Chapter 10

Feminism, Ireland and Women's Video Art in the 1980s

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Introduction

The history of Irish women's video art is both complicated and enriched by the fact that, during the 1970s and 1980s, many women artists engaged with Ireland and Irish society from a distance, either out of choice or necessity. Based in (or sometimes moving between) a variety of locations in Ireland, Scotland, England and the US, these women developed feminist critiques of power that directly addressed both the social construction of gender and the specific values attributed to femininity and motherhood within nationalist and colonial discourses. Some of the artists, activists and filmmakers discussed below had strong connections with international feminist networks for the production and distribution of film and video, but they were also interested in more local feminist initiatives, particularly in relation to campaigns for reproductive rights. All were actively working toward political and social change, through their practices as artists and their parallel roles as educators.

In a catalogue essay accompanying the 1990 exhibition *A New Tradition: Irish Art of the Eighties*, an exhibition curated by Medb Ruane at the Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, Joan Fowler highlights the growing significance of gender and sexuality for both male and female Irish artists in the 1980s.[1] While male artists tended to engage with these issues through expressionist and figurative painting, their female counterparts – including Pauline Cummins, Mary Duffy and Alanna O'Kelly – were drawn toward new media such as video, performance or slide/tape. Fowler emphasises that these women were working in a context shaped both by the expansion of marriage and workplace rights, in the 1970s, and by a 'co-ordinated reaction'[2] to these changes. This reaction was made manifest in two particularly divisive referenda campaigns concerning abortion and divorce, which severely undermined women's rights in the mid-1980s. In a more recent account of Irish feminist performance art, Kate Antonik-Parsons also highlights the reactionary social climate of the

1980s, suggesting that it helps to explain why women in Ireland were particularly drawn to the body as a 'lens through which the intersection of personal, political, theoretical and practical concerns could be focused'.[3] The female body certainly figures very prominently in many of the new media works discussed by Fowler. But it is important to remember that this mobilisation of body as 'lens' *also* frequently involved the use of new media, including film, photography and, eventually, video. Antonik-Parsons' text appears in an edited collection of writings on performance art in Ireland, which also includes some discussion of artists working with video. As of yet, however, there are no scholarly monographs or archives[4] dedicated specifically to Irish video art or experimental film, despite the fact that moving image installation has occupied a prominent place within Irish contemporary art for several decades,[5] with the result that the history of Irish video art remains somewhat scattered.[6] In addition, a small number of works discussed in this chapter (specified in the notes) are difficult to view in full, generally due to partial degradation of the original master tapes.

In this chapter, I have chosen to focus primarily on the practices of Frances Hegarty, Alanna O'Kelly and Anne Tallentire, specifically because all three artists realised works on video for gallery exhibition (as distinct from broadcast) during the 1980s, while the other Irish women artists mentioned in this text only began exhibiting video work after 1990. Hegarty, O'Kelly and Tallentire tended to use video alongside other non-traditional media, including Super 8 or 16mm film, 35mm slide, audio tape or photography. In many of the works discussed, video allowed these artists to present recordings of site-specific gestures or trajectories within the gallery. These recordings could be displayed alongside objects, images or live actions, playing an integral role in the articulation and exploration of spatio-temporal dislocations resulting from migration, legacies of colonisation, and ongoing cultural and legal restrictions to women's rights. But it is important to acknowledge that only a relatively small number of video works by Irish women artists were actually made during the 1980s, mainly because infrastructural supports for the production and distribution (or archiving) of experimental film and video production simply did not exist in Ireland during the 1970s and 1980s.[7]

Artists who completed their undergraduate studies in Belfast or Dublin in the 1970s often gravitated toward masters programmes in London,[8] in search of video and film production facilities. But Belfast-based artists did have at least some access to new media production resources, following the establishment of the Art & Research Exchange (A.R.E.), an artist-run space with a darkroom and studios in 1978.[9] Although it did not include video production or distribution facilities, A.R.E. became an important resource for artists working with performance, eventually hosting live art events. The A.R.E. building also housed the Artists Collective of Northern Ireland, which began publishing the bi-monthly art magazine *Circa* in 1981, with a stated focus on the socio-political context on art production. The magazine's early editorial staff included the artist Anne

Carlisle,[10] known for her work with time-based media, and many of its regular contributors (including Jean Fisher, Joan Fowler and Belinda Loftus) were particularly attentive to feminism and women's art practice.

Feminist Art, Film and Activism North and South of the Border

Like their international counterparts during the 1970s and 1980s, many Irish women artists wanted to secure greater professional recognition, at home and abroad, often forming or joining advocacy associations and women-only networks to achieve this goal. Although not restricted to artists working with new media, many such initiatives involving Irish women artists led to exhibitions, seminars and conferences involving time-based or photographic media.[11] In 1987, for example, a group of Irish-based artists that included Pauline Cummins set up the Women Artists' Action Group (WAAG), organising an exhibition at Project Arts Centre, Dublin, which consisted of a slide show of works by women. Based on this exhibition, WAAG subsequently established a slide library, which was maintained by the group. Cummins' own work from this period included the slide/tape installation *Inis T'Oirr/Aran Dance* (1985), first shown at the Irish Exhibition of Living Art, Dublin, in 1985.[12] Irish women artists who were living or studying in London (or elsewhere in England) during this period also established representative groups, organising a number of conferences and exhibitions discussed below. Hegarty, O'Kelly and Tallentire all contributed

to these campaigns, but their work was also focused on issues of representation that affected women outside of the art field, both north and south of the border.

Many of the same issues were also being addressed by Irish women through the production of film, activist video or broadcast media, as evidenced by the work of Vivienne Dick and Pat Murphy and also Anne Crilly and Margo Harkin of Derry Film and Video, a feminist film and video production group established in the mid-1980s. Studying first at Hornsey College of Art and then at the Royal College of Art, the Dublin-born, Belfast-educated filmmaker Pat Murphy directed two critically acclaimed feminist feature films in the early 1980s. Her films – *Maeve* (1981, co-directed with John Davies), a semi-autobiographical portrait of a young Belfast woman struggling to reconcile nationalism with feminism, and *Anne Devlin* (1984), a feminist retelling of a key event in Irish republican history – were widely shown in festivals, film clubs and arthouse cinemas outside Ireland. Murphy's work also figures prominently in theorisations of feminist and post-colonial film by Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen.[13] *Maeve* had been funded partly by the Experimental Film Fund of the British Film Institute and *Anne Devlin* was supported by the newly-established Irish Film Board but, by 1988, these funding avenues had closed and Murphy was unable to complete her next feature film (a biography of Nora Barnacle, the wife of James Joyce) until 2000.

Like Pat Murphy, Vivienne Dick first began working with film while based outside Ireland, receiving criti-

cal attention for her early Super 8 works featuring prominent women performers from the New York underground scene (including Adele Bertei, Lydia Lunch and Pat Place). Dick's early works were shot on Super 8, but she was drawn to the immediacy of video and her film *She Had Her Gun All Ready* (1978), features a sequence in which a performer (Lydia Lunch) studies her own image on a video monitor. In the early 1980s, Dick made several return visits to Ireland and one of her most ambitious works from this period, *Visibility Moderate* (1981) explored the vantage point of the Irish-American. Much of the film follows the journey of a glamorous young female protagonist, who visits scenic Irish landmarks and poses for the camera at heritage sites. But she also tours around decrepit inner city Dublin and attends a protest in support of Republican hunger strikers in the north with the film culminating in a statement to camera by a former political prisoner, condemning the mistreatment of women.

Although Dick wanted to establish herself as a filmmaker in Ireland, she ultimately chose to live in London, primarily so that she could access financial and social support for her practice as a filmmaker. In London, Dick became an active member of the London Filmmaker's Co-op and secured funding from the British Arts Council to make the 16mm film *Rothach* (1985), a poetic exploration of place and temporality, filmed in Ireland. Living in London also allowed Dick to expand her connections within the Irish art community. In 1987, her films *Rothach* and *Trailer* were shown as part of a screening programme that accompanied *Off the Map*, an impor-

tant group exhibition at the Chisenhale Gallery, featuring works by Hegarty, O'Kelly and Tallentire, (discussed below in more detail). Dick also chronicled many aspects of the London art scene at a key moment for Irish women artists. Her 16mm film *London Suite* (1989) funded and broadcast through Channel 4's 'Experimenta' season, captures both the appeal and the difficulty of London city life for women through semi-scripted interactions between a large cast of predominantly female performers.

Dick was not the only Irish feminist filmmaker to be supported by Channel 4 during the 1980s. As part of its public service mandate, the new channel (launched in 1982) recognised a regional network of non-profit making, often community-based, production groups or 'workshops'.[14] This initiative was intended to demonstrate the broadcaster's commitment to under-represented constituencies, and programming was either commissioned or purchased from the franchised production groups, typically for broadcast in the channel's *Eleventh Hour* or *People to People* slots. The workshop groups included Derry Film and Video (DFV), established by Anne Crilly and Margo Harkin in 1984. During this period, Crilly and Harkin produced several documentaries, including *Strip-searching – Security or Subjugation* (1984), on the conditions endured by political prisoners, and *Planning* (1985), on urban redevelopment in nationalist areas of Derry, and *Mother Ireland* (1988), exploring the representation of motherhood within nationalist discourse.[15] Despite their inclusion in the workshop programme, very few of DFV's produc-

tions were actually broadcast, partly because Crilly and Harkin would not make the adjustments required by broadcasting legislation (introduced in 1988) to censor the voices of those associated with proscribed organisations such as the Irish Republican Army.

Although DFV documentaries circulated among feminist networks, via independent distributors such as The Other Cinema and Cinema of Women,[16] their best known work is undoubtedly *Hush-A-Bye-Baby* (1989). The narrative of this feature-length drama is structured around the pregnancy of a young unmarried Catholic girl in Derry, with a cast that includes Sinead O'Connor. Significantly, the central characters cross the border, staying with a host family in an Irish-speaking part of Donegal to improve their language skills, allowing the filmmakers to explore how women are positioned in relation to Irish as well as British nationalism. In a particularly astute analysis of DFV's work, Jessica Scarlata emphasises that *Hush-A-Bye-Baby* is set in 1984, 'roughly a year after the abortion referendum (restricting women's reproductive rights) passed by a narrow margin in the Irish Republic'.[17] Although Britain's 1967 Abortion Act had decriminalised abortion under specific circumstances, Scarlata points out that it did not apply within the north of Ireland.[18] Crilly and Harkin's film seems to have been consciously set within the context of the mid-1980s conservative backlash since, as Scarlata notes, the lead character is shown watching the end credits of *Mother Ireland* on television, in a deliberately anachronistic gesture, since this documentary was not made until 1988.

Site, Voice and Early Video Works: Alanna O'Kelly

As these examples suggest, Irish women were actively using film and documentary video to effect political and social change in the early 1980s. While the north of Ireland functioned as a particularly important focus (and site) of feminist critiques, Irish women artists were also animated by other political causes, including the campaign for nuclear disarmament. Alanna O'Kelly is a key figure in the early history of Irish women's video art and was actively involved in women's networks, both in Ireland and elsewhere during the 1980s. Born in 1955, O'Kelly completed a BA in Fine Art at the National College of Art and Design (NCAD), Dublin in the late 1970s, studying with tutors such as Nigel Rolfe, a Dublin-based British artist working with performance, photography and time-based media. While NCAD lacked video production facilities at that time, O'Kelly knew that its graduates included Joe Comerford, one of several Irish filmmakers supported by the BFI's Experimental Film Fund.[19] Towards the end of her studies, in 1978, O'Kelly produced sculptural works near her home in Wexford

Fig. 1. Vivienne Dick, *London Suite*, 16mm film, 1989. [Courtesy of the artist.]

Fig. 2. Alanna O'Kelly, *Chant Down Greenham*, performance at Franklin Furnace 1987. Photograph: Raissa Page. [Courtesy of the artist.]

engage with the politics of site and in 1982, she devised a site-specific work, titled *City Images*, consisting of photographs projected onto the river Liffey over two nights. This project was a response to the cultural and social setting of O'Connell Bridge, an iconic and heavily-trafficked intersection in the centre of Dublin. By the mid-1980s, however, she was developing a more explicitly political engagement with the body and site, through performance and installation. O'Kelly's next work, *Chant Down Greenham* (1984–1988) first presented at the SFX Theatre in Dublin, marked her first use of keening, a type of wordless lament traditionally performed by women at Irish funerals. Her keening accompanied projected images of a human chain of protesters attempting to prevent the expansion of the cruise missile base at Greenham Common in Berkshire, England.[21]

O'Kelly continued to work with keening and her audiotape *Caoineadh Na Mairbh* [Lamenting the Dead] (1985), was included in *Divisions, Crossroads, Turns of Mind – Some New Irish Art* (1985–1987), an exhibition curated by Lucy Lippard that toured to several US cities.[22] Around this time, she completed her MFA at the Slade School of Art, working with tutors such as Stuart Brisley and Susan Hiller, and also produced her first video. *Still Beyond the Pale*, was devised in 1986 for an exhibition at the Royal Hospital Kilmainham in Dublin (now the location of the Irish Museum of Modern Art), and it included a video component, consisting solely of a close-up image of O'Kelly's eyes staring at the camera, accompanied by a voiceover.[23] O'Kelly's next work, *Lament*, 1987 was

and these were documented on video by Nigel Rolfe for assessment, marking her first close contact with this medium.

O'Kelly continued to develop sculptural responses to site and context and in 1980 her work was shown in *Without the Walls*, curated by prominent Irish art critic Dorothy Walker at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London as part of a festival of Irish art and culture staged at over forty London venues. O'Kelly was the only woman artist in this exhibition, which also included works by James Coleman, Nigel Rolfe and Noel Sheridan, and she recalls being questioned by other women artists about this gender imbalance at the opening.[20] Over the next few years, O'Kelly began to use photography, voice and sound to

made for exhibition at the Chisenhale Gallery in London as part of the exhibition *Off The Map*. It featured a video, subsequently exhibited and titled separately as *Dancing With My Shadow*, shot in the west coast of Ireland after the death of O'Kelly's mother. Struggling to cope with this loss, O'Kelly wrote a letter to her late mother on several sheets of almost translucent airmail paper and, in a spontaneous ritual action, submerged the paper in a rock pool. Finding that the saltwater fixed rather than dissolved the ink, she then recorded the floating paper with a VHS camera, accompanying the image with her own voice.

Reviewing *Lament* as part of the exhibition *Off the Map*, Sarah Kent describes how the abstract sounds of voice on the audio track transform into a recognisable song, with the words 'dancing with my shadow feeling kind of blue' gradually becoming audible. Kent observes that while this piece might 'sound sentimental', it is characterised by a 'spare economy' that is 'extremely powerful'.[24] *Dancing With My Shadow* was subsequently included, with a reworked audio track, in the 1988 exhibition *Selected Images* at the ICA in London. Developed by artist James Coleman in collaboration with curator Declan McGonagle, this was the only visual arts component of the second (and much smaller) iteration of the festival *A Sense of Ireland*, which focused on the intersection between image and narrative in Irish culture and also included film works by Vivienne Dick. *Dancing With My Shadow* also featured in the influential 1990 exhibition *A New Tradition - Irish Art of the Eighties*, cited at the outset of this chapter. O'Kelly continued to work with video in *No Colouring Can Deepen the Darkness of Truth* (1990). This three-monitor piece again incorporated sounds of keening, along with images of milk flowing from a breast, informed by O'Kelly's research on The Great Famine (1845–48). It was subsequently reconfigured within a larger project, entitled *The Country Blooms, a Garden and a Grave* (1992–25), which revisits the history of the famine and articulates a critique of present day inequalities.[25]

Fig. 3, Alanna O'Kelly, *Dancing With My Shadow*, 1987. [Courtesy of the artist.]

Fig. 4 Alanna O'Kelly, *No Colouring Can Deepen the Darkness of Truth,* 1990. [Courtesy of Alanna O'Kelly.]

Expanded Film and Video: Frances Hegarty

Like Alanna O'Kelly and Anne Tallentire, Frances Hegarty (b. 1946), grew up partly in the Irish countryside. But while Hegarty was still in her teens, she and her family left their home Teelin, County Donegal – a northern, rural and (then) Gaelic-speaking area of the Republic – for Glasgow, where she completed her secondary school education. Following a BA in Fine Art at Leeds Polytechnic (1969) and an MFA at Manchester Polytechnic (1970), Hegarty began teaching and over the next decade, she gravitated toward performance, experimenting with film as a means of augmenting her live presence. In November 1983, her expanded film performance *Ablative, Genitive, Dative* was presented in Belfast as part of *Three Days Of Performance Art*, at the Art & Research Exchange (17–19 November 1983). My discussion of it is based on a detailed account of the performance provided by Joan Fowler in a review for *Circa* magazine,[26] and documentation provided by Hegarty, including a telecined video of the film, which includes recorded sound of the artist's mother speaking and singing.

In her review of the live perform-ance at A.R.E., Fowler describes a small room filled with a 'maze' of paper screens, onto which three words – 'innocence', 'morality' and 'disillusion' – had been written in clear adhesive. Moving through this space, Hegarty revealed these words by covering the screens with powdered colour pigment, before she cut through them in an action that 'represented her journey back to the land of her childhood'.[27] Following these actions, the film was projected, depicting Hegarty in various locations, costumed to suggest two different modes of contemporary, fashionable femininity. She appears in jeans, holding a 16mm film camera, moving first through fields and then the interior of an ecclesiastical ruin, turning to face a man who seems to pursue her, holding a smaller film camera in front of his face. Hegarty's stance, as she confronts this approaching figure, is wide-legged and notably assertive. These scenes are intercut with other sequences in which Hegarty, her long hair hanging loose, wears a skirt and moves through a field laying a trail of soil and red pigment, in which seed-like objects are ritualistically planted.

Many of these actions were reiterated in the live performance, which included a male photographer who followed and recorded Hegarty, until (at the close of the live event) she took his camera and turned it on him. Hegarty's own notes on the performance also describe a final gesture in which a satchel of feathers are disgorged and this echoes a particularly striking film sequence – a close up of a woman's hands tearing the crotch of her jeans apart, before pulling out a mass of tiny feathers. Hegarty's performance is, according to Fowler,

clearly 'sited within post-Lacanian theory; it suggested that our individual consciousness as formed by our culture intervenes in the return to nature which ritual celebrates'.[28] Reflecting on *Ablative, Genitive, Dative* in an interview conducted for this article, Hegarty noted her interest in masquerade, a hugely important concept for many women artists and filmmakers seeking to reclaim narrative from a feminist perspective,[29] while also alluding to the history of video technology and its associations with surveillance and military-industrial research.

A concern with technology is even more pronounced in Hegarty's 1987 video installation *Groundswell.* Informed by feminist critiques of power, colonisation and militarisation (in relation to Greenham and other contested sites), this work explored parallels between the human body in crisis, as a consequence of disease and invasive medical treatment, and the contaminated or irradiated earth.[30] Devised for the exhibition *Off the Map* at the Chisenhale Gallery, this work consisted of a large, earth-covered mound, marked with powdered pigment, with a red glow emanating from a shallow central pit. The mound was surrounded by twenty domestic colour televisions, entirely wrapped in transparent plastic, displaying a 45 minute video. The video featured unedited action, primarily close-ups of a woman's hands, recorded using live studio effects.[31] The palms are pressed forcefully against glass, or formed into fists that knock or push on this surface, initially clean but then covered in soil, wrung together as though in anxiety or despair. At times, it appears as though the hands might

be reaching up from the soil, or even from within a grave. The only audio is an occasional jolt of abstract noise (possibly electronically generated or altered) synchronised with flashes of colour that appear on screen, blocking or disrupting the images of the hands.

Hegarty continued to use video alongside other media and her 1989 installation *Marital Orders* was exhibited as part of *The Wedding*, a group show at Mappin Art Gallery, Sheffield. The installation consisted of ten black and white photographs on aluminium and a 9 minute video work with audio.[32] Sounds of birdsong and a woman's voice, first humming and then singing the words of the song *She Moved through the Fair*, accompany images of a light-filled room, in which a wedding dress and veil are laid out upon a chair. In subsequent shots, a woman (Hegarty) appears wearing these garments, sitting on the chair and scattering fragments from a dark mass of soil gathered in her lap. This action is interspersed with eye line-matched close-up shots of Hegarty in two guises – as a bride wearing a white veil and a soldier wearing a dark combat helmet. Her mouth is not visible in these images and they were reproduced from the screen in ten photographs displayed either side of the video monitor in the installation at Mappin Gallery. These photographs deliberately emphasise the grid-like texture of the screen from which the images were made, suggesting an analogy between material technologies of video screen and fabric veil.

Marital Orders was, according to Hegarty, directly informed by Laura Mulvey's analysis of scopophilia,

exhibitionism, voyeurism in her widely-cited essay on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'.[33] It is possible to identify continuities in the use of clothing and ritualised action, with her earlier explorations of masquerade and (less directly) her exploration of militarism. But rather than engaging with military technologies of surveillance, or the environmental destruction wrought by the military-industrial complex, *Marital Orders* deals primarily with myths of heroism, strength and sacrifice. Hegarty was prompted to make this work following her own experience (as media consumer) of a specific incident of sectarian violence, in which 'two young British soldiers who got caught up in a republican funeral at Milltown cemetery in Belfast were pulled from the car and murdered'.[34] In an insightful interview, conducted by Shirley MacWilliam, Hegarty frames *Marital Orders* both as an exploration of romantic idealism (in relation to war and love) and as a response to the representation of violence in the news media, citing her shock of 'actually seeing, on the news, the soldiers being dragged from the car'.[35] The production proc-

ess used in the realisation of the photographic images, derived from close-up images of Hegarty in costume, as bride and as soldier, was an attempt to create a distance between action and image, retaining if not attenuating the evidence of mediation.

In 1990, Hegarty completed the 7 minute single channel video *Turas* [Journey] which revisited some of the thematics, of migration and language loss, explored in *Ablative, Genitive, Dative*. If the title of this earlier work suggests an academic relationship to language, then *Turas* directly addresses Hegarty's distance from her mother tongue. *Turas* is composed from Super 8 footage shot in 1987 and includes sequences in which Hegarty traces the route of the River Foyle from its estuary to its source in Lough Finn, Co. Donegal, gathering water from the mouth and transporting it to the source. Shots of the river are interspersed with interior scenes in which Hegarty and her mother sit facing each other and perform a series of actions and interactions, including an exchange in Gaelic (which is not translated). The camera dwells on details of bodies and gestures and at

one moment, the younger woman's fingers lightly touch her mother's throat as though trying to learn speech through touch. In a rapidly edited sequence, images of ears, hands, throats, are intercut and over-laid with close-ups of the Foyle river.

By comparison with Hegarty's previous works, *Turas* makes its subject matter notably explicit, even for those without access to the Irish (Gaelic) language. These concerns are particularly evident in a series of textual inserts, (including phrases such as 're learn language / re gain mothertongue / re possess speech / re cover culture / re claim history'), which appear on screen at various intervals. In terms of both layout and content, these textual inserts are suggestive of grammar exercises and this clinical and detached display of text clearly differs from the ritualised revelation of words in *Ablative, Genitive, Dative,* suggesting a more self-consciously analytical approach to language. *Turas* was edited at Sheffield

Independent Film, an important production resource for Hegarty and many other women artists and film-makers based in the north of England during this period.[36] As with several of Hegarty's early works, *Turas* was exhibited in several iterations, including a screening in LUX cinema in the early 1990s and two different installation versions, one of which combined video projection with transparencies in light-boxes arrayed on the floor. Some of these installation versions included only the language learning and exchange scenes, omitting the actions performed along the route of the river Foyle.

Actions, Words and Video Images: Anne Tallentire

A focus on language, particularly in its written form, is also apparent in the work of Anne Tallentire, which encompasses performance, photography, video and sculptural installation. Born (in 1949) and raised in Co. Armagh, in

Fig. 6. Frances Hegarty, *Marital Orders*, 1988, composite installation view. [Photos and photomontage: Andrew Stones; copyright © Frances Hegarty 1988, 2018.]

Fig. 7. Frances Hegarty, *Turas,* 1990, still images from single-screen video film and installation projection. [Photo: copyright © Frances Hegarty 1990.]

the north of Ireland (as distinct from the Republic of Ireland), Tallentire moved to London in the mid 1980s, completing her postgraduate studies at the Slade in 1988.[37] During her time at the Slade, Tallentire became very actively involved with the extended community of Irish women artists in England and Ireland. In 1987, she collaborated with Alanna O'Kelly (also studying at the Slade) on the video performance *Forbidden Heroines*, which was devised for *Live London Film Makers Co-op (Channel 6)*, an event curated by the artist Tina Keane. Shortly after the Co-op event, the performance was restaged to camera and *Forbidden Heroines* now exists as a stand-alone videotape by Tallentire (17 mins, silent, BW, 1987). The tape opens with a close-up of Tallentire's hands mixing a white substance in a bowl, manipulating it with her hands and then, as the camera pulls back, spreading it over her face and neck. The substance, which might be flour or plaster, gradually hardens and cracks as Tallentire contorts her face with eyes closed, grimacing in discomfort.

During 1986, Tallentire and O'Kelly were also instrumental in the formation of the Irish Women Artists' Group, which hosted a conference on Irish women's art at the Women Artists' Slide Library in London. The conference included papers and presentations from women artists working in range of media, such as Anne Carlisle, Liadin Cooke, Pauline Cummins and Aileen MacKeogh, and it was accompanied by an open submission exhibition of work by women artists, entitled *Eye to Eye*.[38] Tallentire and several members of the Irish Women Artists' Group also partici-

pated in *Off The Map*, an exhibition at the Chisenhale Gallery (5 August – 22 August 1987) featuring mixed media work by six artists. The press release describes the concerns of the group as 'an examination of the contradictory experience of being located between cultures and of not only being Irish but female in Britain in 1987' noting a 'desire to lay tracks and establish territories [...] as metaphor of choosing and reconstructing identity within an adopted culture'.[39] *Off The Map* included works by Frances Hegarty, Carole Key, Rose Ann McGreevy, Rosemarie McGoldrick, Alanna O'Kelly and Anne Tallentire and it was accompanied by a screening of experimental films (Super 8 and 16mm) by Vivienne Dick, Annie Fahnan, Oonagh Hyland and Moira Sweeney, most of whom were then living and working in London.

Altered Tracks (1987), Tallentire's contribution to *Off The Map*, was an installation and performance work, including recorded audio. Photographs of stones on a map of Tallentire's Armagh homeland were installed on the walls of the gallery and these functioned as the backdrop to a live performance in the gallery. In this performance, Tallentire walked through the space barefoot, drawing lines in charcoal on the concrete floor, using the palm of her own hand as a guide. She then placed stones at various points on the floor markings. These actions were performed in conjunction with an audio recording of 'palmistry interpretations', read by 'one voice in an English intonation and one Irish accented'.[40] The material leftovers of the performance remained in the gallery for the duration of the exhibition – a practice that Tallentire

generally continues in her performance work. *Altered Tracks* was interpreted very directly by Sarah Kent, in her review of *Off The Map*, as a comment on the future of the north of Ireland, and the possibility of redrawing or rethinking the border.[41]

Tallentire's Slade Postgraduate Fine Art Media final show in 1988 included a work with a video component, called *Bound Words, Stolen Honey*, which consists of an installation of hand-made wallpaper, depicting a pattern based upon an image of the spines of books in Senate House Library, London; a wooden box and a sheet of glass placed over a sanded and scrubbed floor; and a hand-bound book containing photocopied transcripts of 'bee-judgements', written in Ancient Irish, Modern Irish and English. These 'judgements' concern the keeping and management of bees and they form part of the *Brehon Laws*, statutes that governed everyday life in early Medieval Ireland. A 7 minute video, displayed on a monitor as part of the installation, shows a hand turning the pages of a sun-dappled book, repeatedly encountering the same text, with the distant sounds of what might be passing traffic. This text, excerpted from *The Life of the Bee* (1901) by the Belgian writer Maurice Maeterlinck, refers to an 'observational' beehive made of glass, which allows the author to study the behaviour of city-dwelling bees.

Altered Tracks and *Bound Words, Stolen Honey* both employ simple actions and gestures to explore practices and systems used to organise and transmit knowledge concerning habitats. During this period, Tallentire was becoming particularly interested in Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of*

Fig. 8. Anne Tallentire, *Altered Tracks*, 1987, performance (20 minutes) and installation; photographs 100x100m, sound, charcoal. Off The Map, Chisenhale Gallery, London. [Courtesy of the artist.]

Everyday Life (1984) and his ideas continued to shape aspects of her approach to action and site. *The Gap of Two Birds*, 1988, which was first presented in an exhibition curated by David Thorp at The Showroom in London, also communicates an ongoing concern with the performativity and inadequacy of written language. The gallery installation included a single channel 7 minute BW video, consisting of footage shot on Super 8, in a rural part of Ireland. As with many of Tallentire's moving image works, it depicts relatively simple actions, incorporating details of hands, but is much more overtly cinematic in its structure than (for example) the earlier perform-

Fig. 9. Anne Tallentire, *Bound Words, Stolen Honey*, installation; wallpaper, glass, video 7 minutes, book, box, beeswax. 1988 Fine Art Media postgraduate exhibition, The Slade School of Fine Art, London. [Courtesy of the artist.]

ance video *Forbidden Heroines*. In *The Gap of Two Birds*, the camera is often directed downwards at Tallentire's feet as she traces a route through barren, rocky terrain. According to Jean Fisher, Tallentire consciously did not look through the viewfinder of her handheld camera as she walked and filmed her route,[42] treating the camera rather as an extension of her entire body. Yet even if not conventionally composed by eye, the filmic image is highly legible and the camera often seems to dwell upon signs of habitation and infrastructure in this bleak landscape, such as pathways, roads and water pipes, undercutting the initial impression of wilderness.

Transferred to video, Tallentire's film was displayed as a loop on a monitor in the gallery along with several glass panels, which were inscribed with the words 'NORTH and 'SOUTH'. During a five hour performance, she made rubbings in charcoal from the glass panels onto sheets of white paper. The rubbings were then offered by Tallentire to audience members, who were then invited to explain their choice of either 'NORTH' or 'SOUTH', a process that seems intended to complicate (through abstraction as well as interaction) any easy opposition suggested by these designations. Although she has rarely engaged in such direct interaction with her audiences, Tallentire has continued to investigate the relationship between performed action, site and communication, sometimes combining video with newer technologies. Her 1994 work *Inscribe I*, for example, used ISDN to establish a connection between two urban spaces that were usually closed to the public, by transmitting documentation of actions performed to camera in a British Telecom building (in London) to a viewing audience located in a telecommunications exchange in Dublin.

Conclusion: Collaboration and Continuity

As already noted, only a relatively small number of Irish women artists actually worked directly with video in the 1980s. Nonetheless, it was a vitally important medium for women artists and activists seeking to analyse and challenge structures of representation from both feminist and post-colonial perspectives. Sharing a common interest in language, migration, and place, Hegarty, O'Kelly and Tallentire all integrated video with other non-tra-

ditional media, including (for example) live performance, audio, installation, text and photography. They repeatedly used video, or film transferred to video for exhibition, as a way to document their own bodies engaged in semi-choreographed movements or tasks, ranging from quasi-ritualistic gestures to more mundane actions. These actions, gestures, and rituals were performed to camera in relatively neutral studio-like or white cube environments, as in the case of Tallentire's *Forbidden Heroines*, or they were devised in relation to specific sites or situations, at some remove from the gallery. In some of the works discussed, such as *Dancing with My Shadow* by O'Kelly or *The Gap of Two Birds* by Tallentire, video seems to have functioned partly as a pragmatic mechanism for integrating recorded site-responsive performance into the space of the gallery, for presentation alongside objects or live actions. But other works, particularly by Hegarty, exploit the aesthetic properties of video or its cultural associations with television and news media. *Marital Orders* for example, was conceived as a response to the experience of viewing TV news, drawing attention to the screen as boundary. Hegarty also embraced the technical capacities of live video image processing in *Groundswell,* and subsequently used video to integrate text with choreographed action in *Turas*.

All three artists were (and still are) highly attentive to the ways in which written or spoken language can shape and sometimes constrain the articulation of personal and historical experiences, with O'Kelly and Hegarty both drawing on Irish folk traditions in their use of song, speech, and other forms

of sound. O'Kelly, for example, used the traditional Irish lament form of keening to suggest continuities between cultural and personal loss, while also recasting this folk practice as a contemporary tool of political protest, which could be deployed in many contexts (against militarism, or cultural amnesia). As Katy Deepwell has noted, many Irish women artists were interested in language and motherhood,[43] and these concerns are especially evident in video works by both O'Kelly and Hegarty. O'Kelly often favoured wordless verbal communication, but her video *Dancing with My Shadow* was specifically prompted by the writing of a letter, to her deceased mother. Hegarty's videos tend, on the whole, to place equal emphasis on verbal and written communication, as evidenced by expanded the film performance *Ablative, Genitive, Dative*, which involved the performative revelation of hidden words on pigmented paper screens, accompanied by sounds of her mother speaking and singing. In *Turas*, the Irish language is described quite literally as a 'mother tongue', and the video seems to suggest

Fig. 10. Anne Tallentire, *The Gap of Two Birds*, 1988, performance (5 hours) and installation; video, wooden screen 244 x 244cm, glass, text on acetate, paper, charcoal, photographs. The Showroom, London. [Courtesy of the artist.]

parallels between Hegarty's mother's body and the river Foyle, as sources. But even through she refers to the recovery of lost history and identity, Hegarty does not entirely naturalise the acquisition of the Irish language. Instead, she stages an almost clinical scenario of choreographed 'learning'; she itemises her own aspirations (to 're cover' language) on screen and engages in a quasi-scientific transposition of water from the river's mouth to its source.

If Hegarty's work often hints at gaps in meaning, whether through choreography and typography, then Tallentire is even more attuned to cultural and social processes that complicate or disrupt communication and knowledge production. Tallentire is particularly sensitive to acts of naming and to the institutional structures that intersect with everyday behaviours, habits and practices. These concerns are apparent both in *Bound Words, Stolen Honey*, with its evocations of hives and libraries, and in *The Gap of Two Birds*, which performatively explores divisions of space, and place, through the interplay of live and recorded actions. The filmic component of *The Gap of Two Birds* potentially invites comparison with both *Turas* and *Dancing with My Shadow*, since all three works incorporate performative responses to places that are predominantly rural and also watery. Yet whereas Hegarty and O'Kelly are attracted toward ostensibly natural flows of water, such as rivers and the sea, Tallentire is more attentive to the human made structures that determine these flows.

Perhaps coincidentally, Hegarty,

O'Kelly and Tallentire have all been drawn toward collaborative modes of production in recent decades, establishing shared practices with male peers. In 1993, for example, Anne Tallentire formed 'work-seth/tallentire', a collaborative practice with the British artist John Seth, while also continuing to produce and exhibit work under her own name. Since 1997, Fran Hegarty has produced much of her work with Andrew Stones, co-authoring numerous video, installation and public art works under the name Hegarty and Stones, in addition to solo projects.[44] Alanna O'Kelly has also collaborated with the artists Brian Hand and Orla Ryan, realising a public art commission in 2016 as the group Stormy Petrel/Guairdeall. These collaborations are worthy of attention in their own right, and it would be interesting to know if similar trajectories might be traced in the practices of women artists based elsewhere in Europe. Equally, the interconnections during the 1970s and 1980s between women's video art and other forms of critical media practice (ranging from experimental film to activist documentary and feature drama) may merit further consideration, both within and beyond the Irish context. These are just some of the many questions that might be explored, and answered, through shared histories of European women's video art.

Endnotes

1. Joan Fowler, 'Speaking of Gender ... Expressionism, Feminism and Sexuality', in *A New Tradition: Irish Art of the Eighties* (Dublin: Douglas Hyde Gallery, 1990), p. 56.

2. *Ibidem*.

3. Kate Antonik-Parsons, 'The Development of Performance Art in the 1980s and the Early 1990s' in Áine Phillips (ed.), *Performance Art in Ireland: A History* (London and Bristol: Live Art Development Agency and Intellect, 2015), p.177.

4. While there are no archives or study collections focused on Irish artists' moving image, MExIndex, a modestly resourced, but nonetheless important database of Irish artists' moving image was established in 2015. It provides information on the work of several women artists active in the 1980s, including Anne Tallentire and Vivienne Dick. See http://www.mexindex.ie/artists/ (accessed 4 April 2017). I discuss the absence of archives and study resources dedicated to Irish artists' moving image in 'Archiving Irish and British Artists' Video: A Conversation between Maeve Connolly and REWIND researchers Stephen Partridge and Adam Lockhart', *MIRAJ*, v. 5, n. 1&2, 2016, pp. 204–215.

5. Irish artists working with the moving image have represented Ireland at many major international exhibitions, including the São Paulo Biennial (Alanna O'Kelly in 1996, Clare Langan in 2002, and Desperate Otimists in 2004) and the Venice Biennale (Jaki Irvine in 1997, Anne Tallentire in 1999, Grace Weir and Siobhan Hapaska in 2001, Gerard Byrne in 2007, Kennedy Browne in 2009, Richard Mosse in 2013, Sean Lynch in 2015 and Jesse Jones in 2017).

6. I have cited many of the key sources on Irish women's video art in this chapter, including catalogue essays, published interviews and exhibition reviews. Other sources include Shirley MacWilliam, 'Screen and Screen Again', *Circa,* n. 100, Summer 2002, pp. 42–49, and various contributions to the multi-volume anthology *Art and Architecture of Ireland* (New Haven: Royal Irish Academy and Yale University Press, 2014). My research also draws upon email correspondence and personal interviews with Frances Hegarty, Alanna O'Kelly and Anne Tallentire, conducted in late 2016 and early 2017.

7. There was a short-lived attempt to establish a cooperative-type initiative at Project Arts Centre in Dublin around 1976. See Maeve Connolly, 'Sighting an Irish Avant-garde in the Intersection of Local and International Film Cultures', *Boundary 2: International Journal of Literature and Culture*, v. 31, n. 1, Spring 2004, pp. 244–265.

8. For a discussion of this context see Peter Murray, 'Introduction', in Peter Murray (ed.), *0044 – Irish Artists in Britain* (Cork: Crawford Municipal Gallery, 1999), pp. 9–14.

9. For a history of this organisation, see Chris Coppock, 'A.R.E. – Acronyms, Community Arts and Stiff Little Fingers', *The Vacuum*, n. 11, 2003. http://www.thevacuum.org.uk/issues/issues0120/issue11/is11artartres.html (accessed 4 April 2017])

10. Born in County Antrim, Northern Ireland, in 1956, Carlisle was editor of *Circa* from 1983 to 1989. See Jane Spender's profile, 'Anne Carlisle', in the exhibition catalogue (edited by Peter Murray) *0044 – Irish Artists in Britain*, pp. 24–31. See also my discussion of Carlisle's media artwork *Another Standard* (1988) in 'Artangel and the Changing Mediascape of Public Art', *Journal of Curatorial Studies,* v. 2, n. 2, 2013, pp. 204–205.

11. For discussion of some key exhibitions and initiatives see Katy Deepwell, *Dialogues: Women Artists from Ireland* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2005), p. 4.

12. This work involved images of traditional knitted textile patterns projected onto male bodies. It was subsequently transferred to video and included in the exhibition *A New Tradition: Irish Art of the '80s*, at the Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin. In 1992, Cummins and Louise Walsh realised *Sounding the Depths: A Collaborative Installation at IMMA*, consisting of a back-projected video, and a series of images on light boxes, accompanied by a soundtrack, exploring attitudes toward the representation of the female body.

13. Claire Johnston, 'Maeve', *Screen*, v. 22, n. 4, Winter 1982, pp. 54–71; and Paul Willemen, 'An Avant Garde for the Eighties', *Framework,* 24,1984, pp. 53–73.

14. For analysis and documentation relating to the 'workshop' programme, see Margaret Dickinson, *Rogue Reels*: *Oppositional Film in Britain, 1945–90* (London: BFI Publishing, 1999).

15. Belinda Loftus, 'Review of *Mother Ireland'*, *Circa*, n. 44 (March/April 1989), pp. 33–34 and p. 99.

16. See Johnny Gogan, 'Derry Film and Video Collective', *Film Base News*, n. 3 (September/October 1987), pp. 10–11.

17. Jessica Scarlata, *Rethinking Occupied Ireland: Gender and Incarceration in Contemporary Irish Film*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014), p. 67.

18. Scarlata, p. 6

19. See Connolly, 'Sighting an Irish Avant-garde in the Intersection of Local and International Film Cultures', pp. 253–254.

20. Alanna O'Kelly provided details of this and other early works in a personal interview, 16 January 2017.

21. O'Kelly was one of many artists inspired by, or engaged in, the protests at Greenham Common in the early 1980s. Jean Fisher discusses both *Chant Down Greenham* and a video by Tina Keane (a British artist of Irish descent), entitled *In Our Hands, Greenham* (1984), in 'Reflections on Echo: Notes Towards a Dialogue on Sound by Women Artists', in *Vampire in the Text: Narratives of Contemporary Art* (London: Iniva, 2003), pp. 165–166.

22. This exhibition also included work by Anne Carlisle.

23. The video component of *Still Beyond the Pale* is not available to view, as it seems to have been lost (the circumstances are unclear). The work was described to me by Alanna O'Kelly (interviewed by phone on 16 January 2017).

24. Sarah Kent, 'Preview', *Time Out*, 13 August 1987. Kent's text is one of several documents included in the Chisenhale Gallery's online archive of materials relating to *Off the Map*. http://chisenhale.org.uk/archive/exhibitions/index.php?id=158 (accessed 4 April 2017).

25. This work won a major prize when first exhibited and continues to be recognised as one of the most important responses to the legacy of famine by an Irish artist. See Catherine Marshall, 'Modern Ireland in 100 Artworks: 1994 – The Country Blooms, A Garden and a Grave by Alanna O'Kelly', *The Irish Times*, 21 May 2016. http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/modern-ireland-in-100-artworks-1994-the-country-blooms-a-garden-and-a-grave-by-alanna-o-kelly-1.2655006 (accessed 4 April 2017).

26. Joan Fowler, 'Three Days of Live Art, 22 Lombard Street, Belfast. 17–19 November, 1983', *Circa*, No. 14, January–February, 1984, pp. 38–40. Hegarty is credited as Frances Saunders in this review.

27. *Ibidem*, p. 39.

28. *Ibidem*.

29. As a lecturer at Psalter Lane Art School (subsequently absorbed into Sheffield Hallam University) in the 1970s and 1980s, Hegarty led the establishment of a department of performance art and hosted talks by numerous visiting women artists including Alanna O'Kelly as well as Helen Chadwick, Mona Hatoum, Suzanne Lacey and Carolee Schneeman.

30. In documentation accompanying this work, Hegarty specifically cites the actions and statements of the Greenham Common women activists, in addition to the writings of theorists such as Julia Kristeva, Lucy Irigaray, Elaine Showalter and Susan Sontag.

31. Only some of the original *Groundswell* master tape is currently playable – these sections were digitised and restored by Frances Hegarty and Andrew Stones and made available for me to view (online) as part of the research process for this chapter.

32. Elements of this work have also been exhibited separately, and the videotape was broadcast on Yorkshire TV. The original *Marital Orders* master tape is currently only partially playable and the clearest sections were digitised and restored by Frances Hegarty and Andrew Stones and made available for me to view (online) as part of this research process.

33. Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, v. 16, n. 3, Autumn 1975, pp. 6–18.

34. Hegarty, 'Frances Hegarty: Multiple and Transparent Images – interview by Shirley MacWilliam', in Peter Murray (ed.), *0044 – Irish Artists in Britain* (Cork: Crawford Municipal Gallery, 1999), p. 81.

35. *Ibidem*.

36. Sheffield Independent Film was founded in 1976–77 by some of the same women filmmakers responsible for establishing Sheffield Film Co-op (in 1973). See the 'Sheffield Film Co-op' interview and chronology in Dickinson, *Rogue Reels*, pp. 289–303.

37. Tallentire noted her interest in working with Lis Rhodes, Stuart Brisley, Susan Hiller, all of whom were then teaching at the Slade. Personal interview with Anne Tallentire, Dublin, 12 December 2016.

38. This exhibition is cited by Deepwell, *Dialogues,* and Fowler, 'Speaking of Gender...Expressionism, Feminism and Sexuality'.

39. The press release is included in Chisenhale Gallery's online archive of materials relating to *Off the Map*. http://chisenhale.org.uk/archive/exhibitions/index.php?id=158 (accessed 4 April 2017).

40. A description of this work, provided by Tallentire can be found in the biographies section of Áine Phillips (ed.), *Performance Art in Ireland: A History* (London and Bristol: Live Art Development Agency and Intellect, 2015), p. 300.

41. Sarah Kent, 'Preview', *Time Out*, 13 August 1987.

42. Jean Fisher, 'Dancing on a Tightrope (For Anne Tallentire)', in Valerie Connor (ed.), *Anne Tallentire* (Dublin: Project Press, 1999). This publication also included essays on Tallentire's work by John Seth and Sabina Sharkey.

43. Deepwell, *Dialogues*, p. 5.

44. *Hegarty* had a solo retrospective titled *Self-Portrait* at The Model and Niland Gallery in Sligo, Ireland in 2003.