Looking Backwards into the Future:
Steadicam Cinematography, Urban Regeneration and Artists' Cinema[1]

MAEVE CONNOLLY

In recent years, public-art programmes associated with urban redevelopment have emerged as an important context for the production and exhibition of artists' cinema in Ireland. Breaking Ground (the Per Cent for Art Scheme of Ballymun Regeneration Ltd) has commissioned a number of moving-image works, including short films and video installations by Christine Molloy and Joe Lawlor, Graham Parker and Grace Weir, and Adam Chodzko, among others.[2] More recently, the Dublin Docklands Development Authority has also become involved in the financing or co-financing of several visual-art projects that incorporate moving-image production or exhibition. These projects include Jesse Jones' *12 Angry Films* (2006),[3] a temporary drive-in cinema commissioned by Fire Station Artists' Studios and situated in the Pigeon House and *Video Apartment* (November 2007), an exhibition of video art within a domestic setting in the Docklands area, which formed part of the *bodycity* project devised by Shelagh Morris, Cliodhna Shaffrey and Nigel Rolfe.[4] Some public-art commissioning programmes, such as Breaking Ground, favour an overtly 'site-specific' approach in which artists are required to engage directly with the local context, whether understood in terms of physical landscape, history or community. Yet these commissions often give rise to works that circulate beyond the local context, particularly if they take the form of film or video projects. This article examines the relationship between site-specific art practice, public-art commissions and contemporary artists' cinema through reference to the work of Christine Molloy and Joe Lawlor (also known as 'desperate optimists').

The term 'artists' cinema' is used here in preference to 'artists' film and video' because it signals a particular concern with the institutional and cultural history of cinema, in addition to the material and technological aspects of film-making. My discussion focuses on Molloy and Lawlor's self-consciously 'cinematic' strategies of production and exhibition, particularly the use of steadicam cinematography in several films from their *Civic Life* series, including *Moore Street* (2004) and the Breaking Ground commission *Leisure Centre* (2005). While both of these works are loosely concerned with displacement, the latter is directly concerned with the transformation of both self and community. It is also shot and set within a newly built gymnasium and swimming pool, one of the most prominent symbols of the regeneration process in Ballymun. The first part of the article explores the relationship between visual spectacle and cinematography in these works, drawing upon Richard Kirkland's analysis of *Elephant* (Alan Clarke, 1989),[5] while the second part addresses some broader critical issues surrounding site-specific practice and artists' cinema.

Christine Molloy and Joe Lawlor left Dublin to study and work in the UK in the late 1980s and first became established within the field of experimental theatre and live art, incorporating elements of video into their performances, before moving into video and subsequently 35mm film production. Outlining this trajectory, Ben Slater notes that they 'belong to a roughly defined generation of British "live artists" in the 1990s, creating experimental performance for theatres . . . informed far more by filmic imagery, editing and mise-en-scène than . . . by the traditions of the stage'.[6] As desperate optimists, they extended their collaborative approach from theatre to moving-image production, 'frequently opening out their process to include other artists, schools and community groups'.[7] They directed and released seven short films as part of the *Civic Life* series, followed by *Daydream* (2006), which was commissioned as part of the 'Made in Liverpool' programme of the Liverpool Biennial in 2006. More recently, they have made two linked films, a short entitled *Joy* (2007) and a feature-length narrative entitled *Helen* (2008), which share a common storyline, characters and cast.[8]

Molloy and Lawlor typically set and shoot their films within urban locations that are either public or semi-public in some way; these include city streets, parks, community centres and hotel function rooms. Some of these locations incorporate highly recognisable landmarks (such as public monuments) while others are more ambiguous or generic. Each shoot features a large and predominantly non-professional cast of performers, often including members recruited from the local community of residents. Molloy and Lawlor also favour a non-naturalistic mode of address in which performers sometimes demonstrate an awareness of the camera, glancing directly at it when delivering their lines. Each film is shot on 35mm stock, using an anamorphic lens, and the action is staged and recorded as a continuous

'long take' lasting several minutes. Several films in the *Civic Life* series, including *Moore Street, Leisure Centre* and *Town Hall* (2005) were shot entirely with a steadicam, while others involved the use of a crane, dolly or tripod. The choreography of the camera within each film also tends to be highly complex, generally tracking the movements of an individual or group through the set, even circling around the performer at certain points, if a steadicam is used.

There is significant potential for error within this process and the stakes are particularly high because only a small number of shots are possible due to the costliness of the medium. In addition, as long takes cannot be edited conventionally, a mistake within the shot cannot be easily rectified. This means that the movements of both the camera operator and the performers must be carefully planned in advance. Although Molloy and Lawlor have developed an approach to film-making that is formally distinctive and cohesive, their work has continued to evolve and change, particularly in relation to the use of editing, sound and music. Several early films (including *Moore Street*) consist of a single shot accompanied by non-diegetic sound such as a voice-over or music. The later works such as *Leisure Centre* and *Daydream* are much longer, consisting of a succession of long takes and incorporating synchronised dialogue and location sound as well as music.

Visual spectacle, steadicam cinematography and artists' cinema

Within the context of commercial cinema, the use of steadicam cinematography is sometimes associated with visual spectacle, occasionally offering the illusion of free-floating motion through an idealised or imagined world. This is partly because technologies of motion control are often combined with elements of 'motion capture' to enable the integration of computer-generated animation and live-action footage, creating an apparently seamless transition between 'real' and 'virtual' worlds. The work of Molloy and Lawlor is, however, more closely aligned to a counter-current in film-making, whereby long takes and complex camera movements are used to destabilise the construction of a coherent narrative space or to call attention to the presence of the camera. The 'long take' has a well-established pedigree within film history, which can be traced from Italian neo-realism to the work of film-makers such as Michael Haneke. According to John David Rhodes, the long take 'performs a variety of labors, among them this one: a forcing of spectators to assume a more active role in interpreting the representation of reality before them'.[9] It could be argued that this process of 'activation' is amplified by the use of the anamorphic process in the films of Molloy and Lawlor. This is because, while the widescreen image may seem

to offer the illusion of visual mastery, the production process tends to make the grain of the 35mm film stock more visible, while the lens itself creates obvious optical distortions, particularly when used within a confined interior space.

The combination of a long take and highly fluid cinematography is well established within classical narrative cinema, sometimes serving as the mark or signature of a particular *auteur*. It is also possible to identify precedents within the avant-garde tradition, most obviously in the form of Michael Snow's *La Region Centrale* (1971), which was filmed in northern Quebec with a specially constructed device that would allow the camera to pivot rapidly and smoothly through a range of axes. At certain points, the cinematography seems to suggest the mapping or measurement of an apparently uninhabited landscape but as the pace of the camera movement increases, the coherency of both landscape and viewing subject is destabilised. *La Region Centrale* is one of a number of films referenced by Stephen Heath in his influential theorisation of 'narrative space' and it forms part of a shift within avant-garde practice away from the investigation of perception and the material properties of film, towards an exploration of narrative structure and form.[10]

Jonathan Whalley has analysed this shift, highlighting a crisis within structural film in the late 1960s and early 1970s linked to the insistence on 'medium-specificity' within modernist critique. Amongst multiple and inter-related responses to the perceived limits of this position, Whalley identifies the emergence of a form of 'paracinema' concerned with 'cinematic properties outside the standard film apparatus'.[11] The best-known example of this paracinematic current is probably Anthony McCall's *Long Film for Ambient Light* (1975). This work is not a 'film' in the conventional sense but instead could be described as a durational event, unfolding over twenty-four hours and taking the form of an empty Manhattan loft with its windows covered by diffusion paper, lit by a bare light bulb hanging from the ceiling. According to Whalley, this exploration of cinema beyond the apparatus of film was informed both by the general tendency towards 'dematerialisation' in contemporary art and by an overtly historicised concept of the medium of film, indebted to Bazin and Eisenstein. Animated by Bazin's 'Myth of Total Cinema' and Eisenstein's analysis of montage and modernity, paracinema was premised on the notion that 'the film medium . . . is not a timeless absolute but a cluster of historically contingent materials'.[12]

Although the term 'paracinema' cannot be extended to the work of Molloy and Lawlor, the *Civic Life* series is characterised by an exploration of the various ways in which cinema extends beyond the materiality of film. Firstly, the combination of anamorphic cinematography and steadicam

technology clearly evokes a tradition of visual spectacle that extends from proto-cinematic entertainments, such as the diorama, to contemporary visual effects. It is also possible to identify certain parallels with early cinema modes of production and exhibition; when Molloy and Lawlor invite non-professional performers to see themselves and their cities through the lens of the film camera they are operating within a tradition that can be traced to the early cinematographic entrepreneurs, even though the dynamics of economic exchange may be less direct. The exploration of narrative form in the *Civic Life* series is also obviously indebted to the tradition of stage melodrama, while many of the settings (such as city parks) seem to hint at the relationship between early cinema and other forms of public entertainment. .

In recent years, some theorists of the 'projected image' within contempor-ary art have critiqued the dominance of film and video installation within the gallery, emphasising the need to foreground mechanisms of display within the space of exhibition as a counterpoint to the overtly immersive qualities of cinema.[13] Molloy and Lawlor, however, embrace the techno-logical and industrial convention of commercial film exhibition and the history of cinema as a public cultural form. In addition, they do not seem to share the fascination with industrial obsolescence that is evident in the work of some artists working with 16mm film, such as Tacita Dean. They shoot, print and exhibit on 35mm precisely because it is currently the industrial standard and they rarely exhibit their films in galleries; instead preferring to screen their work in cinemas and often favouring commercial multiplexes over arthouse venues. But even though Molloy and Lawlor are not primarily interested in the materiality of film this does not mean that the indexical qualities of the medium are necessarily irrelevant to their practice. They are drawn towards natural lighting effects and often shoot at the 'magic hour' just before the sun sets. In addition, their exploration of 'real time' through the long take articulates a fascination with the evidential qualities of the photographic image. Ben Slater hints at this dynamic when he suggests that their films constitute a 'spectral documentation' of a performance that is usu-ally hidden; 'the marshalling of camera, crew, actors, space and time [which] needs to be performed with the utmost precision and confidence'.[14] Some of the 'spectral' qualities of these films are also integrally linked to the use of steadicam cinematography, and I will return to this point at a later stage.

Subjectivity, spectatorship and the address to the body

The 'address to the body' that is characteristic of spectacular attractions has been widely theorised in relation to early and post-classical cinema, experimental film and the broader domain of visual culture. Scott Bukatman

integrates insights from all of these fields in order to theorise a 'technological sublime'. In keeping with the genealogy outlined by Jonathan Cray, among others, Bukatman acknowledges that the address to the body in nineteenth-century spectacular entertainments may serve as 'a means of inscribing new, potentially traumatic phenomena onto the familiar field of the body'.[15] Yet he emphasises that this process may also be *necessary*:

> While the incorporation of the body into a range of primarily visual entertainments constitutes for Crary a *colonization* of the body, it repre-sents a *compensation* for the declining centrality of sensory experience; a valid (that is, *useful*) means of recentering one's experience of a decentred world. If this was, in some ways, complicit with dominant ideological agendas, it is also, irreducibly, a necessary means of being in the world.[16]

Bukatman notes a recurrence of this address to the body within avant-garde and experimental film and he cites various theorists, including Tom Gunning, who have identified continuities between the early 'cinema of attractions' and the exploration of perception in certain avant-garde and experimental film practices.[17]

The overtly 'presentational' or frontal framing employed by Molloy and Lawlor, whereby characters address themselves towards the camera, is certain-ly indebted to early cinema, but also offers a point of connection with avant-garde theatre, most notably the work of Brecht. Valerie Connor has emphasised the importance of Brecht for Molloy and Lawlor, noting that *Leisure Centre* 'flaunts a range of alienating effects', including the visual distor-tions that are created by the cinematography. The film centres on a young man (Rob) who has recently become a father and is visiting the local leisure centre for the first time since the birth. The camera follows him as he moves through the interior of the building, on his way to meet his girlfriend Amy, and the camera lens creates certain visual distortions, as noted by Connor:

> From our point of view, as Rob goes forward, so we move backward. The camera faces squarely away from the direction we are all moving in. As we watch Rob, centred in the frame, it becomes noticeable that the camera lens is having an extreme effect on the surrounding architecture. Before our eyes, the edges of the walls, the corridors, appear to bend, curving in Rob's wake.[18]

The cinematography amplifies the sense of anxiety and enclosure suggested by Rob's words and gestures and also creates an acute awareness of off-screen space. 'We' move backwards with the camera operator through the corridor, unable to see the space that lies ahead of Rob, while his occasional glances at the camera betray the fact that his view is also obscured.

By calling attention to the existence of off-screen space in this way,

Leisure Centre disrupts many of the conventions of classical narrative cinema and could even be said to offer an example of the 'fourth look' that has been theorised by Paul Willemen through reference to the films of Steve Dwoskin.[19] Willemen's concept of the fourth look is of course partly informed by the notion of the 'fourth wall' in theatre, but it also draws upon and seeks to extend a body of theory developed in relation to film spectatorship. In particular, it references Laura Mulvey's typology of 'looks', which includes the look of the camera at the pro-filmic scene, the spectator's look towards the screen and the intra-diegetic looks exchanged by characters. Willemen, however, introduces the possibility of a fourth 'look' aligned to the Lacanian concept of the gaze, noting that 'Jacques Lacan described this fourth look as being "not a seen gaze but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other" . . . In the filmic process, this look can be represented as the look which constitutes the viewer as visible subject'.[20]

Willemen goes on to emphasise that even though this fourth look is not of the same order as the other looks, because its subject is 'an imaginary other', it is nonetheless continually present, even though institutional conventions of production and exhibition may 'conspire to minimise its effects'.[21] It could be argued, however, that steadicam cinematography introduces yet another 'look', involving the mediation of the pro-filmic scene. An insight into this process is offered by Richard Kirkland in his analysis of Alan Clarke's television film *Elephant* (1989). This film, which has directly informed the work of Gus Van Sant, as well as Molloy and Lawlor, consists solely of a sequence of steadicam shots, each of which follows a lone male who locates and shoots an unidentified individual at close range. There is no dialogue or explication of the narrative, and this action is simply repeated again and again with variations in terms of location, cast and framing, at a pace that is both monotonous and relentless. Kirkland situates *Elephant* in relation to a tradition of 'spectacular' representations of violence in Northern Ireland but suggests that it may offer a somewhat different perspective on this violence, largely as a consequence of the multiple subject positions associated with the use of steadicam. He states that the steadicam's ability to provide 'a seamless shift from POV to other subject positions indicates a mode of contingency, the potential to adopt whatever position is strategically necessary according to the shifting terrain of implication and denial that the film's subject matter impels'.[22] Although he concludes that *Elephant* is a highly ambivalent text, he also finds evidence of an 'ethical' process of contemplation in both the multiple subject positions implied by the use of the steadicam and in the silence that dominates the film.

Kirkland's discussion of the steadicam highlights the crucial dissonance between the point of view of the operator and that of the camera. He emphasises that the camera is fitted to the body of the operator and then balanced on springs so as to eliminate any jolts. The operator does not use an eyepiece to frame the shot but instead relies on a monitor also attached to the body, while the focus is adjusted (remotely) by another crew member. This effectively means that the smoothness of the steadicam image is both the product and the sign of various hidden 'looks' directed at monitors,[23] including those of the steadicam operator and the focus puller. It is here that the notion of the film as 'spectral documentation' offered by Ben Slater seems to acquire renewed meaning, suggesting the possibility that the films of Molloy and Lawlor bear the trace of the various hidden 'looks' associated with the production process.

Collaborative and site-based modes of production

At present, Molloy and Lawlor operate within a funding model that is different (although not necessarily wholly separate) from that associated with the commercial gallery system. Many artists working with 16mm film produce a limited edition of prints and in general they do not make these works available to buy on domestic formats such as video or DVD.[24] As these editioned film works are usually sold through the commercial gallery system, their circulation and exhibition is carefully managed by the artists or their gallery representatives. By contrast, the various publicly funded agencies that have commissioned projects by Molloy and Lawlor are often concerned to promote the status of these projects as *public*-art works. Rather than controlling the exhibition of the films, or seeking a direct return on investment through sales, these agencies often produce and release a relatively large DVD edition, sometimes incorporating an essay or other contextualising material.[25]

In addition, many of the films in the *Civic Life* series were screened in cinemas on 35mm for invited audiences that included the participants as well as press and have since been widely exhibited in film festivals. But this does not mean that the work of Molloy and Lawlor circulates entirely outside the frame of contemporary art. *Moore Street*, the second film in the series, formed part of the official Irish representation at the 26th Bienal de São Paulo and it was funded by the Cultural Relations Committee at the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism and the Arts Council, and Project Arts Centre in partnership with the British Council in Ireland. *Leisure Centre* is arguably more representative of the series as whole in that it was commissioned by Breaking Ground but, as is common in low-budget film-making, the production received funding from many different sources, including Arts Council England, Film London, British Council Ireland and Project Arts Centre.

As this list suggests, Molloy and Lawlor operate as film producers as well as artists, both in terms of securing funding and in their ongoing interactions with crew and performers. Ben Slater specifically describes them as 'artistic and project directors – guiding and interrogating, encouraging and cajoling',[26] highlighting the significance of communication and interpersonal skills within their work. It is this very convergence between artist and 'project director' within the site-specific art practice that has been critiqued by Miwon Kwon. According to Kwon, the institutional context of site-specific art increasingly requires the artist to function as 'cultural-artistic service provider rather than a producer of aesthetic objects'.[27] She traces this reconfiguration in the shift from the exploration of the 'aesthetics of administration' in the conceptual art practices of the 1960s and 1970s towards a new emphasis on 'the administration of aesthetics', in which the artist functions as 'facilitator, educator, coordinator, and bureaucrat'.[28] Kwon emphasises that these procedural changes are (perhaps paradoxically) paralleled by a renewed emphasis on the artist as the progenitor of meaning, even where authorship is differed through processes of collaboration. She also suggests that the thematisation of discursive sites as places contributes to their misrecognition as a natural extension of the artist's identity. This means that the 'legitimacy of the work's critique is measured by the proximity of the artist's personal association (converted to expertise) with a particular place, history, discourse or identity, etc. (converted to content)'.[29] As a consequence, the signifying chain of site-oriented art is integrally linked to the movement of the artist, from one place to another, continually generating 'sites' in the form of the artists' exhibition history.

Kwon is also critical of the way in which site-specific art may mobilise idealised models of collectivity and artistic labour, emphasising that the concept of labour is rarely addressed within public-art discourse. She states:

> [The] drive towards indentificatory unity that propels today's form of community-based site specificity is a desire to model or enact unalienated collective labor, predicated on an idealistic assumption that artistic labor is itself a special form of unalienated labor, or at least provisionally outside capitalism's forces. . . . Underlying decades of public art discourse is a presumption that the art work – as object, event, or process – can fortify the viewing (now producing) subject by protecting it from the conditions of social alienation . . . A culturally fortified subject, rendered whole and unalienated through an encounter or involvement with an art work, is imagined to be a *politically* empowered social subject with opportunity (afforded by the art project) and capacity (understood as innate) for artistic self-representation (= political self-determination).[30]

In the latter part of her critique Kwon argues for a mode of 'collective artistic praxis', understood as a projective exercise rather than in terms of the representation or description of a given community, envisaged and consumed as 'authentic'. Although she invokes the term 'transitive action . . . To emphasise the simultaneous process of coming together and coming apart of social relations'[31] she explicitly resists any further specification of this mode of praxis.

It would seem that Molloy and Lawlor's practice is somehow implicated within this critique of site-specific art, not least because *Daydream* and many of the *Civic Life* films evolved within the context of processes of urban redevelopment. A full analysis of these issues would need to examine the various different modes and forms of collaboration and collective labour that are involved in the commissioning, negotiation and development (as well as the production) of these works. But if the discussion is restricted to the site of the film set, the model of artistic authorship and labour critiqued by Kwon is not wholly applicable. This is because one of the significant features of Molloy and Lawlor's mode of production is their adherence to the conventions associated with 35mm film-making. As their films are not improvised, but instead rehearsed and performed within very tight time and cost constraints, participation within the production process necessarily involves the taking up of a prescribed role (whether as 'extra' or as 'lead') under the direction of Molloy and Lawlor. I do not want to imply here that Molloy and Lawlor somehow operate outside the authorial structures described by Kwon; rather I want to suggest that their practice draws upon traditions of labour and cultural production, associated with theatre and film, which may be slightly at odds with the model theorised by Kwon in relation to the domain of site-specific art.

There are, of course, other modes of labour at work beyond the film set, which are directly shaped by the institutional structures particular to contemporary art. An analysis of the various ways in which these institutional practices may intersect with site-based art practice is clearly warranted and, in this respect, Jeremy Valentine offers an interesting perspective on Kwon's analysis. Valentine rejects both traditional (Adornian) notions of autonomy and also a prevalent 'pessimistic nostalgia' in contemporary criticism for an earlier moment when the 'boundaries between art and organisation seemed to be more clearly defined'.[32] Drawing upon Hardt and Negri's *Empire,* he argues instead for an exploration of the various ways in which artistic and administrative processes combine within a shared imaginary in 'contextualising practices', which include installation, and performance as well as site-specific art.[33] In common with many others, Valentine identifies biennial exhibitions as a privileged example of (and frame for) contextualising practice and he is

specifically interested in the various ways in which heterogeneous values associated with art and organisation get 'locked in' to these practices. Writing in 2004, he suggests that the culture of Liverpool, whether produced through the biennale or through related initiatives such as the 'Capital of Culture' (assigned to Liverpool for 2008), may in fact be the organisation of these events; as such it may be impossible to either pull apart or fully represent this interweaving of culture and organisation. This relationship can only be made visible by 'regarding the experience and meaning of the biennial as the relationship between the exhibition as process of display and the local and global elements that it articulates. Such an object would be without spatial or temporal limit and thus impossible to represent'.[34] As the work of Kwon would suggest, it is this very *unrepresentability* that seems to prompt the recovery of site in the form of a pre-existing totality aligned to the body of the artist.

Looking backwards

Molloy and Lawlor do not evade these issues; rather, their work seems to perform this act of recovery by staging an ephemeral (perhaps even 'spectral') scene of communality for the camera, albeit a scene that is highly constructed. In both *Leisure Centre* and *Daydream* they explore themes of longing for a better life, as well as experiences of alienation and loss. The central characters in *Leisure Centre* (Rob and his girlfriend Amy) have recently become parents and the first part of the film focuses on Rob's fears and anxieties in his new role as a father. As he walks through the depopulated interior of the new building, both the setting and the smooth movements of the camera are strongly reminiscent of *The Shining* (1980), a well-known exploration of paternal alienation.[35] Unlike Jack in *The Shining*, however, Rob can at least express his fears to his partner and she responds by asking him to imagine the future, five years from now. Specifically, she asks him to *look back on the present* from a time in which he, his family and the wider community have found happiness, comfort and security. Amy speaks, however, from a position that is outside the diegesis and she describes this alternative present in a voice-over. As she speaks, the action shifts from real time to slow motion and she and Rob enter the swimming pool, pausing to collect their child from another family member. With Amy now carrying the baby in her arms they walk through the pool area, which is flooded with sunshine in stark contrast to the subdued artificial lighting of the gym and changing room. As Amy continues to speak, her words seem to dictate the movement of the camera, which alights upon children, teenagers and older people at play; the awkward

social interactions of the gym have now been replaced by unrestrained physicality and they are surrounded by idyllic images of communality.

This combination of fluid cinematography and visual plenitude is so seductive that Amy's imagined world quickly acquires solidity and coherence, resolving and banishing many of the ambiguities generated by Rob's journey. But this closing section is not simply an embrace or endorsement of the ideology of urban regeneration. Instead, it suggests the exploration of a conceptual position that is integral to the work of Brecht. According to Darko Suvin, the basic strategy of Brecht's aesthetics involves the observation of the present from a point that is located in another epoch, such as an imagined future, so that even the everyday events of the present acquire renewed significance and meaning. For Suvin, the strategy of the 'backward look' towards the present creates 'tension between a future which the author's awareness inhabits, and a present which his audience inhabits: this tension is at the root of the most significant values of Brecht's work'.[36]

The words spoken by Amy at the close of *Leisure Centre* seem at first to suggest an application of this aesthetic strategy but they actually effect a reversal of the dynamic that is described by Suvin. This is because even though the final scene is framed (by Amy's words) as an image of an alternative present it is also open to another interpretation, as the spectacle of utopian collectivity to be achieved through the process of regeneration. The problem does not necessarily lie in the 'backward look' towards the present, however, and may be partly a consequence of continuities in action between the earlier and latter parts of the film. This is because although the use of slow motion and voice-over in the swimming-pool scene signals an altered temporality, it also implies the continuation and conclusion of Rob's journey through the gym. As a consequence, the reunification of the young family in the pool provides a wholly satisfying narrative resolution to the anxieties and uncertainties generated by Rob's journey.

Conclusion

Elsewhere, in both *Daydream* and *Joy*, Molloy and Lawlor actually explore the theme of the narrative 'quest' or journey directly. *Daydream* is largely concerned with change or transition and it stages a series of scenarios in which individuals and groups reflect upon their desires, fears and aspirations. These scenarios are framed within a meta-narrative, set in a forest where a group of children have become separated from their teacher and classmates. Although the 'lost' children eventually appear in the final scene they are not reunited with their friends; instead, it would appear that their own journey or quest has actually just begun. So even though *Daydream* is

very specifically concerned with change and regeneration, it withholds an aspirational image of the future, focusing instead on the potential that may be inherent in the experience of dislocation and disorientation. *Moore Street* is also concerned with themes of separation and recovery, but structured very differently. The cast is primarily African, drawn from a theatre group, and the action, which is filmed as a single steadicam shot, takes place long after the Moore Street fruit and vegetable markets have closed.

Much of the light in *Moore Street* seems to come from within the restaurants, video shops and other businesses established by local immigrant entrepreneurs, and the scene opens with a single young woman, who walks slowly through the street. Her movements are accompanied by a voice-over in which she (or someone else) describes her present life to an absent lover, shifting between English and Swahili. She asks him to join her yet she clearly remains deeply ambivalent about her new home, questioning whether it is possible, or even desirable, to ever fully 'belong' in this place. This ambivalence is echoed in the movements of the camera as it circles around the central figure and seems to double back on itself several times. Towards the end, the woman is joined by a group of young men and women, who fall smoothly into step with her without any sign of acknowledgement. At the close, they advance towards and then past the camera, turning the corner and heading out into the city. So while *Leisure Centre* is characterised by progressive forward motion, the route taken by the central character in *Moore Street* is far more circular. The relationship between the onscreen performers and voice-over narrator in the latter film also remains ambiguous, suggesting a continually shifting subject position, evoking aspects of the mode of contingency that is theorised by Kirkland in relation to *Elephant*.

Ultimately, it is impossible to deny that Molloy and Lawlor are operating within territory that is fraught with difficulty, as a consequence of the locational and contextual dynamics that have been theorised by Kwon and Valentine, among others. A full exploration of these issues would need to extend beyond the film set to address the various forms of collaboration, mediation and negotiation within their practice. Yet, given the impossibility of finding a position that is somehow 'outside' these dynamics, their work seems both distinctive and significant for its overt thematic engagement with the discourse of transformation in urban-regeneration projects. In addition, by operating at the shifting intersection of public and commercial structures of film production and exhibition, their practice offers an insight into the history and possible future of cinema as a public cultural form.

Notes and References

1 I am indebted to Christine Molloy and Joe Lawlor for providing production details, for bringing Kirkland's text to my attention and for assistance with access to documentation and screenings in the course of my research.
2 For further information on the programme and specific works such as *Around* (Adam Chodzko, 2007) and *Sight Unseen* (Grace Weir and Graham Parker, 2005), see http://www.breakingground.ie/
3 Jones' project also involved the production of six collaborative video works by an 'elective community' established through union, activist and local-community networks. For documentation, see *12 Angry Films*, Dublin: Fire Station Artists' Studios, 2007 [http://www.firestation.ie/downloads/12-angry-films.pdf].
4 Further details of the *Video Apartment* exhibition and *bodycity – A visual arts project in three parts (2007–2008)* can be found at http://www.bodycity.org/
5 Richard Kirkland, 'The Spectacle of Terrorism in Northern Irish Culture', *Critical Survey*, 15: 1 (2003), pp. 76–90.
6 Ben Slater, 'Light on the City: The Cinema of desperate optimists' in Valerie Connor (ed.), *Stephen Loughman, Dennis McNulty, desperate optimists: Representing Ireland at the 26th Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil* (Dublin: Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, 2004), p. 59.
7 Ibid.
8 Both films employ the figure of the stand-in and the device of reconstruction to explore themes of dislocation and displacement. Both are discussed in more detail in Maeve Connolly, *The Place of Artists' Cinema: Space, Site and Screen* (forthcoming from Intellect, 2009).
9 John David Rhodes, 'Haneke, the Long Take, Realism', *Framework*, 47: 2 (2006), p. 18. See also Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'Observations on the Long Take' in David Campany (ed.), *The Cinematic* (London and Cambridge, Mass; Whitechapel and MIT Press, 2007), pp. 84–7.
10 Stephen Heath, 'Narrative Space' in Philip Rosen (ed.), *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 406–7.
11 Jonathan Slater, 'Light on the City: Contrasting Practices in Sixties and Seventies Avant-Garde Film', *October*, 103 (2003), p. 18.
12 Slater, 'Light on the City', p. 26.
13 See George Baker, Matthew Buckingham, Hal Foster, Chrissie Iles, Anthony McCall, Malcolm Turvey, 'Round Table: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art', *October*, 104 (2003), pp. 71–96.
14 Slater, 'Light on the City', p. 60.
15 Scott Bukatman, 'The Artificial Infinite: On Special Effects and the Sublime' in Lynne Cooke and Peter Wollen (eds.), *Visual Display: Culture Beyond Appearances* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), pp. 261–2.
16 Ibid., p. 262 [italics in original].
17 Tom Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, its Spectator and the Avant-Garde' in Thomas Elsaesser with Adam Barker (eds.), *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative* (London: BFI, 1990), pp. 56–62.
18 Valerie Connor, 'In the Full Glare of the Medium', *Leisure Centre: Christine Molloy and Joe Lawlor (desperate optimists)*, DVD published by Breaking Ground, 2005.
19 Paul Willemen, *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press and BFI, 1994), pp. 99–110.
20 Ibid., p. 107.
21 Ibid., p. 108.

22 Ibid., p. 87.
23 Evidently, as digital video technologies are now wholly integrated into the film production process, these forms of mediation extend well beyond the use of the steadicam.
24 There are prominent exceptions to this rule, including *Eija-Liisa Ahtila: The Cinematic Works*, a DVD release by BFI of Ahtila's work from 1993–2002, in single-screen format.
25 The entire *Civic Life* series was also released on DVD in 2006, with funding from the Arts Council England.
26 Slater, 'Light on the City', p. 59.
27 Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2004), p. 4.
28 Ibid., p. 51.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., p. 97 [italics in original].
31 Ibid., p. 208 n. 55.
32 Jeremy Valentine, 'Art and Empire: Aesthetic Autonomy, Organisational Mediation and Contextualising Practices' in Jonathan Harris (ed.), *Art, Money, Parties: New Institutions in the Political Economy of Contemporary Art* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press and Tate Liverpool, 2004), p. 202.
33 Ibid., p. 203.
34 Ibid., pp. 211–12.
35 Fredric Jameson's analysis of the 'ghost story' and repressed class consciousness in *The Shining* (1980) is relevant here. See Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 90. For further discussion of these issues in relation to artists' film and video, see Maeve Connolly, 'Of Other Worlds: Nature and the Supernatural in the Moving Image Installations of Jaki Irvine' (forthcoming in *Screen*, 49: 2 (2008)).
36 Darko Suvin, *To Brecht and Beyond: Soundings in Modern Dramaturgy* (Sussex and New Jersey: Harvester Press and Barnes & Noble Books, 1984), p. 124.

Contents