The catalogues of the Orchard Gallery: a contribution to critical and historical discourses in Northern Ireland, 1978-2003

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The Orchard Gallery opened in Derry in 1978. It was set up by Derry City Council, which appointed a then young artist and art teacher, Declan McGonagle, as its first exhibition director. The second largest city of Northern Ireland did not have any artistic infrastructure at the time, and the Orchard was launched as an attempt to make up for this absence. From the outset, the artistic programme of the gallery aimed to exhibit a range of practitioners, both emerging and established, and coming from diverse geographical horizons, who were asked to produce works specifically for the gallery. The work had to respond to '*the gallery's ethos, which was about the place, and the interaction and the relationship between the artist who comes from outside and the place*'.[1] Derry, or Londonderry, is a city of circa 80 000 people located on the northern confines of the Irish and British isles, on the border between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Its history has long been rooted in a dual narrative. An early Celtic settlement brought the first naming of the site, *Doire Calgach*, or Calgach Oak Wood.[2] With the expansion of the English rule in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the city was renamed Londonderry, an affirmation of the ties that now closely connected it to Britain. When the Orchard opened to the public, the city was at the heart of a conflict that since the 1960s had opposed in Northern Ireland with increasingly violent manifestations the Republican and Loyalist communities. In the midst of the Troubles, the Orchard Gallery aimed through its program to both address the specific urban context of Derry, and to reach beyond its peripheral location. One mode through which it furthered this engagement with the place and its outreach towards the world beyond was printed publication. In 1979-80, McGonagle convinced the council that the money it wanted to allocate to acquire works and establish a collection should be used to commission artists and art critics to produce artists' books and publications. This decision to invest in publications and commissioned essays to accompany the exhibitions held at the Orchard Gallery corresponded to a desire to collect artists' ideas:

> Derry was on the age of Europe, and for us connecting with people was very important. This is pre-fax, pre-email, pre-electronic. Printed material was very important. What I felt was that instead of collecting objects or artefacts, we should collect artists' ideas. I proposed that the money – it was only

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[1] Declan McGonagle in conversation with author, 11.07.2008
[2] Gerry Burns, 'A sense of history', in Victor Sloan, ed, *Walls*, Orchard Gallery: Derry, 1989, 16

15,000 pounds – that would have been allocated to acquire work for a collection, should be used to commission artists to do artists publications. We started a process where we worked with an artist and did very good publications. And the Orchard became known for that, because we sent them out for free across the world.[3]

Until its closure in 2003, and under the direction in the 1990s successively of Noreen O Hare, Liam Kelly and Brendan McMenamin, the gallery maintained a high profile publishing policy, collecting through prints artists' ideas as well as critical discourses commissioned from a wide range of critics, artists and art historians.

This article focuses on the critical essays published by the Orchard Gallery, underlining both their role in explicating the aesthetic propositions they accompanied, and in providing a contribution to the critical assessment of the contemporary history of Northern Ireland marked by the socio-political and (para-) military context of the Troubles.[4] The essays addressed a large range of issues, from technical considerations to specific individual artistic developments as well as socio-political reflections. Yet, through their common setting in Derry and their response to its past and present identity, their individualities can be subsumed into a coherent and prolific discursive formation. This study focuses on three layers of this formation: first, it considers the recurring questioning of language and the relations between texts and images; second, it dwells on a number of recurring iconographical themes identified and developed by observers over the course of the gallery's history; finally, it considers a set of overarching iconological themes, which stem from the artworks and are emphasized due to their capacity to extend beyond the specificities of Northern Irish histories and to articulate arguments of a more universal nature. Ultimately, through the imbrications of those three components, the conditions of visual interpretation, the key iconographical axis informed by the socio-political context of Derry, and the metaphorical movement towards a universal realm of significance, the analysis identifies a specific mode of ekphrasis at play in the catalogues of the gallery, which is seen as characterised by a 'purposeful reticence',[5] only susceptible of rendering truthfully the essence of artworks responding to the complexity of the region's history.

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[3] Declan McGonagle, 2008

[4] The corpus considered for this reflection consists of circa 150 catalogues. While this provides a coherent insight into the publication activity of the gallery, it is not based on an absolute body of texts. We have not so far been able to gain access to the gallery archive held by Derry city council, but through the joint collections of Manchester Metropolitan University library and Derry library, we are able to draw this textual portrait that extends from the first series of catalogues, which from 1980 to 1985 tended to remain relatively light publications, to the more lengthy volumes of the late 1980s and 1990s.

[5] The term is a voluntary deviation from Peter Vergo, 'The reticent object', in Peter Vergo, ed, *The new Museology*, London : Reaktion, 1989, 41-59.

A concern with language

The task of the writer called to comment on the visual work can be seen as an act of translation: to forward the meaning(s) and impression(s) of the image in verbal terms to the reader. More specifically, with Pierre-Henry Fragne and Jean-Marc Poinsot, we can narrow down the critical operations involved to four components: description, interpretation, evaluation and expression.[6] It is from the operation of interpretation that a singular form of discourse coalesces in the catalogues of the Orchard Gallery. This singular component of the Orchard Gallery's interpretative mode revolves around a recurrent concern with its own purpose, the interpretation of images, or aesthetic forms primarily located within the field of the visual arts. This concern would seem to emerge from a distrust as to the possibility of transmitting a clear idea from the artwork to the text. As Roy Wallis aptly wrote in his essay exploring the work of painter Gerry Gleason entitled 'Art, history and language' (1989):

> We must decode the work. Clues abound, but so too does ambiguity. The references may be oblique, the message decontexted. History must itself be decoded, like the pictures.[7]

The decoding of the visual requires an attention to the layering of multiple symbols and signs, which are both manipulated by the artists and grafted on the work by the environment. The power and dangers of symbolical meanings were similarly underlined by Jim Smyth in his discussion of the work of Micky Donnelly (1992):

> What do symbols represent? Are they the glue that holds society together or do they simply reflect a reality of communal cohesion? And what happens when symbols become detached from accepted norms and ideologies and become free floating signifiers exploited by the media industry to represent the products of consumer society?[8]

In the process of extracting and doubling the meaning(s) of the visual works, words can be at time confronted with their objects indecisive quality. Much of the commentators' deciphering throughout the Orchard Gallery history can be understood as an effort to mediate the intentional blurring of aesthetic signifiers by artists keen on avoiding the narrowness of clear-cut statements. This character of

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[6] Pierre-Henry Frangne et Jean-Marc Poinsot, 'Préface. Histoire de l'art et critique d'art. Pour une histoire critique de l'art', in *L'Invention de la critique d'art*, actes du colloque international de l'Université de Rennes 2, 1999, Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2002, 9-16.
[7] Roy Wallis, 'Art, history and language', in Gerry Gleason, ed, *History and language: new paintings*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 1989.
[8] Jim Smyth, essay in *Micky Donnelly*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 1992.

non-literalness stemmed from two conjugating influences: first, as Roy Wallis suggested, from an acknowledgement of the specific 'circumstances', with which the artists exhibiting at the Orchard were engaging. In the context of Northern Ireland, symbolical imagery could function as the provider of distinct statements. Of the important mural production of the late twentieth century, Fionna Barber in her publication on *Art in Ireland since 1910* noted (2013):

> Deliberately partisan and lacking in ambiguity, other republican and loyalist murals throughout the decade [of the 1980s] celebrated paramilitary prowess on one side or another. Also, like the kerbstones painted in the colour of the Union or the Republic, they functioned as a means of defining territory, at a time when knowing exactly where one stood could be a matter of life or death.[9]

It is to this political efficiency that Northern Irish aesthetics responded, and as Barber underlines, *against* which it aimed to define itself.[10] To the readability of the surface, was opposed an art of textures, whose ramifications the commentator had to untangle:

> Layers of representation and interpretation lie upon each other, needing to be unwrapped as with a mummified figure, or unpacked like the Russian doll, but with no guarantee that any definitive truth lies beneath the surface.[11]

Besides, as Barber reminded her reader in the early twenty-first century, and as Roy Wallis was keen to stress in 1989, the very probing of the set of circumstances in which the art work was being made in the 1980s in Northern Ireland commanded a degree of cautiousness:

> An artist must be cautious who would advert to contentious local circumstance. Here, as in other contexts beset by dogma, art may have dangerous consequences for life.[12]

The second parameter colliding with the indigenous deconstruction of visuals signifiers is related to the epochal critique of meta-narratives, as incorporated in particular by artistic practices at the turn of the 1980s. Jim Smyth in his discussion of Micky Donnelly's work referred on the one hand to Walter Benjamin and the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction (tackling the much-debated issue of

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[9] Fionna Barber, *Art in Ireland since 1910*, London: Reaktion, 2013, 209.
[10] Barber, 209.
[11] Wallis 'Art, history and language', 16.
[12] Wallis, 'Art, history and language', 16.

media coverage), and on the other to Jean Baudrillard and the simulacrum. Modernity was being questioned and postmodern theoretical explorations provided a range of critical tools that could contribute to the aforementioned will to question modes of representation.[13] Within this foray, a number of art pieces informed by the developments of conceptual art in the 1970s could query through the incorporation of textual materials the balance between the object and its perception, the signified and the signifiers of the artwork.

Liam Kelly in his survey of contemporary art in Northern Ireland pointed in particular to the influential display of three British artists at the Orchard Gallery in the 1980s, Kit Edwardes, Tony Rickaby and Terry Atkinson, whose aesthetic concerns were articulated through a distinctive use of textual commentaries.[14] While Terry Atkinson's installation in November 1988 at the Foyle Arts Centre was comprised of sculptural and pictorial materials, the accompanying publication included characteristic exegesis from the artist, as well as an essay by the art critic John Roberts. The discussion revolved around the artist's ongoing questioning of the politics of late modernism, as reflected in the specific complexities of the 'Anglo-Irish historical problem' :[15]

> Orchard/Foyle is one of many thousands of places throughout the Western world which in one way or another has, as one of its primary functions, the transmission of modernist ideology (…). For example, the relationship within a given cultural community between modernism and that community (or 'community' in general) might be one form of the transmission. The issue of making art (practice) and the conditions of its administration is another of the issues of transmission. So is the matter of what kind of culture a given artist is representative of. And bearing on this latter, where does the artist come from, under what kind of conditions does this artist produce his/her work in this place. It is not hard to see then that these general conditions will bear upon an examination of English culture(s) and the kind of influence such cultures might exert on a particular English artist. As I have said already, such questions have perhaps a special resonance when an English artist is showing work in Derry.[16]

[13] Barber, 196.

[14] Liam Kelly, *Thinking long,contemporary art in the North of Ireland*, Cork: Gandon Editions, 1996, 22.
Kit Edwardes, *My fifty true love stories*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 1982.
Terry Atkinson, *Mute 1*, Derry: Orchard gallery, 1988.
Tony Rickaby, *Looking at a group of buildings in Ireland*, Derry: Orchard gallery, 1981.
We could also mention Stephen Willats, *The new reality*, Derry: Orchard gallery, 1982.

[15] Terry Atkinson, *Mute 2*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 1989.
See also Martin Ignatius Gaughan, 'Textual titles: resisting translation', in Jeff Morrison and Florian Krobb, (eds) *Text into image. Image into text*, Amsterdam; Atlanta: Rodopi, 1997, 262-63.

[16] Terry Atkinson, 'Practice, England', *Mute 2*, 1989, 35

The voluminous paratext framed the conditions within which the work was being made and displayed. It addressed the international nature of late capitalism and modernism as well as its specific expression in the context of Ireland and Northern Ireland. It also introduced the issue of importing from abroad aesthetic strategies aiming to address the internal struggle of Northern Ireland. How effective could such works be in their seizure of the situation? The writer and art critic Brian McAvera strongly emphasised in his 1990 reflection on *Art, Politics and Ireland* the limitations that such imports appeared to draw: an unfortunate tendency to simplify and distort the complexity of the Northern Irish socio-political equation. [17] However, those works certainly responded to the gallery's objective to bring a larger dialogue at play in the international field of contemporary art in direct confrontation with the Derry context. The opening could facilitate through aesthetic channels the intermingling of the local scale with the national(s) and global scales. In the words of Tony Rickaby looking at the buildings comprising the village of Ballyfarnon in County Roscommon in the Republic of Ireland, the subjective experience of the place by the artist ('In these buildings which form this village in the parish of Kilronan I may see a parable for my own existence. Like them I am simply *here*, in space and time, my life a hotch-pot of things and events'), is confronted by the tidal forces imposing their determinacy onto the surrounding architecture: 'the weather, the church, British colonialism, Irish colonialism', and most importantly, the modern capitalist state characterised by 'industrialisation, consumerism, 'Euroculture' and state control'.[18] It is the experience of reading the buildings (reproduced in the catalogues through sober documentary photographs) that conveys an aesthetic enterprise combining the specifics of site with outreaching external parameters.

The presence of artists from Great Britain in the Orchard Gallery programme was considerable in the early 1980s, while it found more of a balance with artists based in Northern Ireland and coming from other international shores in the second half of the decade.[19] Towering figures included John Hilliard, Stephen Willats,

[17] The art critic Brian McAvera has questioned the validity of the outsider's view, and in particular that of the English eye: see Brian McAvera, *Art, politics and Ireland*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1990, and his discussion of the work of Paul Graham, Antony Gormley and Richard Hamilton in 'an English eye', 109-16.

[18] Tony Rickaby, 1981

[19] From our corpus, it is interesting to consider the respective proportions of artists exhibiting at the Orchard coming from Northern Ireland, Ireland, Great Britain, and from a wider international background. In the first years of the gallery's operation, from 1978 to 1985, when McGonagle was briefly appointed at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London, the balance is largely in favour of British artists (22) compared to Northern Irish (9), Irish (8), and international (2). This trend however then reverses in the following period: from 1986 to 1991 (the year when McGonagle left the Orchard to become head of the newly created Museum of Modern Art in Dublin) with Northern Irish (18) and international (12) on the lead, with a steady contingent from Britain (13). In the early 1990s under the direction of Noreen O Hare, Irish artists (17) are dominant in the corpus, compared to Northern Irish

Richard Hamilton, Richard Long, Hamish Fulton and Victor Burgin.[20] However heavy-handed the work might in some instance appear to be on the political front, this presence can be seen as contributing to an opening towards a far-reaching critique of representation and 'the progressive logic of modernity'.[21] Second, it also opened the gallery programme to a relevant geographical platform of enquiry following the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979. The conservative shift of the 1980s entailed both a direct radicalisation of British politics in the Northern Irish conflict, as well as encompassing deindustrialisation trends. Finally, British imports were not limited to openly ideological queries. When shown in Derry, the work of Richard Long or Graham Crowley for instance lent itself to metaphorical interpretations similar to the mode of symbolic reflection/scrutiny outlined by Roy Wallis in 1989.[22]

So on the one hand we notice in the essays of the catalogues a preoccupation with the conditions of interpretation of the visual realm; and secondly the furthering of an artistic linguistic exploration also exemplifying modalities of *reading* the visual world. If the deciphering of the visual language appears to be problematic, the relation text-image was further complicated by artists incorporating texts in their visual work. Jean Fisher in 'Seeing beyond the pale' (1990), reflects on a series of photographic works by Willie Doherty where the reading of rural and urban landscapes is guided and misguided by textual devices. In *The blue skies of Ulster* (1986), the legend 'we shall never forsake the blue skies of Ulster /for the grey mist of the republic' is inscribed on a misty view of the river Foyle. As Fisher comments, the apparent associations of clarity with unionism and mistiness with republicanism are counterbalanced by the underlying opaque and grey vision. Two clues can be retained from this interlocking of text and image:

> … firstly that the fantasy inscribed in mythic speech 'misrecognises' or contradicts reality, and secondly that the two opposing river banks are more or less indistinguishable.[23]

 A similar unsettling process is at play in Les Levine's 1986 *Blame God* billboard series. The billboard images were based on photographs taken by the artist in the

(13), international (13) while British artists have significantly decreased (5). These numbers are to be taken with a pinch of salt, given the aforementioned gaps in our corpus.

[20] John Hilliard, *Borderland*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 1981.

Richard Hamilton, *Work in progress illustrating for James Joyce's Ulysses*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 1988.

Richard Long, *River Avon Mud Works*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 1984.

Hamish Fulton, *Dun Na nGall*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 1983.

Victor Burgin's exhibition was held in 1986 and came from the ICA in London.

[21] Fionna Barber, 'Postmodernism and Ireland', 2013, 196.

[22] Graham Crowley, *In living memory*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 1987.

[23] Jean Fisher, 'Seeing beyond the pale – the photographic works of Willie Doherty', in Willie Doherty, *Unknown Depths*, Cardiff; Derry: Ffotogallery, Orchard Gallery, 1990.

North of Ireland and were displayed in London, Derry and Dublin. Demonstrators, neutral figures, policemen and military are featured along a set of repetitive slogans: 'Blame God', 'Hate God', 'Attack God', 'Create God' etc. Thomas McEvilley in his contribution entitled 'The collaboration of Word and Image in the art of Les Levine' analysed the variations of linguistic formalism at play in those textual messages. He underlined five components: the use of a familiar two words format, the use of an imperative verb, the systematic repetition of the second word (God), the apparent presence of only one meaning in each action, itself counterbalanced by a threefold implication. Stemming from an active – passive linguistic recurring articulation that positioned the word 'god' in the passive role, he outlined three divergent theological positions: atheism, theism, and pantheism. Depending on one's belief, the work would appear to produce three meanings and three correlated understandings: an insult, an injunction to free oneself from the idea of god, and an analogical take relating humans to God, in that to attack a man would be alike to attacking God. From a dual opposition, the work shifts to an uncertainty produced by the use of religion for violence:

> The work seems deliberately incomplete in its meaning. Levine wants the clarity of meanings that words alone allow, but he does not want his meanings crudely imposing themselves on us.[24]

Shane Cullen's monumental *fragmens sur les institutions républicaines IV* completed at the contemporary art centre of Vassivière in Limousin (France, 1997) would appear to hold no such questioning for the viewer. It consisted of 96 panels, on which the secret messages ushered out of the Maze prison during the hunger strike of 1981 have been meticulously copied out by hand. Michael Wilson in his essay entitled 'Fragments and responses'[25] reminds us that the artist was accused of pursuing a political agenda, which he laconically denied. Moreover, Wilson quotes at length the critical comments made by Fintan O'Toole. The journalist had deemed the work to be an act of evasion, both in terms of art and in terms of politics.

> What happened in the H-blocks was a self conscious deployment of images, symbols and actions to evoke a response shaped by traditions and history… And at times, the relationship between the politics of hunger-striking and aesthetics has been extraordinary intimate.
>> For a painter the problem posed by this entanglement of art and politics can be expressed crudely by asking the question: what can you put on the walls of a gallery that can compete in visceral force with the faeces

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[24] Thomas McEvilley, 'The collaboration of word and image in the art of Les Levine', in Les Levine, ed, *Blame God, Billboard project* London; Derry: Artangel and Orchard Gallery, 1985.
[25] The absence of the letter T in the title of Cullen's work, 'fragmens', is a reference to the original publication by the French revolutionary Louis Antoine Léon de Saint-Just (1793).

and menstrual blood that the protestors smeared on the walls of their cells?[26]

The fragments would fail to transcribe in aesthetic terms the force of the history they engage with. Wilson objects to this view. In particular, he stresses the importance of the work's openness in addressing the complexity and physical intensity of events that O'Toole had rightly underlined.

> Cullen in layering the strategies of representation necessitates that the viewer consider the strategies of reading and of viewing in their own right.

Wilson points out that the multiple strategies at play within the work embed different layers of signification: the comms themselves, encompassing both a political strategy and the mythology of martyrdom; the actual text used, which crucially is that of David Beresford's publication *Ten Men dead: the Story of the 1981 Irish Hunger Strike*,[27] thereby incorporating the author's explanatory comments on the comms in bracket as well as his own strategy of representation; and the input of Cullen himself, with the use of the Bodoni font, the newspaper format, the manual touch, the use of paint and the gallery display. Representation is melded with appropriation in a decisive shying away from a weakening unilateral meaning, which prompts Wilson to claim:

> … that the multiplicity of strategies at play in the work displace any possibility of believing in simple authentic access to the referent while still refusing to forgo an encounter of some order with ten men dead.

The representation of discourses and the reluctance to assertively pin down truths through them has been a recurring motif of discussion for the essays published in the Orchard Gallery catalogues throughout the period. From Archer to Wallis, and from Fisher to McEvilley, the conversations probe repeatedly the linguistic grounds and parameters on which and with which the interpretation of the visual realm is to occur. It is from a recognition of those 'shifting grounds' that the iconographic identification can proceed.

Iconographic landscapes: the vectorial body in Derry

A survey of the Orchard Gallery catalogues offers an opportunity to sketch an iconographical map of the period drawing from a range of individuals' purposeful confrontation with representational issues in Northern Ireland in the late twentieth

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[26] Fintan O' Toole, quoted in Michael Wilson, 'Fragments and responses', in Shane Cullen, *fragmens sur les institutions républicaines IV*, Vassivière; Derry: Contemporary Art Centre of Vassivière and Orchard Gallery, 1997.
[27] David Beresford, *Ten Men Dead, The Story of the Irish Hunger Strike*, London: Grafton, 1987.

century. A key lead to follow through the text concerns the engagement with the site, the city of Derry, and its inhabitants, advocated from the outset by the gallery. In a 1999 publication, the French art historian and curator Eric de Chassey coined the term 'the social body' to describe what he saw as a prevailing trend in international contemporary art.[28] He underlined the dual nature of the term, which can refer to both the immersion of body in the social fabric, and in society itself (in political philosophy). The 'social body' offers a useful point of entry into the reflections on the various artworks displayed in Derry. The engagements with the site throughout the 1980s and 1990s at the Orchard Gallery articulated and demanded from the observer a reflection on both the bodily presence and its socio-political inscription. This presence is decomposed in the critical apparatus in a scalar progression, stretching from the innermost recesses of the mind to the expanses of urban and rural territories trodden upon by a body serving as a vectorial platform of enquiry.

Michael Cullingworth in his 1988 study of Tony Bevan's work entitled 'Painting from the inside out' astutely outlined three components he deemed essential to an understanding of the artist's portraits: the painterly, the psychological and the sociological. The three approaches are ultimately to be seen as interlaced in a work based on a scrutiny of figurative representation and an ontological interrogation of pictorial activity:[29]

> How does paint become people? How do people become painted? What does the painter state about the urge to paint through the act of painting? (...) The questions around the person in paint seem paradoxical, yet there are set up for us explicitly by Tony Bevan through the incrustation of pigments on the surface; through the strong colour contrasts which sometimes present the figure as a hole in the surrounding context; through the outlining of the figure in a boldly cartoonish style, (…) through the consolidation of space into flesh, hair or cloth by jagged and flowing lines.[30]

The discussion revolves around a movement inscribed in paint oscillating between an Heideggerian reflection on a 'being-in-the-world', and a tortured longing to belong to society; in other words, it oscillates between an extreme articulation of the 'social body' described in phenomenological terms, and its nascent inscription in the external social realm through a consciousness made flesh (paint). Cullingworth furthers his exploration by drawing from Jungian theory, discussing processes of alienation and individuation in the work of Bevan, and referring to the ambiguities of introversion and extroversion, where 'each state

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[28] Eric de Chassey, *Le corps social,* Paris: Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 1999.
[29] Michael Cullingworth, 'Painting from the inside out', in Tony Bevan, Derry: ICA, Kettle's Yard, Cartwright Hall and Orchard Gallery, 1987.
[30] Cullingworth, 1987.

implies the other to the extent that a degree of cyclical movement becomes visible'.
The inward-outward tension captures the vulnerability of figures, which emerge
through the artist's 'search for the way in which the world takes form in the images
of people – other people'.

   The encounter of the self with a possible other was also at the heart of the
1987 *Sculpture for Derry Walls* by the British sculptor Antony Gormley. The TSWA
funded project saw the artist install three Janus looking figures on the city's
seventeenth century fortified walls:

> Each sculpture consisted of two identical cast-iron figures joined back-to-
> back. They hold a cruciform pose and are placed in such a way that one faces
> into the walled city, and the other outside.[31]

Brendan McMenamin as well as Declan McGonagle retraced the fortunes of the
three sculptures, one of which had been kept in possession of the city, and was the
object in 2001 of an attempt to be reintegrated permanently on the city walls. In the
accompanying publication, Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith addressed the specific
impact of the British sculptor's longstanding interest in the use of figurative
envelopes designed to be the vehicles of spiritual investments:[32]

> Perched on the battlements of a walled city historically divided against itself,
> these heavily armoured cast iron shells, scarred with crude seams, echoed
> the dual signification of domination and defence, repulsion and
> containment, of the walls themselves seen from the diverse view points of a
> riven community (…) *Sculpture for Derry Walls* is a prime example of
> Gormley's persistent attempts to bridge the imaginative gap between the
> individual and the community, and to forge links between the isolated body
> and the body politic.[33]

The spiritual realm is not to be seen as cut off from society; the awareness of being
in the world is not to be understood solely as an intellectual understanding of one's
physical presence, but comprises an engagement with the social realm, and
inevitably with its political dimension. A rising correlate of these explorations on
the relation between the body and identity to emerge during the period was to focus
on gender.

   At the outset of the 1990s, the appointment of Noreen O'Hare at the head of
the gallery marked a distinct inflexion in the programme. The presence of women

[31] Brendan McMennamin, 'Introduction', in *States and Conditions*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 2001.
[32] Sandy Nairne, 'Such stuff as dreams are made on – the works of Antony Gormley', in *Anthony Gormley*, Frankfurt: Stadtische Galerie Regensburg, Frankfurter Kunstverein, 1985.
[33] Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith, 'States and conditions', in *States and conditions*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 2001, 50.

artists – who had not been ignored throughout the 1980s – grew significantly, as did an engagement stemming from feminist theory.[34] The *Relocating history* catalogue published to accompany an exhibition at the Fenderesky Gallery in Belfast and the Orchard Gallery of seven Irish women artists was exemplar in that respect. It responded to the holding of the 1993 conference of Irish historians at Queen's University in Belfast on the theme of the history of women. An essay by Fionna Barber entitled 'Relocating history: postmodernism, discontinuity and Irish women's art', pursued the combined aim of tracing back the fortunes of women artists in Ireland in the twentieth century, the modes of representation induced by cultural power relations, and the implications of an overtaking of modernism in aesthetic practices.[35] A1994 installation work by Kathy Herbert embodied such a three-dimensional development. Nora Donnelly in her comments emphasised the notion of passages, in a metaphorical interpretation of life bodily experience:

> Herbert frequently alludes to the concept of entrance. There are what can be seen as portals of birth and portals of death. These are spaces, openings, through which the spectator must enter to trace origins, to originate traces (…)
> The opening is not spatial, but, as throughout the show, is a strange rite of passage into our own inheritance. (…) Recognising our past involves the recognition that we bear its origins and traces within us, and joyfully own them as our own.[36]

A more sombre embodiment of the social body, that similarly referred to passages into life and beyond it, had been organised in 1991 by Brian Connolly, Brian Kennedy and Alastair MacLennan in collaboration with the Orchard Gallery. Featuring sixteen artists, *Available Resources* was held in different locations in Derry. However, an abandoned funeral parlour provided a rallying point for a series of interventions privileging installation and performance works. In the publication issued to document the project, Slavka Sverakova contributed a general introduction together with detailed notices for each artist. Amongst the powerful pieces that were located in the parlour itself, Alastair McLennan's presented two installations, *Layer a Dair*, and *Black U Jack - Tri No Colour*. The artist had inscribed on the walls of the first floor room the birth dates of all that year's newborns. The signs gained ambivalence from the location:

> These 'birth certificates' intensified the light in the room, providing a visual

[34] While in our corpus the balance between male and female practitioners was of 36 to 4 in 1978-85, and 38 to 11 in 1986- 91, it fell to 30 to 18 in 1992-95.
[35] Fionna Barber, 'Relocating history: postmodernism, discontinuity and Irish women's art', in *Relocating history*, Belfast; Derry: Fenderesky Gallery and Orchard Gallery, 1995.
[36] Nora Donnelly, 'Drawing on traces elements', in *Kathy Herbert*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 1994, 7-8.

metaphor for a celebration of life. Some viewers, however, interpreted them as death statistics - a dialectic inversion the artist welcomed.[37]

The incorporation in the second installation work (in the same room) of references to political entities (flags, maps) furthered the convergence of the physical and phenomenological body (the 'being-in-the-world') with a socio-political body infused with historical forces. Sverakova ended her account of MacLennan's interventions by reporting on the artist closing performance/action, a carefully measured one-hour rotation around the two world wars monument in the Diamond Square in Derry city centre. Here the duality at play in *Layer a Dair* was pursued, for 'one community's heroes', noted the observer, may well end up being 'the other's terrorists'. The unpremeditated breakage of the globe MacLennan carried in his hands in the last minutes of the rotation condensed the work's iconographic articulation of the fragmented body.

As the preceding examples attest, the discussion around the 'social body' moves from a phenomenological investigation to an encounter with the 'polis',[38] which constitutes a recurrent and powerful object of scrutiny for artists and commentators alike. The split in the urban fabric, in an echo to that of the divided self, is discussed in depth by David Brett in an essay written to accompany the second exhibition of the sculptor Richard Livingstone at the Orchard Gallery in 1996. Brett began by analysing the world of assemblage used by an artist who picked his materials directly in his surrounding environment, doors, radiators, carpets, to construct symbolic figures of a divided city: 'they present images of Northern Ireland – specifically of Derry – as a living thing divided in two'.[39] This recurring duality is expressed through references to Celtic beliefs as much as to armoured vehicles patrolling the contemporary urban landscape. Direct references to both physical and spiritual entities constitutive of the present are drawn into the work in an actualisation of the 'savage' mind.[40]

> Livingstone uses two different languages in these sculptures, playing one against the other. There is the figurative, human vocabulary, of heads, hands, figures, clothing; imposed on this is the tribal language of warring dualities: Loyalist/Republican, Protestant/Catholic, Unionist/Labour, East Bank/ West Bank, Orange/Green, Union Jack/Celtic Cross and Book of Kells.

The work of Livingstone uses totemic figures that associate the properties of the ritualised physical body with the specific presence of the northern Irish city. The

[37] Slavka Sverakova, 'Alastair MacLennan' in *Available resources*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 1992.
[38] A perspective particularly emphasised by Liam Kelly in his second chapter of *Thinking Long* (1996) entitled 'Polis: walls, barriers, towers, temples – divisions', 56 - 93.
[39] David Brett, in Richard Livingstone, *The futility of gardening,* Derry: Orchard Gallery, 1996.
[40] Claude Levi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage*, Paris: Plon, 1962.

existential query transfers to the urban realm, and similarly the urban fragmentation informs the bodily presence.

The immediate iconographical pendant to the theme of the 'polis' is that of the landscape, both an immediate presence surrounding the walled city and a powerful traditional motif to contend with:

> The artists I asked to show would not have been labelled political artists; Richard Long for instance, but he deals with the issue of landscape, which is a very important dimension of our sense of identity on this island, and indeed in the British context as well.[41]

Such a metaphorical function can be associated with the mud drawings of Richard Long (1984), the walking experience and line of horizon brought back by Hamish Fulton (1983), the mountainous border photographs of John Hilliard (1981), the seven days walk across the border and towards Derry of Philip Roycroft (1979),[42] or the deceptively still photographs aforementioned of Willie Doherty. It also points towards a rejection of a romantic celebration of nature, and a defiance in the words of Aiden Dunne commenting on Sean Fingleton's landscape painting, of a vision 'of the rural as slick as a tourist brochure and remote from the realities of life'. [43] The same writer is also enlightening in his discussion of Diarmuid Delargy's etchings, qualifying the work as 'Poussin rewritten in an Ulster idiom'. He unveils the artist's reference to Tiziano, Giorgione, Delacroix, and Picasso, in the process of interpreting a vision of 'disturbed harmony'. The Arcadian landscape is tainted by the negative inclusion of urban elements, and a feeling of 'something being amiss' for instance in the exaggerated density of bodies in space. Here too, the observer is drawn to conclude with the presence of an 'unresolved tangle of contradictions', which refers analogically to the political situation in Northern Ireland. This reflection ultimately leads to a consideration of how the rural landscape is laden with socio-political textures, roamed upon by bodies carrying with them symbolical and political investments.

Brian McAvera in his essay on 'the limitations of intelligence and technique' published in the catalogue of *Magnetic North*, an exhibition he curated at the Orchard gallery in 1987, addressed the reductive nature of both media and advertising imagery:

> Northern Ireland has been at the centre of media attention for almost 18 years now. Images from the North have tended to locate the province within the context of Beirut or San Salvador. Occasionally, in deference to either the tourist board, or to the well established myth of pastoral innocence (…), we

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[41] The author in discussion with Declan McGonagle, 11.07.2008
[42] Philip Roycroft, *A stay in two parts*, Derry: Orchard gallery, 1979.
[43] Aiden Dunne, in *Diarmuid Delargy*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 1989.

have rural fairs sited idyllically against misty blue mountainscape.[44]

It is against this simplifying and deceptive vision that McAvera locates the work of Barbara Freeman, Maurice Dobson, Peter Neill, and Victor Sloan. He looks towards recent development in poetry exemplified in the work of Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon and Michael Longley, who he sees as having succeeded in conveying the density of the world around them. Seemingly, looking at recent developments in painting, exemplified in the work of Gerry Gleason, Dermot Seymour and Fergus Delargy, he notes that:

> What was once safe, middle-class, painterly école de Paris work (Ireland has blue skies, bog, picturesque peasantry ad infinitum) has become in the work of a number of younger artists an allusive, subterranean, layered response to politics, religions and social mores in the North.

The gain is located in a breaking away from both seemingly pristine post-impressionist perspectives as well as the media deforming imagery, enabling this group of photographers to 'demythologise and subvert the traditional images'. The analytical contributions must similarly reflect this subversion and elucidate the multi-layered textures of the visual work, 'a cultural text, inscribed within the social, the political and the historical', to quote Jean Fisher.[45] Beneath the earth, Catherine Harper in a discussion with Declan McGonagle of her bog bodies sculptures seemingly unearthed from the soil points out after Seamus Heaney to how 'the human landscape' is 'mirrored in the bog landscape'.[46] Hence if the self is not as whole and stable as it might have first appeared to be, seemingly the landscape around one is revealed as composed of multiple strata and complex tectonics.

To complete this overview of the social body, as verbalised by the writers' commentaries in the gallery's catalogues, and positioned at the exact counterpoint of the phenomenological query that opened our iconographical journey, one finds a repetitive engagement with history. Gerry Burns in his essay entitled 'A sense of history' published to accompany the work of photographer Victor Sloan opened with the following lines (1989):

> Derry is a town infested with the past, a proud city, a damaged city, a city that many times over the past years could have died from a broken heart, but refused to do so. A sense of history permeated the place. It is in the streets and in the stones of buildings. It is in the very bones of its citizens.[47]

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[44] Brian McAvera, 'The limitations of intelligence and technique', in *Magnetic North: Barbara Freeman, Maurice Dobson, Peter Neill, Victor Sloan*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 1987.
[45] Jean Fisher, 'Seeing beyond the pale: The photographic work of Willie Doherty', 1990.
[46] 'Interview with Catherine Harper by Declan McGonagle', 17.
[47] Gerry Burns, 'A sense of history', in Victor Sloan (ed) *Walls*, 16.

The essay traced this historical presence from 'the annexation' to 'the conquest', from the construction of 'the walls' to the mythical narrative of 'the epic siege of 1688'. And in considering the present repercussions of such strong historical associations, the commentator returned to the ambiguity of language:

In seeking the truth, however, it helps to remember that what we are dealing with is not a factual recording of events but rather various versions of events which have been absorbed, not learned. With this type of history the terms right and wrong, fact and fiction, can be almost interchangeable.[48]

Walls, by Victor Sloan, consisted in a series of photographs focussing on the parades of the Orange Order in Derry, whose origins go back to the 1688 siege of the city by the Jacobite army of King James. James Odling-Smee similarly reflected on the nature of 'anniversaries', 'the meaning of the siege as a contemporary signifier', and the mode through which these anniversaries 'are attempts to transcend the historical discourse. To replace history with tradition, discourse with experience.'[49]

The 1688 siege and the parades have provided a powerful object of scrutiny, functioning on an eminently symbolical level, a vector of history as much as mythology. They serve as the object of Paul Sherrard's *Siege Paintings* (1990),[50] and are discussed by Roy Wallis in his reflection on art and history in the work of Gerry Gleason, while Ross Sinclair, in his discussion of Rory Donaldson photographic work captures the vivid presence of history in the reproduced textures of the stones (1994):

One work is a free-standing wall piece, literal and metaphorical. One side of this wall is completely covered by tiny details of the old city walls. These contain images which map the surface of the walls with architectural vigour. (…) it is as if evidence of history must be visible in the minutiae of this scrutiny like carbon dating a lived history.[51]

Their visual presence is to be related to military as well as sectarian violence, that provide a difficult and recurrent interpretative streak infusing the reading of the many diverse works displayed in Derry. The presentation of Per Barclay glasshouses, tambourines and water installation in 1996 thus immediately 'insinuated themselves into the place politic, the polis', wrote Liam Kelly.[52] For as he reminded the reader, the Derry installation had 'coincided with a highly charged

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[48] Burns, 'A Sense of History', 20.

[49] James Odling Smee, in Victor Sloan, ed, *Walls*, 5.

[50] *Paul Sherrard, Siege Paintings*, Derry: Orchard Gallery,1990.

[51] Ross Sinclair, 'Makes no sense at all', in *Rory Donaldson*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 1994.

[52] Liam Kelly, 'Foreword', in *Per Barclay: a terrible beauty*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 1996.

period in both Belfast and Derry over the legitimacy of certain Orange Order and
Apprentice Boy's marchers to walk particular routes'. Certain types of object also
found naturally charged historical associations despite not necessarily referring to
specific sites and events. Michael Archer spent much of his 'Over-riding
imperatives' discussion of Kerry Trengrove's points of defence examining the literal
and metaphorical notion of transgression at play in the artist's painted low-reliefs
(1985). The idea of overcoming existent barriers stemmed from the anchoring of
ideas of marking, border and military ceremonials:

> Trengrove has no better way of describing those works than to call them
> monuments. But they are not memorials to dead things. They can be seen as
> intimation of possible futures arising out of presence dissonance rather than
> as statements of shared grief at past events; and through their rootedness in
> real conflict they concern ideals without falling into the sentimentalism of
> idealism.[53]

The convergence of the past into the present, the vitality of history in the
contemporary realm was also emphasised by Jobst Graeve in a text entitled 'Journey
into 'Past Present Past' that analysed the iconographical references in the work of
painter Mark Pepper in 1992.[54] History is not a disincarnated force, but merges into
the body politics. The social body that we see as a vectorial mass bringing together
the diverse iconographical interpretations, thus condenses the self with its
environment, the social realm with its historical roots, the constructions on the
ground with the spectral presences beneath it.

Transnational Iconology

The set of iconographical streams mentioned above are ultimately processed by
commentators of the Orchard Gallery catalogue in a condensed reflection on the
overall significance of the visual works discussed. This purposeful iconological
analysis revolves around a distinct recurrent purpose: to subsume the diversity and
specificity of a local experience into a comparative and universal perspective.
Although the realm of iconology is largely indebted to the work Erwin Panofsky, it
might be more useful to think of its articulation in the discursive formation of the
Orchard Gallery's catalogue as more akin to Ernst Cassirer's in depth study of
symbolical forms, in which art - as science and religion – is seen as consisting in a
range of diverse physical externalisations connected to a universal spiritual

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[53] Michael Archer, 'Over-riding imperatives', in Kerry Trengrove, ed, *Points of defence,* Derry: Orchard
Gallery, 1985.
[54] Jobst Graeve, 'Journey into past present past', in *Mark Pepper Past Present, Past*, Derry: Orchard
Gallery, 1992.

content.[55] Of this symbolical grammar as articulated by the catalogues published in Derry, three appear to stand out from the corpus. In the terminology of the sixteenth-century writer Caesare Ripa, they can be named Discordia, Historia and, well, perhaps a hybrid between Pittura and Dubbio.

> Discordia: A woman resembling an infernal fury, wearing varied colours, with dishevelled hair.[56]

Fragmentation, conflict, binary oppositions, division, separation, borders, as well as their resolution, transgression, passages, bridges, birth and renewal are all recurrent motifs of the gallery's catalogues critical discussions. These are all qualities that are extracted from the site-specific discussion. In a tertiary movement, an attempt to locate their connections to shared human or historical components emerges. An exemplary occurrence of this movement is found in Jobst Graeve's aforementioned discussion of the work of Mark Pepper, where the author depicts a vision of military conflict as a perennial activity whose peculiar configuration should not hide its belonging to a largely immovable characteristic of humanity:

> The most important and far-reaching decisions in societies to a greater or lesser extent were and are made through acts of war. Power and fear are central issues in the control of opposing societies. Judging from the Parthenon marbles and Assyrian reliefs in the British Museum, the Pergamon altar in Berlin (…), there is nothing new in attempting to solve problems through war. The triumphant warrior, the victor and the victim, their weapons and their protection equipment have only changed slightly in concept over thousand of years.[57]

The weaponry and the monuments of the classical world are mixed with contemporary industrial tools. Mark Pepper's still life, furthermore, are laid neatly on bins that stand for the pillars of the past, thus 'leaving us in no doubt that everything that is now present will inexorably become the past'. The exploration of conflict can transcend time and space. As Jürgen Schneider commented on Victor Sloan 1994 Borne Sulinowo series, Sloan's pictures of an abandoned soviet army base in Poland can be read as a pursuance of his exploration of socio-political and cultural issues in Northern Ireland:

> Victor Sloan with his allegorical Borne Sulinowo series is again exploring the socio-political and cultural phenomena of Northern Ireland. Borne Sulinowo

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[55] Ernst Cassirer, *La philosophie des formes symboliques*, Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 27-8.
[56] Author's translation. *Discordia: 'Donna in forma di furia infernale, vestita di vari colori. Sarà scapigliata'*. Caesare Ripa, *Iconologia,* Rome, 1593.
[57] Jobst Graeve, 1992.

becomes Belfast, Derry, Portadown.[58]

The secret soviet army base that troops left in the winter of 1992 became a signifying platform in the follow-up of the I.R.A 1994 ceasefire, outlining the role of demilitarisation in establishing conditions for a successful peace process.

Victor Sloan's series found across the seas a site that brought powerful parallels to Northern Ireland. With the Cenotaph Project of Stuart Brisley and Maya Balcioglu, it was the displacement of a specific monument replica in various locations around the United Kingdom that was meant to exert different chain reactions. The cenotaph was a model of Sir Edward Lutyens 1920 Whitehall monument, which travelled to Derry in 1990, metaphorically encapsulating an overlapping signifier as its 'representations …in critical sites' aimed to 'encourage collective discourse related to issues raised during the placement of the project', which would in effect vary according to its location, thus putting the emphasis on the triggering of these discourses. [59] As Penelope Curtis pointed out:

> The Cenotaph project seeks to open an argument concerning the relationship between the state, the society and the artist through an investigation into the nature and condition of the public monument.[60]

Brisley and Balcioglu's project led to an interrogation on identity and alterity, a recurrent topic addressed by the catalogues' critical writings. Such an interrogation had informed Donald Kuspit's reading of Brian Maguire's Foundation Stones (mental home), with its sentiment of isolation and despair,[61] while Joan Fisher had pointed to the reproduction of mentalities in Willy Doherty's *Closed Circuit*, a photograph of a Sinn Fein's advice centre in Belfast.[62] David Sandlin and Jodi Blackburn were prompt to underline how Fergus Delargy in his drawings depicted through mythological scenes the fragmentation of the mind as much as the social body. Eventually, it is the earth, which appears as a fractured place:

> The traditional baggage of history, myth and culture that people carry around with them is constantly rearranged by forces outside themselves – by politics, religion, science, psychology and individual prejudices.[63]

[58] Jürgen Schneider, 'Beyond Borne Sulinowo', in Victor Sloan, *Borne Sulinowo*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 1995.

[59] Stuart Brisley and Maya Balcioglu, *The cenotaph project*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 1991.

[60] Penelope Curtis, in Brisley and Balcioglu, 1991.

[61] Donald Kuspit, 'Brian Maguire's primitivism' in *Brian Maguire: paintings 90/93*, Derry; Dublin: Orchard Gallery and Kerlin Gallery, 1993.

[62] Joan Fisher, 'Seeing beyond the pale', 1990.

[63] David Sandlin and Jodi Blackburn, 'From myth to muck: shifting perspectives in the art of Fergus Delargy', in *Fergus Delargy*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 1992.

Gabriel N.Gee   The catalogues of the Orchard Gallery: a contribution to
critical and historical discourses in Northern Ireland, 1978-2003

The specific contemporary configuration of oppositional forces becomes mirrored in the crystal bowl of human experience. And it is this telescoping of the particular conflict into a larger contextualisation that opens up the possibility of an overcoming of its internal dilemma. Distance provides philosophical comfort, as well as political knowledge.

> Historia: A woman resembling an angel, with great wings, looking behind her; writing on an oval table, on the back of Saturn. The wings denote her publishing all events, with great expedition; her looking back, that she labours for posterity; her white robe, truth and sincerity: Saturn by her side, denotes time and spirit of the actions. [64]

In *The Clothing of Clio* and *Romanticism and the Rise of History*, Stephen Bann traced back and reflected on the development in the course of the nineteenth century of a new and overwhelming form of enthusiasm for history.[65] It could be perused in the increasingly scientific researches of Ranke, Barante, Thierry, and Michelet; in the constitution of the Lenoir's Musée des Petits Augustins and du Sommerard's collection of historical artefacts leading to the creation of the Musée de Cluny; in visual and pictorial representation, it could be seen as epitomised by the work of Paul Delaroche. This enthusiasm was to be understood as participating in a distinct episteme, characterised by an ever-present 'historical mindedness'. At the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, following up on a century of modernist adventure, there emerged in the visual arts of the British isles (and while it is a phenomenon intrinsically tied to global patterns, to what extent it is shared by other geo-political entities, and in particular in this case by the Irish context would require an adjacent exploration), a similar yet distinct form of historical mindedness, connected to deindustrialisation, globalisation and national politics. In Derry and Northern Ireland, while closely connected to those parameters, the sense of history appeared both immersed in the intensity of local politics, and concerned with how the minutiae of site-specific events was connected to broader historical patterns.

The insightful essay of Roy Wallis on Gerry Gleason's paintings again provides an exemplary entry point. Wallis began his discussion with a quote from Karl Marx: 'Men make their own history', extracted from *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*.[66] The quote revealed an affinity with the complex theoretical debate on

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[64] (*Iconologia or moral emblems by Cesare Ripa*, trad P. Tempest, London, Benj. Motte, 1709). *Historia* '*Donna alata et vestita di biancho che guardi indietro, tenghi con la sinistra mano un ovato, overo un libro, sopra del quale mostri di scrivere, posandosi col piè sinistro sopra d'un sasso quadrato et a canto vi sia un Saturno, sopra le spalle del quale posi l'ovato, overo il libro, ove ella scrive.'* Caesare Ripa, *Iconologia,* 1593.
[65] Stephen Bann, *The clothing of Clio. A study of the representation of history in nineteenth-century Britain and France,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
Stephen Bann, *Romanticism and the rise of history*, New York: Twayne, 1995.
[66] Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', in *La revolution,* New York, 1852.

cause and consequence in historic evolutions.[67] Significantly, it introduced the recurring topic of revolutions and revolutionary sentiment, which has been a vector of metaphorical and metonymical historical reflections for artists and commentators alike. Liam Kelly and Mike Wilson evoke this theme à propos the work of David Goldbold (1998),[68] Mary Stevens' statement on her work around two photographs of Rosa Luxembourg (1988),[69] John Roberts's discussion of the work of Leon Golub (1987),[70] or Michael Wilson precise analysis of Shane Cullen's 1997 reference to St Just *Fragmens sur les institutions républicaines*.[71] Wallis' concluding words on Gleason aptly stand for the merging of specific condition with outreaching historical significance as illustrated by military and revolutionary comparisons:

> At times obliquely, at others more directly, [Gerry Gleason] asks us to confront our culture, our preconceptions, the time honoured tags and phrases through which we depict and interpret the world. He draws us from local circumstances to recurrent dilemmas and dangers of the human condition. He apportions no blame or guilt, promotes no cause, but rather provides an opportunity through reflection to consider ourselves dispassionately, to determine our own contribution, to remove the beam from our eye before embarking on the mote of our neighbour, our forebear or our enemy.[72]

The artist is not positioned as a passive illustrator of an unfolding narrative, incorporated into larger historical trajectories on which he has no bearing. Rather, he has gained the capacity to take a step back, and to consider the specifics of the sites under his eyes. The forms through which he engages with the surrounding world articulate a reflexivity that extends into space (the territorial other) and time (history).[73]

> Doubt: A beardless young man, standing in shimmering garments out of the darkness; he holds a stick in a hand, a lantern in the other; his left foot aside as if he were to step forward. Doubt is an ambiguity of the soul within

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[67] Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit. 1 L'intrigue et le récit historique*, Paris, le Seuil, 1983.

[68] David Godbold, *The answer garden. A native/settler debate*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 1998.

[69] May Stevens, *One Plus or Minus One*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 1988.

[70] John Roberts in *Leon Golub, selected painting 1967-86*, Derry; Dublin: Orchard Gallery and Douglas Hyde Gallery, 1987.

[71] Michael Wilson, 'Fragments and responses', in Cullen, *Fragmens sur les institutions républicaines*, 1997.

[72] Roy Wallis, 'Art, history and language', 16.

[73] Historia even becomes a superior biological machinery in the scrutiny of Nancy Princenthal discussing in *Art of renewal* (1989) the work of Pat Steir, Thomas Lawson and Maura Sheehan. Nancy Princenthal, *Art of renewal: Pat Steir, Thomas Lawson, Maura Sheehan*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 1989.

knowledge, and therefore also of the body within action.[74]

The third of our iconological category takes us back to the very beginning of this discursive exploration, to an uncertainty, a doubt, as to the exact implications of visual representation. The Janus figure has been evoked in relation to the work of Antony Gormley, yet it could extend its presence to a considerable number of the Orchard Gallery's texts. Its duality is captured by Davina Thackara, commenting on a John Aiken's sculpture for the Belfast headquarters of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland:

> Sited on a grassy bank overlooking the city, a monumental steel sculpture maintains a watchful eye over both institution and surroundings through an horizontal slit at the end of its long ridged arm. In its double faced character, looking both inwards and out, the work once again evokes an ambiguity – the tendency symptomatic of many defence structures to appear simultaneously protective and threatening.[75]

What might appear to hold a definitive meaning can suddenly reveal itself to articulate the exact opposite stance, and what one might believe the other's position to be, might reveal itself to be one's very own.

The artist Colin Darke coined this ambiguity clearly in the essay he wrote to accompany his 1996 exhibition: *A contribution to the critique of political economy*.[76] The artist was exploring through a formal reference to comms and a textual reproduction of Marx's *Contribution to the critique of political economy*, the overlapping and contradictions existing between Republican beliefs and socialist theories. The work questioned a set of projected values and the modes through which we adhere and represent them:

> The aim was to show that the relationships between society's structures, struggles, ideas and art are problematic, fluid, and unpredictable.[77]

The catalogue of the exhibition featured both an introduction by the artist, and an auto-critique, originally published in *Circa* in 1995. In a humorous yet significant move, the artist-critic came to the following conclusion:

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[74] Author's translation. *Il Dubbio: Giovanetto senza barba, in mezo alle tenebre vestito di cagiante, in una mano tenga un bastone, nell'altra una lanterna e stia col piè sinistro in fuora, per segno di caminare. Dubbio è una ambiguità dell'animo intorno al sapere, e per conseguenza ancora del corpo intorno all'operare.* Caesare Ripa, *Iconologia,* 1593
[75] Davina Thackara, 'Disruptive influence', in John Aiken, ed., *Form and enigma*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 2002.
[76] Colin Darke, *A contribution to the critique of political economy*, Derry: Orchard Gallery, 1996.
[77] Darke, 'Introduction', in *A contribution to the critique of political economy*, 1996.

> The more I looked at the show, the clearer it became that Darke is attempting
> to explore complex issues of which he has little comprehension.[78]

With this statement, the artist-observer was underlining the complexities stemming
from both the aesthetic format, and the inherent difficulty of transcribing and
mediating the latter through critical writing. In a sense, one might say that the
question of language we introduced in the first place as a crucial common
denominator is effectively the most overbearing extensive category to be repeatedly
engaged with by the critical essays. This is so as essays address conditions of
communicableness. Those form a prevailing existential issue in aesthetic creation
and have been of a highly sensitive nature in the specific historical context of
Northern Irish society in the late twentieth Century. Doubt as to the possibility of
establishing clearly the nature of things emerges throughout the catalogues as a
constructive reticence, in that it may eschew the impasses of pre-believed
standpoints. In an article published in 1960, Svetlana Alpers discussed the nature of
ekphrasis, the rhetorical process of textual description of a visual work of art, as
articulated by Vasari in his lives of the artists.[79] Alpers underlined how the
emphasis in the Lives' description was purposefully laid on conveying *clearly* to the
reader the nature of the narrative depicted and the emotions attached to it. It might
be said that the ekphrasis displayed in the catalogues of Orchard converge in their
reticence to convey a clear description of the narrative and emotions displayed.
Only through such reticence can they truly express *clearly* the aesthetic quality at the
heart of the works displayed.

Conclusion

In 1990 an exhibition at the Tate Liverpool entitled *New North, New Art from the
North of Britain*, had explicitly made an attempt to describe a rising artistic strategy
its curator Lewis Biggs termed 'Local-international'. The exhibition featured artist
from Wales, the North of England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and the impetus
behind their local-international bonding was both spatial (North vs South) and
epochal (a product of the 1980s global shift). Biggs, however, was keen to stress the
potential communicative strength of local-international cultural production:

> Local international describes the position of an artist who draws on a deep
> and personal experience to provide the impetus for his or her art. 'Local'
> describes a position in the cultural, not the geographical sense – the notion of
> purposes and values held, of conviction. It bears the same relation to
> 'locality' as 'community' does to 'neighbourhood'. But this sense of intimacy,

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[78] Darke, 'An auto-critique', in *A contribution to the critique of political economy*, 1996.
[79] Svetlana Alpers, 'Ekphrasis and aesthetic attitudes', in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld
Institutes*, 23: 3/4, July-December 1960, 190-215.

of something known and felt from the inside out, is balanced by the artist's awareness of other cultures, of the many interpretations that will be brought to his or her art by people ignorant of its original sources.[80]

The category of 'local-international' is an operative one to describe a series of development in British aesthetics at the turn of the 1990s, and should be considered within its historical context. That same year, in 1990, Declan McGonagle held a speech entitled 'Looking beyond regionalism' at the AAH conference in Dublin.[81] The argument reflected on the conditions within which centre-periphery configurations were shaped, particularly in the context of the United Kingdom, and reiterated the practical agenda based on an investment on locality the Orchard Gallery had been developing in the past decade:

> [The development of new models] cannot be done without engaging with the importance of place, its meaning and its universality, and that requires a definition of regionalism as part of the canon to be challenged.[82]

The convergence of technological changes, time-space compression, the nature of conservative politics of the 1980s in Britain and postmodern theoretical enquiries, together with a range of individual and collective agency all contributed to a superseding of the traditional binary relation between centre and periphery to establish vectorial (or potentially universal) double-peripheries, where any peripheral location by combining competing influences with self-generated interpretation can establish its production as independent from the influence of the centre.[83] Benefiting from a double spatial connection, to Britain and to Ireland, the Orchard Gallery could constitute its own identity and display art works that were informed from an emancipated perspective. The catalogues and essays published by the Orchard Gallery played a significant role in the constitution of such an identity, expressing both a range of iconographical concerns decisively pertinent to the social-body of Derry, while reflecting on the metaphorical transnational apertures that the visual realm could open up. In the dense and reflexive body of texts published in the 1980s and 1990s, the catalogues furthered through an ongoing consideration of the shifting grounds on which they stood the nature of an aesthetic

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[80] Lewis Biggs, 'Local international', in *New North, New Art from the North of Britain*, Liverpool: Tate Gallery Liverpool, 1990, 9.
[81] Declan McGonagle, 'Looking beyond Regionalism', in Fintan Cullen, ed, *Sources of Irish Art. A reader*, Cork: Cork University Press, 2000, 100-04, extract from *Circa Art Magazine*, 53, Sept-Oct 1990, 26-7.
[82] McGonagle, 'Looking beyond Regionalism', 102.
[83] The notion of double-periphery was articulated by Carlo Ginzburg and Enrico Castelnuovo in 'Centro e periferia', in *Storia dell'arte italiana*, Vol.1, Turin: Enaudi, 1979, 283-352. The author has discussed some of its applications in the context of Britain in the 1980s in 'Art without commerce in northern England, 1980-2000', in Charlotte Gould and Sophie Mesplède, eds, *Marketing art in the British isles, 1700 to the present*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2012.

pursuit, which crucially incorporated question marks as a major transversal
component of its stylistic characteristics.

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