "fictionists", who attempt to author themselves, or at least fill out their disjointed lives with imagination and part-fabricated memory.[88] Fragmented and dislocated by violence, life is refashioned with a narrative coherence that bears the formal likeness of autobiography.

The common element of intellectual and religious 'fictionist' frameworks is their inability to incorporate the material fact of violence. In this respect *Hidden Symptoms* can be read as a document of the failure to 'create' the self 'through the conflict'. From its vantage point of narrative abstraction, the novel allows author and reader to 'see through' religious and intellectual frameworks, to reach their limits, only to redeploy them in a 'reflexive' manner. This is not so much a conservative assertion of the religious life, as the use of a received discourse to fortify a radically autonomous contraction of the self away from the perceived barbarism of less abstract community. The only successful transcendence in *Hidden Symptoms* is that achieved by the novel itself, which rehearses these positions only to legitimate the attempt by 'fictionist' characters to 'write' themselves out of the territories of community: the body and place.

If Madden's transcendence is a fragile enclosure, a retreat from both the embodied danger of violence and the embodied formation of community, Wilson represents an a more direct engagement with the violence of Northern Ireland. His is an overt critique of the

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[87] Parker 'Self-Reflexivity' p.94.
[88] Ibid p.86 & 101.

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received narratives of violence using a "pervasive irony", as Patten observes, to provide "an enabling distance from which to survey and destabilize the configurations of home."[89] Yet, Patten concludes, that such 'distance' "runs the risk of indulging in a warped folklore and producing in the end a neo-provincialism based entirely on oppositional cynicism and ironic excess."[90] Here she is writing about the unrelenting parodic pastiche in *Ripley Bogle*, but I would argue, that the problem also appears, albeit more subtly rendered, in the later *Eureka Street*.

In a critical response to Heaney's Nobel Prize, Wilson pointedly argued that:

> Those who would maintain that in writing about hedges and blackberries, Heaney has actually treated the manifestations of political violence in a different manner are entirely fraudulent and must be termed so. *Bog Queen* doesn't really pass muster as an investigation of modern Northern Ireland ... he has left out that unpoetic stuff, that very actual mess.[91]

As we have seen, Wilson prefers what he sees as an unflinching probe into the heart of violence.[92] And *Eureka Street* is Wilson's fictive engagement with political violence in Northern Ireland.[93] Chapter Eleven is his rendering of the 'very actual mess' of a bomb exploding in Belfast.[94] Immediately preceding this chapter, which Wilson describes as "the hub on which the wheel of the narrative turns", is a short love-note to Belfast by night. Here the denizens dream and "the streets glitter like jewels, like small strings of stars." It is a quiet, reflective, moment, professing humility about the attempt to write of the city's tender and teeming vitality:

> The merest hour of the merest day of the merest of Belfast's citizens would be impossible to render in all its grandeur and all its beauty. In cities the stories are jumbled and jangled. The narratives meet. They clash, they converge or convert. They are a Babel of prose.[95]

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[89] Eve Patten 'Fiction in Conflict; northern Ireland's prodigal novelists' in *Peripheral Visions: Images of Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction* Ian A. Bell (ed) (Cardiff 1995) p.130.

[90] Ibid p.138.

[91] Robert McLiam Wilson 'The Glittering Prize' *Fortnight*, November 1995,p.24.

[92] See Robert McLiam Wilson 'Cities at War' *Irish Review*, vol.10, Spring, 1991, pp.95-8.

[93] See Wilson *Eureka Street* p.176. The novel also contains the caricature poet, Shague Ghinthoss, whose political commitment is ego-driven and who writes of: "hedges, the lanes and the bogs. He covered rural topography in detail. It felt like a geography field trip."

[94] See Richard Mills '"All Stories are Love Stories": Robert McLiam Wilson Interviewed by Richard Mills' *Irish Studies Review*, vol.7, no.1, 1999, p.76. Wilson states: "I wanted these chapters to be the hub on which the wheel of the narrative turns. Absolutely central and as crucial as that. The idea of writing about political violence as a traffic jam, which is what it is."

[95] Robert McLiam Wilson *Eureka Street* (London 1997) p.216.

This short chapter breaks the narrative flow, as the narrator casts his omniscient eye over the sleeping city, creating a strong mimetic sense, akin to documentary film. It presents as a record of the "ordinary life" of the city itself.[96] Yet the final images of quiet, before the narrator deliberately steers us to the site of the explosion in the next chapter, are all of writing. Lives considered too intimate and immense for 'rendering' are thus instantaneously converted to 'prose' and 'stories'. They are made 'epic':

> their stories only temporarily suspended. They are marvellous in their beds. They are epic, these citizens, they are tender, murderable.
>
> In Belfast, in all cities, it is always present tense and all the streets are Poetry Streets.[97]

As a complex web of intersecting lives lived 'out there', the city is an idea of the 'real', which is evoked and then quickly brought back within the control of a fictive order. The sensuous particularity of the citizens gives fleshly weight to the novel's world of words but, despite the narrator's stated humility, it is writing that finally defines the bodies.

Having established the city and its people as objects of writing, Wilson continues the motif into his portrait of the bomb-blast. Forensic detail of the explosion is coupled with paragraph vignettes that individuate the victims:

> The young man who had opened the door for her — he was thirty-four but still had unlined skin and thick hair, had always been thought younger than he was but what had irritated him in his early twenties now delighted him ... he could still date girls ten years younger than himself — was also killed, though he took nearly twenty seconds to stop existing. Some of the display case had removed one of his legs completely and mutilated his groin and pelvis. Glass from the door had smashed open his face, ripping off his nose, and penetrating his brain. His name was Martin O'Hare[98]

This is an attempt to incorporate not only the 'actual mess' of violence, but also the minutiae of an individual life, through the accumulation of detail. A series of these micro-characterisations is set out in satiric contrast to the gross sweep of the justifications, "politics" and "history". The chapter then laments the victims by returning to the image of the written life: "They all had stories. But they weren't short stories. They shouldn't have been short stories. They should each have been novels, profound, delightful novels,

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[96] See Edna Longley 'Quality Street' *Fortnight*, October 1996, p.34.
[97] Wilson *Eureka Street* p.217.
[98] Ibid p.222.

eight hundred pages or more."[99] And finally: "The pages that follow are light with their loss. The text is less dense, the city is smaller."

Violence is inscribed within *Eureka Street* but, like the detail of day-to-day life through which it is pinned to the 'actual', it is filtered through aesthetic categories: the horrific and the prosaic are made-over as prose. The attempt at individuation in the account of violence, both in relation to the person's 'character' and to the destroyed body, subsumes the embodied individual — a living and dying part of the city — within the transcendent terms of writing thereby confining the particular and the actual within the territory of the novel. This stylistic effect can be understood as ideological, when considered in relation to the novel's overtly satirical positioning. What Longley has termed "moral agency" is for Kirkland the "dominant liberal ideology of the novel".[100] Kirkland points to the lonely "liberal voice" of the character/narrator, Jake Jackson, non-aligned Catholic and reformed hard-man. Jake occupies a self-consciously neutral position, representing a rational antagonism to both Loyalism and Republicanism, by refusing to distinguish between them. Jake's precariousness is a device for the novel to present "as marginal those positions it simultaneously strives to advance" and thereby allow them to appear unconnected to power or non-ideological.[101] Longley's pithy observation that "Jake is portrayed as loser as well as a liberal" lends unwitting support to this reading.[102] Similarly, the apparently benign recuperation of the individual 'stories' from their dissolution in violence is an aspect of this masking of ideology. Folding the city into the novel, the individual into story, life into prose, is a rendering of the relatively material aspects of community into the more abstract sociality of the intellectual form of life. The "clear eyed" perception, which promises a deliverance from ideology, is in fact a refashioning in the image of the aestheticised self, which, sits within the ideological armoury of neoliberalism. The ethical effort to resist the de-humanisation of suffering — to know the dead, to name rather than list — is here put to the service of an ideology pushing beyond individuation and towards the radical autonomy of individualism.

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[99] Ibid p.231.
[100] Longley 'Quality Street' p.34. See also Kirkland 'Bourgeois Redemptions' p.224.
[101] Kirkland 'Bourgeois Redemptions' p.218.
[102] Longley 'Quality Street' p.34.

Economic globalisation is explicitly represented in the novel in the figure of Chuckie Lurgan, Jake's "fat and lazy working class Protestant"[103] friend, who manages to channel the flow of transnational capital — government grants, European development funds and U.S investment — into his terrace house on Eureka Street. Through "bullshit, lies and fantasies" Chuckie becomes one of the mobile elite of globalisation.[104] Emerging from a poor Protestant neighbourhood, he finally secures happiness through a loving sexual relationship, in a place resonant with the late-capitalist idea of 'home': Kansas.[105] Ecumenical capitalist, working-class-slob-made-good, reluctant political hero: Chuckie is an indulgent liberal fantasy, licensed by the novel's satiric playfulness. Between Jake's vulnerable 'non-ideological' perception (allied with the omniscient narrator's attempt to encompass the 'actual' city) and Chuckie's realisation of the dreams of postmodern production and consumption, the novel oscillates from the defamiliarising effects of satire to the accumulated detail of realism. This shifting quality is the formal aspect of the faux-marginalisation Kirkland observes. It might well be understood as meta-fictional self-reflexivity, where the novel is structured around a playful awareness of its own formal slippages.[106]

While this is an adequate descriptive reading, it fails to provide an account of the ideological effect of such a structure. The 'marginalisation' of realism by satire, and of satire by realism, appears to destabilise any representation that might solidify into ideology. What survives these formal shifts, however, is the pervasive aestheticisation of the self and community, their transformation through incorporation in the novel. Despite being given ethical weight by the accounts of violence and being represented as a real city beyond the text, the 'actual' in fact textualises the city and its people. As Kirkland notes, in order to maintain the marginality both of Jake's liberal voice and that of the

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[103] Ibid p.34.
[104] Wilson *Eureka Street* p.118.
[105] Ibid p.316. *The Wizard of Oz* is one of the few modern texts that approaches the richness of myth. Through it Kansas has surely become a globalised sign of both the yearning for and inaccessibility of a pre-modern 'home'.
[106] The sprinkled references to Dostoevsky, Dickens and Tolstoy in *Eureka Street* would be cited as evidence for such a reading.

omniscient narrator, political change is reduced to the resolution of the sexual tension between him and Aoirghe. So the scales of Republican ideology fall away and she finally sees through 'clear eyes'.[107] Wider political transformation remains outside the novel's satiric bounds. Even the enthusiasm for Chuckie's spontaneous political intervention is dismissed as a popular taste for "platitudes". Transformation is only at the level of the individual character, played out here as the "taming of the Republican shrew".[108] Aside from the obviously gendered quality of this circumscribed political change and its anti-Republican intent, it also carries a working-class *ressentiment*, in which the middle-class intellectual is silenced but their class-enabled dominance reconfigured and left in place.[109] The small victory for the 'non-ideological' is, in fact, a displacement of the explicit and local class-based domination by a globalised reformation of social distinction through the novel's aesthetic abstraction of the body and community. The narration of violence in *Eureka Streeet* is thus actually a re-narration, which lifts violence out from the immediacy of the 'history' and 'politics' of the conflict and re-plots it within the more abstracted formation of the social that is a component of the ideological matrix of globalisation.

Abstract Place: Patterson and Deane

Deane's *Reading in the Dark* ends in 1971 as Derry's barricades are being dismantled. Patterson's *Burning Your Own*, set during the summer of 1969, ends in August as British troops enter Belfast. The novels 'end', rather than conclude, at these resonant moments. The boys, who are their central characters, have arrived at departure points rather than resolutions. "Resolution" notes Lloyd, "becomes highly problematic in 'an era of transition' in which it has to be recognised that the novel is itself partisan rather than transcendental".[110] Deane and Patterson signal the irresolution of this historical moment and they deploy the novel form with a wary eye on its abstracting effects, guarding

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[107] An effect of seeing a victim of a punishment beating. See Wilson *Eureka Street* p.364. The last sentence of the novel is: "She smiles and she looks at me with clear eyes." p.395.
[108] Longley 'Quality Street' p.34.
[109] See Fredric Jameson *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London 1989) pp.210-2.
[110] Lloyd *Anomalous States* p.141.

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against the slip into transcendence. If these end-dates mark the beginning of what became 'the Troubles', then the reader might imagine these boys stepping across the boundaries of their novels into a future shadowed by state and paramilitary violence. While this was true of the thirty-year conflict itself another future is implied in the endings, one that winds across the period of violence into and beyond the present. This implied future is both an attempt to imagine reterritorialised community beyond the designations of British colonialism, Republican nationalism and Unionist regionalism; and also a utopian gesture against globalised deterritorialisation. These Northern novels are conditioned by the dislocations of colonisation and conflict, yet set that experience in the frame of embodied sociality and can therefore be read as responses to more general transformations of community within globalisation. Crucial to how the novels render a manifold sociality is their binding of oral and written forms within their narrative frameworks. Here, narrative itself, in its porous and meaning-making coherence, alludes to the possibility of a collective and emplaced formation of a home hospitable to difference.

Burning Your Own is structured around the formation of the self in relations of difference, identity and desire. The largely Protestant community of Larkview, an estate on the outskirts of Belfast, is home to ten-year-old Mal Martin. His experiences during the summer of 1969 — hinging on the events surrounding an Eleventh Night bonfire, his parents' fissile marriage and his relationship with (Catholic) Francy Hagan — make up the narrative. From this description Patterson's first novel appears to follow the conventions of the *Bildungsroman*. However, generic structure is here conditioned by the particular circumstance of the novel's content and production. The autobiographical infiltration, which is common in such novels, is specifically Patterson's Protestant Unionist working-class background, which puts the bourgeois predisposition of the *Bildungsroman* under some strain.[111] Patten observes that these particular conditions deflect what might have been the ideological course of the narrative:

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[111] See Glenn Patterson 'I am a Northern Irish Novelist' in *Peripheral Visions: Images of Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction* Ian A. Bell (ed.) (Cardiff 1995) p.151. See also Patten 'Fiction in Conflict' p.139. See also Elke D'Hoker & Hedwig Schwall 'Interview with Glenn Patterson' *Etudes Irlandaises*, no.25, Spring 2000, pp.92-3. See also Paula Shields 'The Fortnight Interview: History in a House' *Fortnight*, no.414, May 2003.

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> *Burning Your Own* is a classic Northern Irish *Bildungsroman*, but one in which the author uses to maximum extent the education and disillusionment of its central character as a means of exposing redundant or pernicious aspects of his society's cultural conventions.[112]

Patterson's novel is a critical engagement with the *Bildungsroman*, rather than merely a typical, ahistorical and apolitical, example. This differentiates it from the aesthetic transcendence attempted by Madden or Wilson. Patterson's figuration of the self incorporates the conflict as "unavoidably constitutive of the subject, rather than as an alien intrusion".[113] Born in 1961, his childhood years in Belfast coincide with the escalation of the conflict described in *Burning Your Own*. Contemplating its "destabilizing effects" in destruction, violence and the demographic and territorial upheavals in Belfast during the 1970s, he echoes Deane's conception of the constitutive power of the conflict as 'hostile or liberating energy'. Patterson detects a "liberating potential":

> In particular it resists the closure of traditional interpretations in which one unchanging territory is endlessly contested by two mutually exclusive tribes: the old politics of one thing or the other. Identity becomes dynamic rather than birth-given and static.[114]

This 'dynamic' understanding of identity is emphasised in the reciprocally constitutive relation between Mal and Francy, which refuses to settle in any one of identity, difference or desire. Instead it shifts across those categories as the narrative moves through loyalty and betrayal, repulsion and empathy, familiarity and estrangement. Yet within this fluid and dialogical understanding of the conflict, and of the constitution of the self around "flux and exchange", Patterson insists on his own situated position: "I am a Northern Irish novelist".[115] He thus seeks the universality of the particular, irreducible to qualitative sameness and infinite exchangeability. For Patterson, the designation of home is a limit on the formation of self, but home itself is a dynamic set of relations that neither remains static nor fragments into autonomously individualised compartments.

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[112] Patten 'Fiction in Conflict' p.142.
[113] John Goodby 'Bhabha, the Post/Colonial and Glenn Patterson's *Burning Your Own*' *Irish Studies Review* vol.7, no.1 1999, p.67.
[114] Patterson 'I am a Northern Irish novelist' p.151.
[115] Ibid.

Reading in the Dark has also been compared to the *Bildungsroman*. Smyth describes it as a "failed bildungsroman", in which the nameless narrator is unable to "realise his true self" because of his "inability to overcome the problems and obstacles which have arisen in a colonial context".[116] This failure to achieve "identity" or "earn a name", as Deane describes the predicament, is indeed a deformation of generic conventions that require an imposition of the self on the world.[117] There is here no sovereign core-self, finding expression in the development of character. The fictive assertion of an individual will, which creates for itself an autonomous space, is revealed as ideological wish-fulfilment when attempted in a political environment of incomplete state hegemony and explicit coercion. In such a circumstance the self is inevitably and conspicuously "infected" by political conflict.[118] The 'failure' Smyth describes is then a critical one, representative of social foreclosure rather than a formal shortcoming in the novel. It is a rejection of the transcendent formation of the novel, opting instead for a narrative of process, an incremental mobilisation of agency.[119] The narrating 'I' does not arrive at identity, but rather develops as a contributing participant in pre-existing social and historical narratives.[120] This understanding of narrative as the process of agency decentres the liberal conception of arrival at self-identity, usually rehearsed in the *Bildungsroman*. Rather, narrative itself becomes a constitutive allegory of the interrelation of social- and self-formation. Narrative is both constitutive and allegorical because it simultaneously enacts and represents this relation. Yet, as Gibbons has suggested, such decentring also

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[116] Gerry Smyth *Space and Irish Cultural Imagination* (Basingstoke & New York 2001) p.135.

[117] Rumans 'Reading Deane' p.29.

[118] See Andrew Ross 'Irish Secrets and Lies' *Salon* (http://archive.salon.com/april97/deane970411html). Deane is quoted: "I don't suppose that there was any point at which I ever felt that there was a visible gap between what people call politics and my private life." "I think everybody is infected, one way or the other. ... But when a family has directly experienced political violence, then it's very difficult to avoid the more deforming aspects of it. But it's also useful, in that it allows you to see just how dangerously insinuating violence is."

[119] See Liam Harte 'History Lessons: Postcolonialism and Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark*' *Irish University Review*, vol.30, no.1 2000, pp149-62.

[120] See Feidman *Formations of Violence* p.13: "The polarity between text and self and narrative and event cannot hold. In a political culture the self that narrates speaks from a position of having been narrated and edited by others — by political institutions, by concepts of historical causality, and possibly by violence. The narrator speaks because this agent is already the recipient of narratives in which he or she has been inserted as a political subject. The narrator writes himself into an oral history because the narrator has already been written and subjected to powerful inscriptions."

destabilises the state-nationalist claims of 'arrival' at self-identity.[121] In *Reading in the Dark* the anti-colonial 'self-possession' Deane envisages is irreducible to a nationalist reassertion of 'Irishness' simply awaiting its full mediation in the state. It is 'Irish' in the sense that the narratives, within which the narrator moves and from which he forms himself, are culturally, historically and spatially specific. This specificity saves such a formation from the poststructuralist diminution of the self as an idiosyncratic twist of the intertextual web.[122] Likewise, it resists the rule of interchangeability ubiquitously imposed by the commodity form. A static and centred identity, with the violence to the other this implies and requires, can be avoided without recourse to the radical relativism of the market or the postmodern turn. The process of agency is, as Deane terms it, an act of self-possession, a taking of oneself, not merely a receiving nor a realisation. It is self-representation individuated by the circumstance of its synthesis and delimited by its determined parts. It carries the specificity and variety of the stories from which it is constituted.

Feldman notes of his ethnographic work in Northern Ireland that its informants were not inert repositories of cultural information. In one example, a PIRA member describes his interrogation by British troops. Feldman interprets the account thus:

> For the narrator, the cumulative sequence of beatings and attempted mutilations becomes a narrative of survival — a journey past language and the body and a return to language and the body that coincides with the recitation of the oral history.[123]

'Recitation' restores the body to cultural and political agency. In the ethnography, this process of recuperation is enacted at another level of abstraction. Re-embodiment is already in action 'on the ground' when "The body subtracted by violence is reconstituted and replotted through oral history."[124] This cultural action is then further abstracted by 'recitation' in the ethnographic frame. Here, oral and written forms contribute to the same political and cultural reterritorialisation of the body through the abstracting mechanisms of narrative. There is a similar fusion of forms in *Burning Your Own* and *Reading in the Dark*. The colonial contest between the "discourses of literacy and orality" has been

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[121] Gibbons *Transformations in Irish Culture* pp.134-47.
[122] See Goodby 'Bhabha, the Post/Colonial and Glenn Patterson's *Burning Your Own*' pp.65-71.
[123] Feldman *Formations of Violence* p.119.
[124] Ibid.

noted before in postcolonial readings of Deane's novel.[125] And Patten's suggestive category of "restorative fictional anthropology" opens the way for an understanding of orality in the novel.[126]

The "heavy materiality" of "social negotiations over territory, identity and exclusion", wrought in *Burning Your Own* can be seen in productive interaction with the abstracting quality of the novel form.[127] The interaction between Francy and Mal provides an image of this relation, as the latter's ruminations on an early encounter make plain: "listening to Francy was like reading a book".[128] Indeed, the intermingling of oral and written forms is announced in the novel's opening lines:

> 'In the beginning' — said Francy — 'was the dump.'
>
> He stamped both feet on the mound on which his toilet squatted and fixed the boy before him with fiercely twinkling, black eyes, beguiling him with his knowledge.
>
> Mal nodded, convinced, though it was his body, not his mind, which came closest to understanding[129]

The bible's written approximation of orality is converted back to recitation by Francy. Here, however, the mystical abstraction of "the word" is replaced by a defined locality. The 'dump', in which Francy spends most of his time, is a fenced area at the edge of the estate, at once part of, yet not included within, the community territory. From this vantage, Mal looks back at Larkview: "He lived here, but he did not recognise this place, could not reconcile the jumble with the neatly hedged rows he walked through day to day."[130] The uncanny perspective from the dump combines with Francy's oral history of Larkview to defamiliarise home for Mal. In this there is a homology with Patterson's written abstraction of home. He wrote the novel while living in England, as a recreation of home at a spatial, temporal and formally abstracted distance.[131] This combined

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[125] Harte 'History Lessons: Postcolonialism and Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark*' pp.158-62.

[126] Patten 'Fiction in Conflict' p.130.

[127] Ibid p.140.

[128] Glenn Patterson *Burning Your Own* (London 1993) p.18.

[129] Ibid p.3.

[130] Ibid p.14.

[131] See Patterson 'I am a Northern Irish novelist' p.150: "I hoped that by exploring in the novel form territory that existed at a historical and geographical remove I might be able to find new perspectives from which to view events that were, in 1986-7, in every event much closer to home."

distancing is an instance of the process of 'lifting out', characteristic of the intellectual form of life, and in the novel itself, this type of abstraction is extended to Mal.

If this were merely a matter of Francy's account unsettling Mal's received understanding of place, then it would merely reproduce the Arnoldian stereotypes of the 'Celt' in the figure of a grubby red-haired boy and so give his orality an exotic pre-modern aura. In fact, Francy is something of an 'organic' intellectual, gathering his knowledge of their home from a robust technique of participant observation and from the books and files he has gathered from the archive-like dump.[132] Instead of this modern/non-modern division, *Burning Your Own* represents oral and written forms interweaving in a thoroughly contemporary negotiation of territorial meaning. The abstraction of sociality that allows a rethinking of home as contextual rather than natural and which in turn diminishes the sectarian antagonism between the characters is then turned back on the common, but disputed, territory. In language that appears a travesty of the Ulster Covenant, Francy has Mal swear "allegiance to the dump", only to abandon "all that yielding obedience stuff" in favour of an assurance that he will "stick by me and the dump".[133] As the televised violence of Burntollet materialises in their corner of Belfast, the micro-community of reciprocity and shared meaningful territory can no longer maintain its liminal exemption from the "rules" outside the dump. As a pogrom gathers to expel Francy's family from Larkview, the benign mimicry of nationalist/regional territorialisation in the dump is punctured. Echoing Patterson's own understanding of "countries as collective fictions", Francy denounces the dump as "all lies".[134] The oral formations that territorialise the dump — the faux-biblical origin myth and geographical lore, the oath of allegiance and the rites of the "ratcharm" initiation — are dissolved by political violence. One embodied formation of community (the sectarian collective expulsion of the Other) displaces another(the oral mediation of the dump's community).

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[132] Patterson *Burning Your Own* pp.59-64.
[133] Ibid pp.63-4.
[134] Patterson 'I am a Northern Irish Novelist' p.159. Patterson cites Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* as an influence on his "reimagining" of Northern Ireland.

The novel form allows a view of competing oral discourses vying to identify the self.[135] In *Burning Your Own* there is a glimpse of the utopian allure of a territorialised self. Alongside the oral formation of Francy and Mal, which momentarily redirects the meaning of place, we encounter the sectarian collectivity, which displaces what might otherwise be inter-communal class solidarity. The power of sectarian discourse to co-opt the individual is demonstrated to Mal in his rapid loss of control of the football-field slur, "Derrybeggars". In the formal context of the novel the sectarian enclosure of self-identity can be recognised as an attempt to reterritorialise a community and integrate the alienated individual. Oral forms work within the novel as a localised reintegration, grounded in a particular place, narrating its conflictual and communal history in a replication of a face-to-face context. Patterson incorporates this oral 're-plotting' of community and individual, but re-positions the discourses in relation to other competing accounts of home. The novel form allows such embodied and territorial narratives to be lifted out from their territorial context, rather than transcending their material quality, as *Burning Your Own* returns these extra-abstracted stories to their place of origin. Finally, the combination of performance and allegory in Francy's incendiary departure from the narrative — in which he is part spruiker-auctioneer, part burlesque master of ceremonies, part urban guerrilla — synthesises the oral reclamation of territorial meaning and the critical distance of abstraction, recognising at once the constitutive designations and fictive potential of home.

The problem of representing social formations and their relations to violence is one with a significant history in Ireland. Explaining the inability of nineteenth century Irish novels to represent agrarian movements like the Whiteboys, Lloyd sees the novel form as implicated in a "dominant social narrative" working the towards consolidation of representation within the state. Both imperial and nationalist state formations enact this cultural enclosure, characterising that which cannot be included as unrepresentable outrage. The problem of representing violence thus becomes a problem of acknowledging social and political formation inadmissible to the social formations which produced, and

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[135] See Goodby 'Bhabha, the Post/Colonial and Glenn Patterson's *Burning Your Own*', for a discussion of class, sexuality and gender subsumed by sectarian ethnicity.

which is reproduced by, the novel. He reads this problem of representation as an ideological exclusion:

> I would suggest, what is unrepresentable in agrarian violence is not simply, if at all, violence itself, but modes of organization which offer counter-possibilities to the social vision embedded in either constitutional or novelistic narratives.[136]

A key aspect of the nineteenth century crisis of representation was the apparent impossibility of including oral forms in the novel. Again, Lloyd characterises this, not merely as "formal differences between modes of emplotment or characterization", but rather as a more fundamental difference of social formation in which "a real antagonism exists between the novel and the social forms it desires and the 'oral' culture it would displace".[137] Rather than a mode of representation transcendent of violence, the novel is part of the coercive armoury of state circumscription of social and self-formation[138] The sanctioned violence of exclusion, which inheres in state-defined self-identity, is thus active in the novel.

Reading in the Dark attempts to reconcile this 'antagonism' between oral and written forms. Following Lloyd, Deane's novel can therefore be read as offering a figuration of the synthesis of social formations. Of course, there are limits to the comparison: the orality in Deane is not that of an Irish-speaking peasantry and the reconciliation of these forms is played out in the structurally partisan realm of the novel. However, the problems of the unrepresentability of violence, the fragmentary inclusion of an oral culture and the apparent effacement of located and specific community by more abstract formations, are all included as problems *within* the narrative. And in its reflexive 'failure' as a *Bildungsroman*, *Reading in the Dark* unsettles the violence of self-identity encoded in the novel form. Deane's novel incorporates the crisis of its own production.

Reading in the Dark has the symmetrical framework of six chapters in three parts. However, the symmetry breaks down within the chapters as the narrative unfolds in brief episodes that are titled and dated. Coupled to the nameless first person narration, these

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[136] Lloyd *Anomalous States* p.145.
[137] Ibid p.131
[138] Ibid p.154. Lloyd states: "Far from being simply an intrinsically benign and democratic form, the novel enacts the violence that underlies the constitution of identity, diffusing it in the eliciting of identification.".

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give the impression of a diary, memoir or autobiography within a novelistic frame.[139] Some episodes are madeup almost entirely of direct speech, such as the classroom scenes and, notably, the ghost tale in 'Katie's Story, October 1950', which concludes Part One.[140] There is thus an attempt to bring the apparently 'fragmentary' nature of oral form into direct relation with the totalising frame of the novel. The antagonistic formations of Lloyd's analysis are structurally intermingled. Violence, as a narrative component, enters the structure in two ways: through direct accounts of the narrator's 'experience' and via oral narratives recounted to the narrator. An example of the first is the interrogation by the RUC of the narrator, his brother and father.[141] The incident is related in two brief paragraphs of plain tone: "They made my father sit at a table and then lean over it, with his arms outspread. Then they beat him on the neck and shoulders with rubber truncheons, short and gorged-red in colour."[142] The violent event is set out with minimal metaphoric elaboration and appears at the bracketed chapter-end. An example of the second can be seen in one of the numerous speculations about a shootout between the IRA and RUC at a whiskey distillery in 1922:

> There was a story about one of the IRA men in the distillery strapping himself to an upright iron girder at the corner of the building as it caught fire. He had a machine-gun, probably a Thompson, and he had away with that as the police came shadowing across the street below to the base of the building. He was about twenty feet up and the bullets sprayed from the Thompson as from a hose with a filter nozzle, all over the place. But the gunman was such a target, silhouetted by the fire, stock-still in one place. He must have been hit twenty or thirty times, and his figure stood there, drooped on the girder, glittering when the flames shone on the blood that soaked from his front, his arms and straight down before him.[143]

Here, cinematic visual detail is combined with an appropriation of the mythic death of Cuchulain to fill out what the narrator feels is fragmentary and incomplete narrative. As the reader and narrator come to learn, these events are a key part of his family's history. After the shootout the narrator's (paternal) Uncle Eddie was executed as an informer on the orders of his (maternal) Grandfather. The scene is represented as a part-imagined and

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[139] Gerry Smyth *Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination* (Basingstoke & New York 2001) p.135.
[140] Seamus Deane *Reading in the Dark* (London 1997) pp.59-71. 'Katie's Story, October 1950' is the longest episode in the book.
[141] Ibid pp.28-9.
[142] Ibid pp.28.
[143] Ibid p.182.

part-recalled episode from a larger oral narrative, the source of which cannot be pinned down to any one person: "I could hear all their voices in the kitchen but I couldn't match a voice to a detail."[144] There is a stylistic clash here between the realist 'recollections' of 'experienced' violence, which are meagre but certain, and the elaborated 'stories' of violence, which are polyphonic, fragmentary and disputed. As the narrator attempts to incorporate these oral narratives, drawing a rational thread through the many different versions to make the story his own, he overlays the first mode onto the second. But, having collected sufficient detail and achieved a satisfactory coherence, he finds that his control of the story offers no respite from the silent pain in his family and merely alienates him from the parents who hold different fragments. In this apparent failure of the rational realist mode to mediate social reintegration after violent disruption, we find an echo of the crisis of representation Lloyd observed. Here, however, it is an avowed gap between oral and written forms, which is located within the figure of the narrator and embedded in the structure of the novel itself.

The antagonism between the oral and written, which Deane sets in the fabric of his narrative, carries with it the history of colonial domination and resistance, understood as a confrontation between social formations. This antagonism also extends to the social shift stemming from the extension of welfare into Northern Ireland in the 1940s,[145] in particular, the rise of a Catholic middle class, as a result of the changes to school funding initiated in the Butler Education Act of 1944.[146] The resultant class mobility is an aspect of the representational 'gap' structured into *Reading in the Dark*. As Harte notes: "the boy is situated at a crucial conjunction of social and historical change, as the oral folk culture of his native community is about to be finally and irrevocably overlaid by the dominant state-sponsored culture of literacy."[147] And this division extends further still, to the generalisation of the intellectual form of life and the restriction of sociality to abstraction in globalisation. Rather than a fraught transition from pre-modern to modern

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[144] Ibid p.182.
[145] See Paul Bew, Peter Gibbon and Henry Patterson *Northern Ireland, 1921-94: Political Forces and Social Classes* (London 1995) p.106.
[146] Alvin Jackson *Ireland 1798-1998* (Oxford 1999) p.356-7.
[147] Harte 'Postcolianlism and Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark*' p.159.

cultural forms, this last shift is a qualitative transformation of social being, which those actively constituted in the intellectual form can exploit, but which leaves a denuded social frame for others. The crisis of representation, called out by violence, is both the continuing colonial/postcolonial contest for self-representation and also the present disengagement of abstract sociality from its material counterpart.

The narrator's attempt to overlay the singular linearity of written narrative over multi-voiced oral form proves difficult both for him and for the reader alike.[148] The disorientation of the search for significance in small signs, allegorical renderings, or even silent spaces in the story, is pervasive throughout. The reader becomes complicit, particularly through the borrowed conventions of the murder-mystery genre, with the boy's need to place the violent events of his family's past within the control of his own narrative. However, the stories incorporated into the novel are represented as holding some of the shape that shows them to be from a social formation other than that of the novel. The recurrent ghosts stories and appearances from the 'otherworld', such as the "clear, plain silence" between the boy and his mother in the opening scene of the novel, signal some formal durability resistant to the particular abstraction of the novel.[149] The clash of modern urban rationality with pre-modern rural culture is explicit in encounters such as the boy's unthinking rejection of "the field of the disappeared" his father shows him.[150] There is also the awkward presence of the long ghost tale in the section, 'Katie's Story, October 1950'. This story is resonant with the literary tradition of Big House Gothic, but here translated through 'oral' telling into a myth of the family's rupture through violence, death and exilic disappearance. Feldman describes the cultural function of the ghost story thus:

> What the ghost, the banshee, and the recursive death site signify is the liminal experience of historical passage. The appearance of confused space and time implies that a residual order that held space and time, life and death in a different relation no

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[148] Smyth *Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination* p.134. Smyth admits: "After several readings, I am still not *exactly* sure what happens to whom, in what order, and what the implications of every event and exchange are for the overall 'meaning' of the book."
[149] Deane *Reading in the Dark* p.5.
[150] Ibid p.54.

longer governs, that these constituent dimensions are now in a new uncodifiable arrangement.[151]

The story is the beginning of a process of reterritorialisation that goes some way to mending the social rend occasioned by violence. In *Reading in the Dark* part of the narrator's (and reader's) difficulty in establishing 'what has happened' is the resistance of these stories to the mode of abstraction of the novel, holding instead to their more territorially emplaced narrative incorporations of violence. The ghost story is a replotting of an absent body in the narrative of a particular place.

While the antagonism between forms is structured into both the narrative and the narrator of *Reading in the Dark*, the problem of this conflict is also brought to light through the aesthetic abstraction of the novel form itself. Bringing these forms into proximity, within the porous boundaries of the book, produces a figuration of their reintegration in an alternative social formation of the future. Like the narrator of *Reading in the Dark*, Deane insists that there is a 'story' within the competing narratives he has collected.[152] In the introduction to the *Field Day Anthology*, he brings Ireland's diverse 'micro-narratives' under the organising principle of liberal pluralism. But, Deane himself has suggested the inadequacy of this resolution.[153] By contrast, his novel offers an alternative structure of reintegration, in which the search for narrative coherence engages with the problems surrounding a postcolonial reclamation of self. The pitfalls of nationalist designations, which succumb to a totalising enclosure of self-identity, are a recurrent motif in the novel: from the various oppressive silences of family members to the 'disappearances' caused by political violence.[154] They also appear as the friction between oral and written forms, manifest in the novel's narrative and structure. Rather than eliding these problems by attempting aesthetic transcendence, the novel converts them, through narrative, into a

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[151] Feldman *Formations of Violence* p.68.

[152] See Seamus Deane 'General Introduction', *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* vol.I, (Derry 1991) p.xix: "There *is* a story here".

[153] Dympna Callaghan 'An Interview with Seamus Deane' *Social Text* no.38, Spring 1994, p.46. Responding to Callaghan's criticism that his image of Ireland as "hospitable and generous", in the 'Introduction', is "what Ireland is for the Tourist Board", Deane provides an ambivalent answer: "There is a code speaking here. I've attacked pluralism as a political question in relation to Joyce, in relation to Roy Foster, and various others. I've said in effect, for Christ sake, save us from liberal pluralism. On the other hand, I'm aware that liberal pluralism permeates that Introduction."

[154] See Harte 'Postcolianlism and Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark*' p.157.

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problematic "search for a legitimating mode of nomination and origin".[155] This neither imposes a written order on an elusive past, nor binds together a 'fragmentary', orally mediated, contemporary social formation, nor resigns itself to unknowability and a fissile self. Rather, working in an intellectual mode of narrative, *Reading in the Dark* brings together, without pretending to a resolution, the embodied and abstracted social formations severed by a series of deterritorialising forces: colonisation, class fragmentation, nationalist enclosure/exclusion and globalist dislocation. Deane's novel thereby outlines the shape of a reterritorialising process that might leave behind the violence inherent to all of these.

Both Deane and Patterson are engaged with the problems of reterritorialising home through an intellectual mode of narrative. There is a common self-reflexivity in their approach to the novel form, aware of its structural tendency toward idealism, its textualisation of the social world. Their attempts to incorporate the more embodied levels of sociality, of place and speech, signal a response to social division and violence that seeks reintegration, rather than a retreat into aesthetic shelter. Their reflexive practice is informed by the potentialities and dangers of 'home' (originary legitimacy troubled by essentialism and exclusion) and 'deterritorialisation' (free autonomy haunted by solipsism and dissipated sociality). Their novels bring these problematic categories together in narratives of self-formation as movement into the intellectual form of life, yet enact this as an abstraction of located community. This is a figuration of the abstraction of sociality, not as necessarily terminating in deterritorialisation or transcendence, but rather as an interaction between levels of abstract integration, from the territorialised or embodied to the disembedded intellectual. The manifold levels of social being are thus structured into the novel.

There is nonetheless a significant political divergence between Deane and Patterson: their views regarding nationalism. Deane's scholarly and literary work is a critical and 'reconstructed' intervention within the nationalist tradition. Patterson, on the other hand,

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[155] Seamus Deane 'Introduction' in Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, Edward W. Said *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* (Minneapolis 1990) p.19.

exhibits a "great fear of nationality, or nationalism".[156] He stresses that this 'fear' extends to "all nationalisms":

> I think nationalisms are fictions, I just can't understand what a nation is. They only come about by including a certain group of people, by telling them a story of why and what they are, English or Irish, and so you have national myths and history. But as soon as you do that, you instantly identify people who aren't that. And that's the instant where you start to have problems with nationalism.[157]

Patterson is aware of the apparent paradox of arguing this opposition to nationalism while professing his sense of "Northern-Irishness": a version of the contradiction between cultural pluralism and identity politics, which plagues much liberalism and postmodernism[158] He attempts to solve the problem by referring to a more concentrated space of identification, a common "experience" within a "hemmed in" region, even contracted to the size of the city. The sense of common cultural experience is here de-linked from national territory, so that the feeling of belonging to a place is not determined by the enclosure of the border.[159] But if the pitfall of the nation-state is the 'fiction' of exclusive self-identity, then this spatial contraction of community does fails to guard against it. There is no need to use one's imagination to conjure an image of a city, town or even a suburban community — centred on religious identity, for example — that is violently exclusive of those who do not share the faith.

There is a more serious problem in the equation of origin or difference — 'a story of why and what they are' — with the exclusion of others. Patterson's own recourse to shared 'experience' is a properly materialist origin story, which does not rely on the negative definition of 'people who aren't that'. The spectre of essentialism diverts him into this conflation of identity and exclusion. If his fear of nationalism stems from a rejection of essentialist designations of self-identity, then he and Deane occupy common ideological terrain. The common ground between the novels lies in their refusal to deny the allure of essentialised community and identity. Rather than transcending the essentialist malformation of community, by denying the located and embodied aspect of sociality,

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[156] D'Hoker & Schwall 'Interview with Glenn Patterson' p.94.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Terry Eagleton 'Nationalism and the Case of Ireland' New Left Review no.234, 1999, p.60.
[159] D'Hoker & Schwall 'Interview with Glenn Patterson' p.95. Patterson dismisses the Irish North-South border: "if it goes it goes, but we would have to adopt a different context."

their novels attempt to reoccupy the ground on which essentialism stands. The success of the national 'fiction' of belonging is derived from such fusings of embodied formations of community with more abstract modes of integration. Deane and Patterson show that narrative abstraction in the novel might also be drawn into such a synthesis. By directing this intellectual formation to the violence at home, they project the possibility of other abstracted social formations being turned to new expressions of sociality that acomodate rather than compartmentalise social being. For those future social formations to emerge, the processes of abstraction need to be reclaimed from the ideologies that reproduce a market-centred globalism by constituting the individual in conditions of homelessness.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

I have identified in contemporary Irish culture several broad responses to the contested role of the nation as a framing abstraction for the constitution of the self. Further, I have argued that across these responses there is a common recourse to the intellectual form of life as an alternative model for the constitution of persons. The generalisation of this form is deployed with various degrees of reflexivity and with a different susceptibility to or common cause with the ideological figuration of individual as radically autonomous. The representation and enactment of this ideology is a cultural aspect of globalisation, which, in its most extreme instances, reconfigures the self as disembodied, deterritorialised, and asocial.

It might seem strange that O'Toole, an avowed critic of globalisation in Ireland, appears repeatedly in this thesis as a critical foil, almost as its *bête noire*. I have used his work as an entry point into anti- or postnationalist liberalism in contemporary Ireland. My critique has shown how the liberal reaction to nationalism is often blind to the consequences of the apparently desired postnational future. I have pointed to some of these as manifest in recent novels. The step away from the nation as a constitutive frame presents questions about the viability of alternative formations, especially under the pressurised conditions of globalisation, in which the market displaces other possible constitutive categories. The contradiction in O'Toole's position, which also haunts other liberal reactions to nationalism, is that as it seeks to dissolve the identitiarian bonds of place, characteristic of nationalism, it opens the way for the economic globalism to which it is averse. In *After the Ball*, O'Toole presents a detailed description of the precariousness of the Republic's newfound wealth, predicated on the presence of transnational corporations and financed predominantly from the United States. His other concern is inequality of access to the benefits of this influx. While the Republic is "the big winner in the globalisation stakes" in terms of its economy, O'Toole argues that instability and inequality persist.[1] Indeed,

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[1] Fintan O'Toole *After the Ball* (Dublin 2003) pp.3.

they are at best sustained and at worst exacerbated by the neoliberal economic policies which underpin this form of globalisation.[2] He is alive to the failure of the "free market ideology that is driving global development", which replicates the familiar class structures of earlier forms of capitalism. But O'Toole fails to recognise postnationalism as an enabling context for the particular inequalities of globalisation. Despite noting that globalisation is a complex phenomenon, intertwining "economic liberalisation, speed of communication and cultural homogenisation", he emphasises the economic at the expense of the cultural. Presumably he has in mind the 1958 Whitaker report on economic development and the program of "expansion" it initiated, when he claims that "the integration of Ireland into the global economy has been underway for over forty years". He, however, does not include the transformations in the figuration of the nation, implied in the program, as part of the conditions that led to the Republic becoming "the most globalised country on earth".[3]

I have attempted to discuss some of the cultural processes of globalisation, as they appear in the contemporary Irish novel. I have argued that economic globalisation is linked to social, technological and ideological processes that push social relations toward increased degrees of abstraction. This broad process of abstraction was also a condition of the emergence of the national form itself. The generalisation of state-mediated and distanced social relations in the nation, the "horizontal comradeship" of national community, required abstraction from the face-to-face relations of proximate community. But this shift to more abstract social relations is normalised in terms of that more material, prior, level of integration. Herein lies the success of the national form: its capacity to integrate its members across various levels of abstraction, including the concrete categories of land and the body. This is the nation's structure of manifold integrative levels, through which the individual is constituted.

I have argued that the intellectual form of life, in which the constitution of the self is disembedded — where there is some lifting out from one's received social situation — is

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[2] Ibid pp.61-7.
[3] Ibid p.3&8.

a key model of being in the nation. Yet this abstracting process, which is a requirement of 'thinking the nation', in generalising its characteristic social relations between absent, unknown others, is in large part mediated and delimited by material territory and enacted in the embodied relations of local community. The nation, like other successful social formations, situates its members in an abstract ontological order by giving a meaningful account of the relations of immediate presence, to place and proximate others. Likewise, the intellectual form of life offers abstract relations with absent others across time and space via material mediation, specifically in the technologies of writing and print. In this, as Anderson observed, it provides a precondition for the nation, but, as I have argued, this form is also a conduit for the transcendence of the nation in globalisation.

The common image of the intellectual life as pure abstraction, as having left the body or place behind, contributes to its apparent availability to globalisation. Abstracted social relations are thus taken as transcendent of immediate social circumstance. As I have noted, this is often construed as the *absence* of constitutive social relations, so the individual becomes the sovereign author of the self. The abstraction of capital, in the profound expansion of information, image commodities and financial flows, is complemented by this figure of apparently absolute abstraction. Globalised production and exchange are characteristically 'rationalised' around the goals of mobility, flexibility, and interchangeability, in which the image of the global subject is also remade. Here the misrecognition of the increased abstraction of sociality in the intellectual form, as deterritorialised and disembodied, is put to ideological use in the figure of radical autonomy, consuming and producing outside the limiting frame of the social. This is the ontological contradiction of globalisation: rather than incorporating prior levels of integration it attempts to displace the more material aspects of social being and so restrict the constitution of the self to the single abstract plane, willed and circumscribed by the individual. Much of the critique of the national form, in Ireland as elsewhere, points to a history of often violent social exclusion perpetrated in its name. Yet, there is no historical or present reason to believe that the replacement of the nation by an aggregation of radically autonomous individuals, in state-mediated relations with the global economy,

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will diminish the exclusion and violence required to administer flows of labour and capital.

Kearney set out a vision of a postnationalist future for Ireland that directs the transition from national to regional integration within the European Union supra-state. Here he directly addresses the question of the cultural shift entailed in the envisaged supersession of the nation as a frame for constitutive abstraction. As we have seen, his 'fifth province' is an example of the effort to deploy the intellectual form of life in a specifically grounded cultural context, under pressure from conflicting nationalisms. Yet Kearney's envisaged generalisation of the form through aesthetic categories leaves his hope for a pluralist and non-homogenised Irish culture open to precisely the radical autonomy I have described. While a self constituted under the conditions of globalism might be formed in the image of the intellectual, for many the actual abstracted community of intellectual life, supported and mediated by print technologies and the institutions of the media and universities, is simply beyond their reach. These others are lifted cut from the political and communal territorialisation of the nation, but find no access to other constitutive abstractions, aside from commodity consumption or religion, within which to reorder the self. Kearney's vision of an aesthetic framework for the constitution of the self and the integration of community, displays the tendency toward idealism inherent in the intellectual form.

The novel provides a particularly apt entry into this tendency of the intellectual form, because it manifests the tense union of abstracted social relations mediated through material structures. Specifically, the novel's structural disposition towards the aesthetic transcendence of sociality, its representation of an 'alternative world', is always set within the larger social frame of language. Rather than functioning as a means of transcendence, the novel works at an increased degree of abstraction of the sociality of language. This combination of the sense of aesthetic enclosure and the objective structures of language, which constitute and exceed it, illustrates the ambivalence in the intellectual form of life. The novel can incorporate a reflexive acknowledgment of the levels of social abstraction that intersect to constitute it or it can be formed around the

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image of its own enclosure. This formal ambivalence, in both the novel and the intellectual, provides space to represent and enact the contest between figurations of sociality that move across levels of abstraction and the vision of sociality contained within ever-more abstracted formations. The latter position is a key aspect of the ideology of autonomy. I have analysed the contemporary Irish novel within this theoretical framework, seeking to discern the way it enacts and represents this part of the 'ideological matrix' of globalisation.

In chapter three I described the work of John Banville, Mary Morrissy and Desmond Hogan as 'aesthetic cosmopolitanism'. I hoped this description would capture something of the ambivalence and tense union of the intellectual form displayed in the dual movement of transcendence and location, which I read in those writers. This analytical category describes the use of aesthetic form as a container of meaning, what Lukács described as the 'form-giving' quality of the novel. But in this use of the aesthetic as an ontological order there is installed an awareness of its limits. In both narrative content and structure these novels set out an aesthetic 'shape' for the self, as an alternative to the received designations of the body or place. Yet, through modulations of conspicuous artfulness and a sense of the 'real' beyond the book, they also point to the insufficiency of the aesthetic for the task of constituting and integrating the self. They enact the process of self constitution within the intellectual form, moving across abstract and material levels of integration. The 'transcendence' of artful prose and formal composition — the 'inward' turn of the novel for Banville — is simultaneous with the down-to-earth 'location' in meaningful place, bodily immediacy or proximate social relations, which make up the 'outward' turn of his writing. Sitting beyond the novel, these latter, more material social phenomena, present authenticating frameworks that exceed formal aesthetic enclosure. These novels play out, in reflexive display, the ambivalence of the intellectual form of life. And in the common theme of madness, they allude to what is at risk in the contest between the radically autonomous self-formed self (here represented as enclosure within the single plane of the aesthetic) and a self formed in the intersection of manifold levels of social integration. Where the aesthetic is allowed to dominate the formation of the self in these novels, there is a retreat of the self within the self, a loss of

the social, a diminution of meaning. They hold to the potential of the aesthetic as a form-giving structure, while remaining wary of its potential to displace other integrative social structures.

No such misgivings trouble the works I characterised as solipsistic. Here, there is little acknowledgement of the abstraction of sociality in the aesthetic. In the example of Neil Jordan, the failures of and perceived betrayals by nationalist Ireland initiate a response that edges over from commonplace individualistic liberalism toward a cultural enactment of radical autonomy. At the level of content, Jordan presents an aesthetically constituted self, where the individual is composed of an assemblage of images in a self-authored performance of identity. The apparently formal containment of the aesthetic object, its narrative order, is overlaid onto the formation of the self. This blend of form and content articulates the process of autonomous self-formation, enacted in the absence of integrative frameworks that incorporate less abstract social formations. Here, the sense of nationalist betrayal not only licenses a shift from the images of national community, but also sets off a contraction from sociality itself. An individualistic version of the intellectual form of life is thus generalised as the condition of self formation. Characters, apparently disenfranchised by nationalism, enact the constitutive modes characteristic of the intellectual form, but without the formative practice of writing and the extended society of print. The alienation, madness, or violence that permeate these narratives is represented as stemming from social betrayal. But, I have argued that this is an unwitting expression of the anxiety of enclosed self-authorship. The solitary image of the self as the author and integrative limit of identity, which Jordan represents as the figure of radical autonomy, in fact leads to a fortified self centred on lack. Solipsism emerges in place of the national frame.

Unlike the aesthetic cosmopolitan novels, which recoil from the 'ontology of placelessness' offered in a fully aestheticised self, the solipsistic texts treat this as benign freedom. While there is, in aesthetic cosmopolitanism, a reflexivity about the reproduction and generalisation of the intellectual form, largely absent from the solipsistic texts, this combines with a pervasive pessimism about the possibility of a form

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adequate to the task of authenticity. The hope engendered in the form-giving quality of the novel never quite extends to shelter the solitary self. By contrast, the novels considered in chapter five redeploy the concept of 'home'. They represent a reformation of territorialised community and place, but with an eye to the formal deterritorialisation and disembodiment effected in the novel and the irreversibility of its equivalent in the increased abstraction of social relations. These novels offer different examples of 'aesthetic reterritorialisation', which attempt to bring together the abstract and material aspects of the novel in a figuration of a reformed society. In some of these, the new shape of the social is to be postnational, so integration is represented in the apparent absence of the national abstraction. Other formations are presented, framed by the body, the family or an extension of textuality itself (in a vision more optimistic than in aesthetic cosmopolitanism). But even here, in avowedly post- or anti-national positions, it proves difficult to extract home, even in its abstract extension, from the grip of the national imaginary. These novels are often caught between their commitment to liberal individualism and reproducing romantic categories of belonging. Two of these novels, however, one by Seamus Deane the other by Glenn Patterson, do attempt to engage with the category of national home as both 'problematic and productive'. Here, the specific pressure of the conflict in Northern Ireland distils two related problems: a liberal attempt to form a transcendent 'home' through aesthetic abstraction or solipsistic enclosure; and a reactionary deployment of 'home' as unproblematically territorial, continuous and unaffected by the global economy or the mobility of people (forced or otherwise). I have read Deane and Patterson as engaging with these responses through the aesthetic reterritorialisations of their novels. Utilising the figure of the intellectual — narrated in the moment of 'lifting out' and in the action of forming a self — their novels acknowledge the shift to greater social abstraction, but this is held in tension with grounded narratives of place. Rather than a transcendence of the proximate, indeed *intimate*, conflict, these characters are represented as forming themselves 'through the conflict', utilising the vantage of the intellectual form to reconfigure or renarrate those social relations, rather than to replace them. In this I read not only a response to the particular conflict in the North, but also the outline of an alternative to the 'placelessness' offered in the ideology of globalisation.

There is an arresting moment in Patterson's *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain*, which will serve as a final image for this thesis. The novel is set in 1991, during the construction of Euro Disney. Sam, a newly employed *imagineer* from the US, a believer in the "simultaneous convergence and divergence" of the theme park and the outside world, is confronted by a scene that focuses the doubts he has begun to harbour about the Disney dream:

> he noticed, as though he had just at that moment been dropped there, a man, a West African, standing waist deep in mud, holding a section of wooden rainbow at full-stretch above his head.[4]

As a French foreman shouts at the workman, Sam finds he is overwhelmed by the sudden convergence of the Disney ¯esthetic (the perfection of space through thematic enclosure) and the down-to-earth activities that enable such a transcendence:

> There was a sound in Sam's head, like the click of a fine key turning in a lock. White light flooded his brain wiping it clean of all its accumulated connection and responses. Almost at once, though, other, unfamiliar characters bubbled to the surface, formed incomprehensible words, which nevertheless became ideas of people and then images of them, joyously kinetic. It was a frigging parade, stretching back as far as he could think or see.
>
> "Up! Up!" the foreman shouted.
>
> Sam felt his feet move. He seemed to be walking in two planes simultaneously. He was marching beside the Big Parade still bubbling up in his head and he was wading through the gloop towards the foreman. The rainbow seasawed again, trailing in the mud.[5]

When Sam reaches the foreman he beats him, venting all the confusion and anger that flow from the contradiction that has just taken shape in his mind. The contradiction includes the jarring dissonance between the saccharine serenity of Disney's simulation of the global city and the exploitation of a globalised labour-force excluded from its own products. Beyond this is the contradiction within Sam himself, which is also suddenly realised. Violence towards the foreman and empathy towards the worker both manifest the embodied sociality obscured in the Disneyfication of space, which builds a city *sans* community and makes a place *sans* history. The problem for Sam, as part of this process and in making it a part of himself, is the separation of the 'two planes', which can only

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[4] Glenn Patterson *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain* (London1996) p.77.
[5] Ibid p.78.

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come together in violent collision: the 'Big Parade' of 'characters' drawn from Disney lore, that are the amassed images of his chosen self; and the more territorial plane of the conflict on the ground before him, of which he is a part both because of his proximity and because of his more abstract role in a system that has the worker lifting, the foreman shouting, him imagining.

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