NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN

FACULTY OF FINE ART

DEPARTMENT OF SCULPTURE

'TURAS': AN INTERRUPTION OF CONTINUITY

BY

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SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART
AND DESIGN AND COMPLIMENTARY STUDIES IN CANDIDACY
FOR THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF HISTORY OF ART WITH
FINE ART (SCULPTURE) 1996

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis will look at Frances Hegarty's video *Turas* where it explores the complexity of her identity as an Irish woman immigrant and artist. Bearing in mind that there are many different features underlying such an investigation, I propose to draw out and discuss some of these concerns and their implications as articulated by Hegarty.

The reality for many Irish people in a multicultural British society is a harsh one where they frequently face racial discrimination. Indeed, racism in Britain assigns value to real or imaginary differences (of 'race'), for the benefit of the British and at the expense of its victims, in order to justify its aggression and privileging. Where many Irish people face racial abuse in Britain as a multicultural society, the geographical proximity of both nations and the difficult political situation between them point to the complexities which face many Irish immigrants. For reprisals within Britain resulting from its colonial and post-colonial connection to Ireland greatly effect the living and working situation of the Irish residing in Britain as "they find themselves in a no-win situation" *(O'Faolain, 1996, P. 1)*.

While the Irish people in general face immense difficulties in Britain, the identities of Irish women are further complicated where they:

> ...are twice dispossessed.
> Disremembered, Unremembered.
> No body, so to speak.
> No past to speak of.
> Unremembering our history of absence,
> sign of our existence.
> *(Smyth, 1989, P. 37)*

Defined by two political and cultural realities: the imprint of colonialism (racism) and a patriarchally induced otherness (sexism), they are doubly colonised and marginalised.

From the 1970s onwards, numerous people in Britain had begun informing themselves and others as to the oppressive attitudes which immigrants faced. Various groups and organisations were set up to forefront the subjugations. With the support of these groups, new attitudes and plans for the future were formed.

Within this thesis, I will deal with how this consciousness raising, evident in many cultural groups throughout Britain, effected Irish women within the field of visual representation. For as a result of such initiatives numerous Irish women artists began looking at and exploring their circumstances as Irish women immigrants in Britain. Concepts of cultural dislocation and heritage therefore, became immensely significant to these women. Kay Walkingstick in a similar situation as a descendant from Cherokee Indians in America, describes the importance of heritage to her art: "It is who I am. Art is a portrait of the artist's thought processes, sense of self, sense of place in the world.... my identity as an Indian (woman) artist is crucial", *(Walkingstick in Valentino, 1994, P. 63)*.

Indeed, Irish artist Frances Hegarty undertook an investigation of her cultural dislocation through the intersection of her family history with broader social movements. This exploration has to date, resulted in three projects *Teanga,* (1990), *Turas,* (1991), *Gold,* (1994) and most recently *Voice Over,* (1995).

For the purpose of this thesis, I propose to explore *Turas* as an example and fruition of much inquiry into the oppressive nature of British patriarchal systems. I will investigate its negotiation of a gap between women and the event of her subjugation in order to articulate an analysis of how some women are positioned in the category of 'Irish woman'.

It is from this premise that I will discuss the narrative formation of Frances Hegarty's piece as it critiques those of the dominant film and video industry.

From a further analysis of *Turas,* I also explore the appearance of notions of 'myth' and 'Irishness' as they are upheld and historically defined by colonial systems of reference. Through this discussion, I propose that the presence of these concepts within the video lead to complexities that can in fact, allow for problematic readings of the piece contrary to the intentions of Frances Hegarty. However, I will also outline how she proposes to subvert these difficulties by incorporating them into the entire video narrative.

Concurrent to the intentions of Hegarty's *Turas*, as a site of colonial contestation, is then her proposal to re-appropriate the Irish language. This inclusion and exploration will therefore, be discussed as an important aspect of her piece. Within my investigation of this particular trait in *Turas* I will refer to discourses of 'nativism' and 'ethnic absolutism' as they effect the Irish situation in Britain. This discussion will also take into account an analysis of how language operates as a structure of signifiers.

Finally, I will situate the main underlying theme of *Turas*, as it is mirrored in the re-appropriation of the 'mothertongue': Irish language and identity.
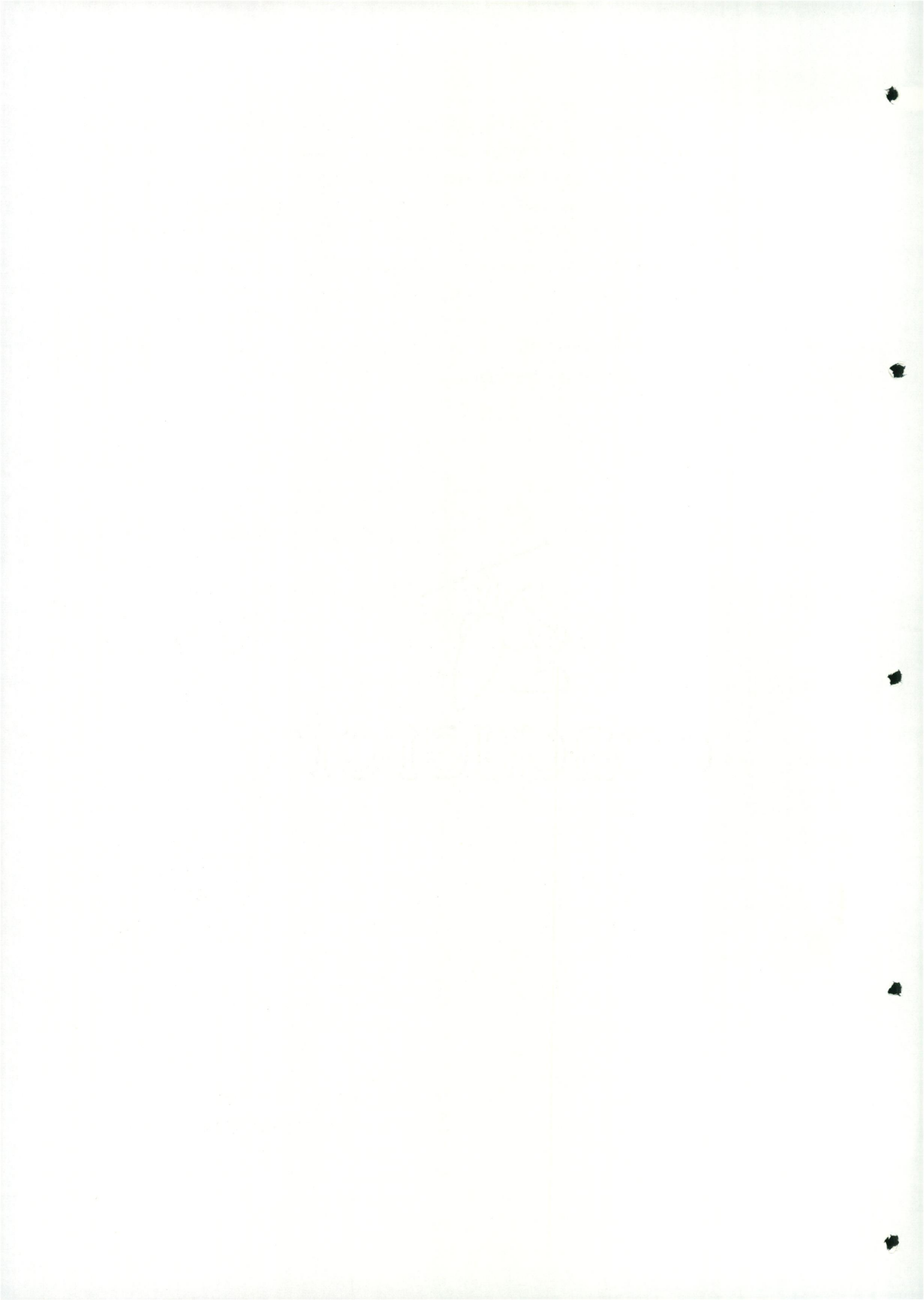
CHAPTER ONE

> During the nineteenth century, the majority of Irish women (in Britain) lived to a greater or lesser extent in poverty... In the 1960s, women and children bore the full brunt of poverty, insecurity and resentment when they were included in rehousing schemes from condemned property... against a backdrop of both economic recession and rising immigration from Ireland (Irish women) in London in the 1980s... continued to experience difficult conditions from the white British-born majority.
>
> *(Walter, 1988, p.8)*

This quotation points to the discrimination and subjugation Irish women faced in Britain over the last hundred and fifty years and is included here as a point of departure for my thesis. For the oppressive histories that have been a part of Irish women's lives in Britain for quite some time, necessitated an acknowledgement of them for what they were: deliberate refusals of their culture and needs as women.

In this first chapter, I will outline how Irish women artists, as a result of general attempts to undermine these subjugations, began recognising and exploring their circumstances. I will take into account events which occurred within a specifically feminine Irish field of visual culture as effected by other relevant ones in the field as a whole. This discussion will culminate in a description and investigation of *Turas*, as a specific response by Frances Hegarty to the restrictive implications of dominant ideological systems in Britain.

Concurrent to this oppression of Irish women was a maintained ignorance that hindered them from realising their situation and producing a means to challenge it. Indeed very little official exploratory documentation existed or exists relating to the situation of Irish immigrants who settle in Britain. Even less information is available concerning the working and living standards of Irish women once they leave Ireland. However, a statistical report complied by Bronwen Walter in 1988 describes Irish women living in London as "doubly invisible", their existence frequently unrecognised and whose work is mostly hidden in homes, offices and hospitals, *(Walter, 1988, p.7)*

While such statistical reports increased the recognition of Irish women in Britain, they also, by their nature, created a rigid interpretation of what it was like to be an

Irish woman. Operating under the guise of objectivity such studies reduced the complexity and psychological impact of assimilation and discrimination in Britain. Many women researchers argue for qualitative research methods which they suggest would allow for a more complex exploration of the issues at hand. This suggestion is taken up and articulated by Mary Lennon, Marie McAdam and Joanne O'Brien, three Irish women immigrants in Across the Water. This book is designed to give a more particular voice to the seldom explored personal and psychological aspects of assimilation in Britain. It also highlights the women's stories because of their significance to studies of Irish immigration in Britain: "we knew without our experiences the overall picture is inadequate and distorted", *(Lennon, McAdam, O'Brien (eds.), 1988, p10).* The information composited by these women can be seen to signify the various day to day emotional realities experienced by many Irish women in Britain. As a consequence of much racist and sexist opinions, many examples of anguish and frustration are in evidence. Una Cooper's ongoing ordeal in the search for decent housing is significant recalling a time when advertisements in every shop window read: "No coloured or Irish need apply", *(Lennon, McAdam, O'Brien (eds.), 1988, p.141)*

Compilations such as Across the Water should be seen as the cause and/or effect of an increased visibility of Irish women in Britain during the late 1980s. That there were many changes taking place with regard to women in the Irish community during this period is indicative of an increased awareness of their subjugation. This recognition was mostly due to wider political and social investigations taking place within Britain. During the 1970s many mainly white middle-class women initiated explorations of their identities as they began comprehending them to be constructed by the dominant order's desire to place these within a pre-ordained and oppressive category.

These explorations in turn led to more specific struggles by women within ethnic groups such as the 'Black' (Afro-Caribbean) community. A desire for recognition and change by most Afro-Caribbean women in Britain became visible in the late 1970s and early 1980s, where many support groups were founded specifically by and for 'Black' women. Indeed many of these women began, as a result of their struggles against racism, to explore the specifically feminine culturally based implications of their dislocation. Where renewals and a re-appropriation of their
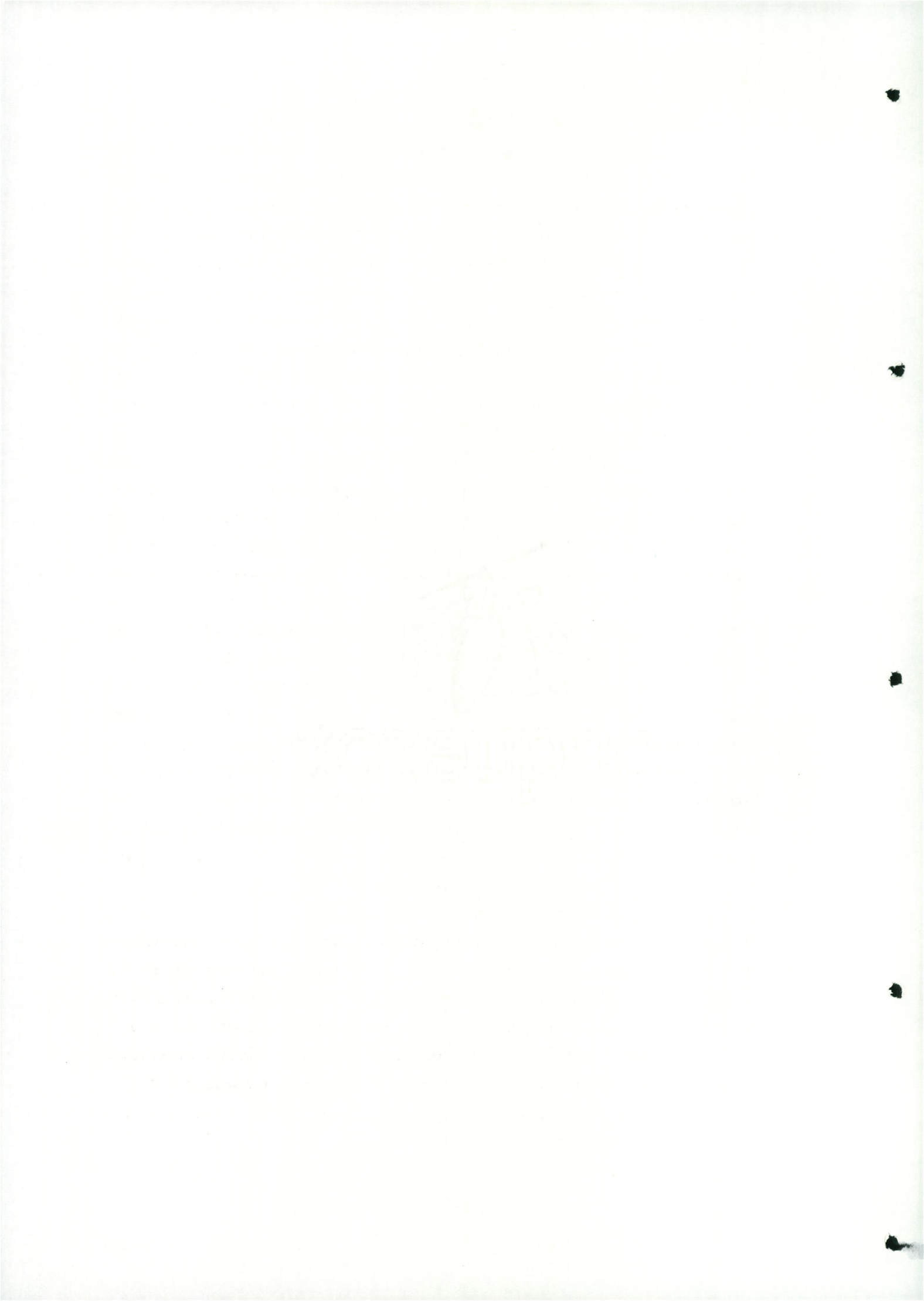
heritage followed on from these struggles they also culminated in renovations of 'ethnicity' as a relevant expression for their new and unfamiliar identities. "Ethnicity, in our times, is beginning to carry other meanings, and to define a new space for identity", (Hall, 1987, p.46).

The importance of these ethnic tendencies reverberated through the Irish female community as a whole amassing in similar formations of groups and systems of support. The repercussions within the feminine specific domain of visual culture for the purpose of this thesis, then becomes extremely significant. For as numerous Afro-Caribbean women had begun tackling their cultural dislocation through the field of visual representation, so too many Irish women followed suit initiating similar explorations.

Of consequence to these investigations was <u>Eye to Eye</u>: a project which grew out of a lack of representation for Irish women artists in Britain. Founded in 1985 as a collaboration between the Women's Artists Slide Library and Anne Tallentire, it culminated in a two day slide show (as part of International Women's Week) and the setting up of I.W.A.G. The Irish Women's Artist Group was formed in 1986 to help break down the isolation, raise the profile of and provide support for Irish women artists, *(Tallentire, 1985, p.3.)*. I.W.A.G. organised the 'Prism I and II' exhibition in the same year and, with a much reduced group, the 'Off the Map' exhibition in 1987. While the first show consisted of the various unconnected work of twenty-six artists, the second saw six women locate themselves specifically in an "investigation of the contradictory experience of being not only Irish but female in Britain in 1987," *(Hegarty in Off the Map, 1987, p.5.)*. It was from this context that Irish born artist, Anne Tallentire viewed 'Off the Map' as a forum for her "to challenge some of the visual clichés that surrounded Irish culture and explode the sources of these identities," *(McLoughlin, taped interview, 1996)*.

The increased visibility and group consciousness resulting from the formulation of I.W.A.G. and the exhibitions which ensued, gave artists like Frances Hegarty the support and encouragement necessary to explore her identity. These investigations culminated in the videos, *Turas*, (Journey) made in 1990, *Teanga* (Tongue/language) in 1991, *Gold* produced in 1994 and most recently, *Voice Over* in 1995. For the purpose of this discussion, I have chosen the video *Turas*, where I will explore its relationship to Hegarty's situation within a colonial and patriarchally dominated British society.

Illus. 1 - From *Turas*

Illus. 2 - From *Turas*

Illus. 3 - From *Turas*

As it is the focal point of my thesis, I will begin by describing *Turas*. Seven minutes in duration, the video is broken up into three main narrative sections. The first image we receive is of white lettering on a black screen, which initiates the underlying reason for this 'journey' (Illus. 1). As the background colour changes to red, a woman's voice begins to narrate the "journey" of the video as it retraces the River Foyle from "it's mouth at Inishowen Head, down through Derry City and west to it's source in Lough Finn, Donegal". She also situates the river's estuary as "a port of mass emigration from the West of Ireland", *(Turas)*. We are then confronted with the task set by Hegarty in the video where "rising inland along the course of the river, against the flow of the river, the 'mothertongue' (attempts to) re-assert itself". Images of a young woman emerge alongside this statement as she takes a glass jar of water from the estuary, (Illus. 2) where she will then use it to replenish the source of the river in the concluding scene (Illus. 3).
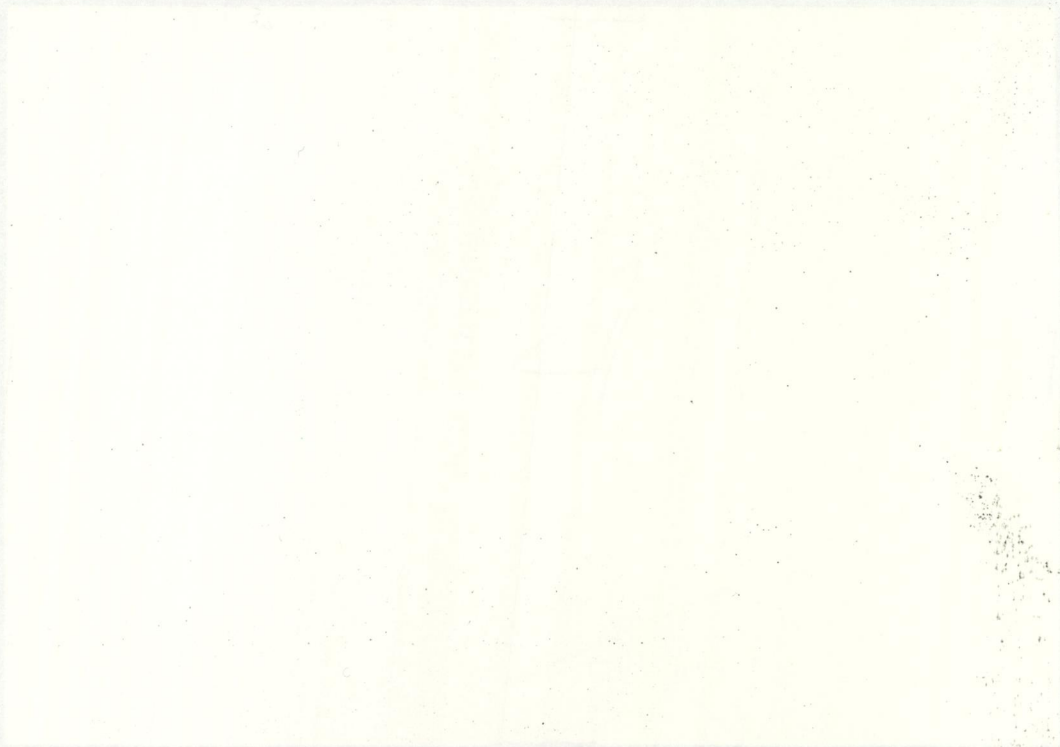
The second narrative begins with black lettering on a grey screen signifying the intention of this particular section, (Illus. 4). That this is the longest and most complex narrative of the video (approximately four minutes long) is significant, as it is here that the struggle of the 'mothertongue' becomes evident. Silence ensues for the first minute of this section, the images being that of mother and daughter, the former touching the fingers of the latter against her lips, also placing her daughter's hand on a book. Both these actions outline Hegarty's desire to "relearn language, recover culture, regain 'mothertongue' (and to) reclaim history", *(Turas)* and are echoed in (Illus. 5 and 6) respectively.

Interjected throughout these scenes are images which go against the course and force of the turbulent river where they gain in momentum as it descends from its source, (Illus. 7: a view of the river's course). Indeed as Hegarty points out, "the river provides the central signifier (in *Turas*), disrupting the surface of the work", (Hegarty, unpublished notes on *Turas*, 1990). It is also relevant that the increasing speed and intensity of the river coincides with the loud rhythmic beating of a bodhrán, (a traditional Irish drum). Indeed when relayed alongside the images of this narrative, it increased the tempo and mood of the whole section. However, the soundless transference between mother and daughter ends here. For as the latter puts her mother's fingers to her own lips, (Illus. 8), she signifies the desire to learn orally from the mother figure, asking her "will you teach me how to speak Irish?", (translated from Irish).
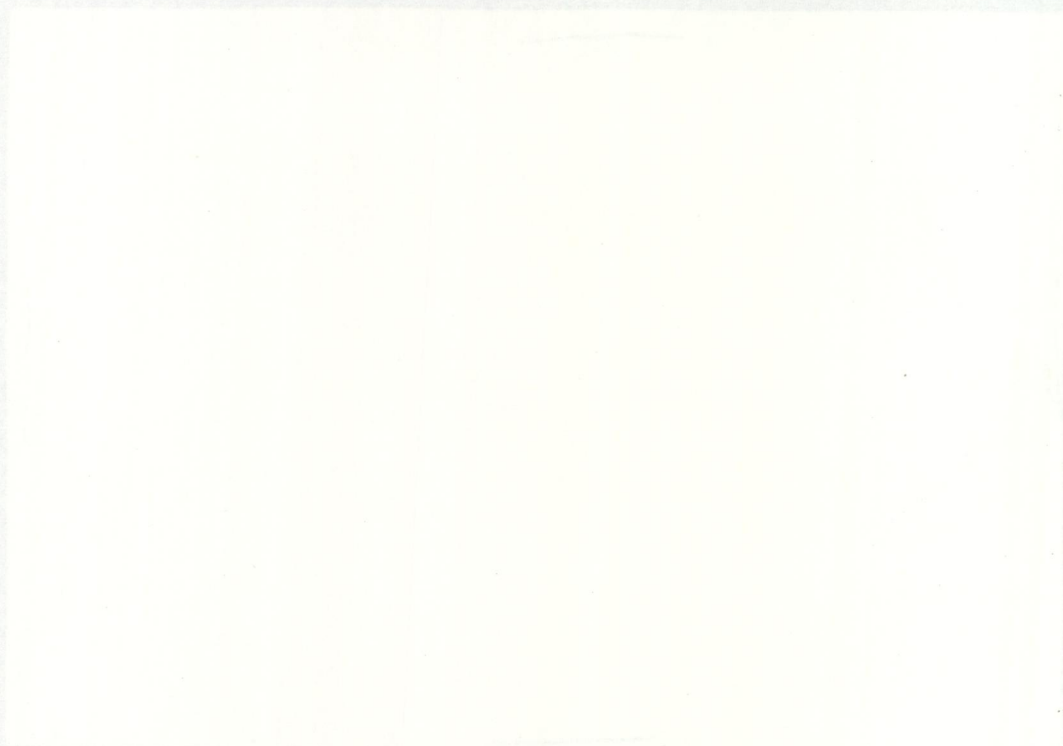
Illus. 4 - From *Turas*

Illus. 5 - From *Turas*

Illus. 6 - From *Turas*

Illus. 7 - The twists and turns of the River Foyle - From *Turas*

Illus. 8 - From *Turas*

The next sixty seconds relates this transference through the 'native' Irish language, where the anglicised and mispronounced phrases of the younger woman are corrected by the mother's strong accented Donegal 'Irish'. Furthermore, images reflecting an intense desire to listen to and learn from the verbal intricacies of the Irish language are dispersed throughout this section, (Illus. 9 and 10). Yet, the difficulties involved in this relearning process are mirrored by the sporadic bursts of confusing speech and multilayered images which produce a confusing end to the central narrative, (Illus. 11).

The water taken from the river's estuary at the beginning of the video finally replenishes it's source in the final section, (Illus. 3). Here, Hegarty sought to "reconstruct loss, re-image mother resite home, replenish source and re-affirm identity", (Illus. 12) signifying the desire to produce a resolution and symbiosis between the physical and cultural territories in *Turas*. The final narrative restores the 'mothertongue' relaying the words which name and repossess the space where daughter and mother question and reply respectively yet, also in time to the gentle rhythmic lapping of the water against the river bank. Consequently, the 'journey' both returned to the source of the River Foyle at Lough Finn and also formed a link between the past and present represented by the connection between mother and daughter respectively.

The assertion of the 'mothertongue' evident throughout *Turas* can thus be viewed as an attempt by Hegarty to rewrite and undermine a dominant (masculine) history which recognises neither the complexity nor the relevant past and present elements of her identity. This is further implicated through the formation of Hegarty's narrative structures where, while seeking to subvert those of the dominant order, she acknowledges the difficulty of the task.

Andrew Stones discusses the narrative and editing structures pertaining to the dominant film and video industry, *(Stones in <u>Voice Over</u>, 1995, pp. 3 - 5)*. He states that the established flow of television is a 'dynamic' tailored primarily to the habits and expectations of viewers as a result of their two-fold status as audience and consumer. Of particular importance to this process then is the dominant order's creation of a linear and seamless 'continuous time'. Through specific narrative and editing techniques, this construction alleviates the difficulty of comprehending disparate and possible problematic fragments by guiding the
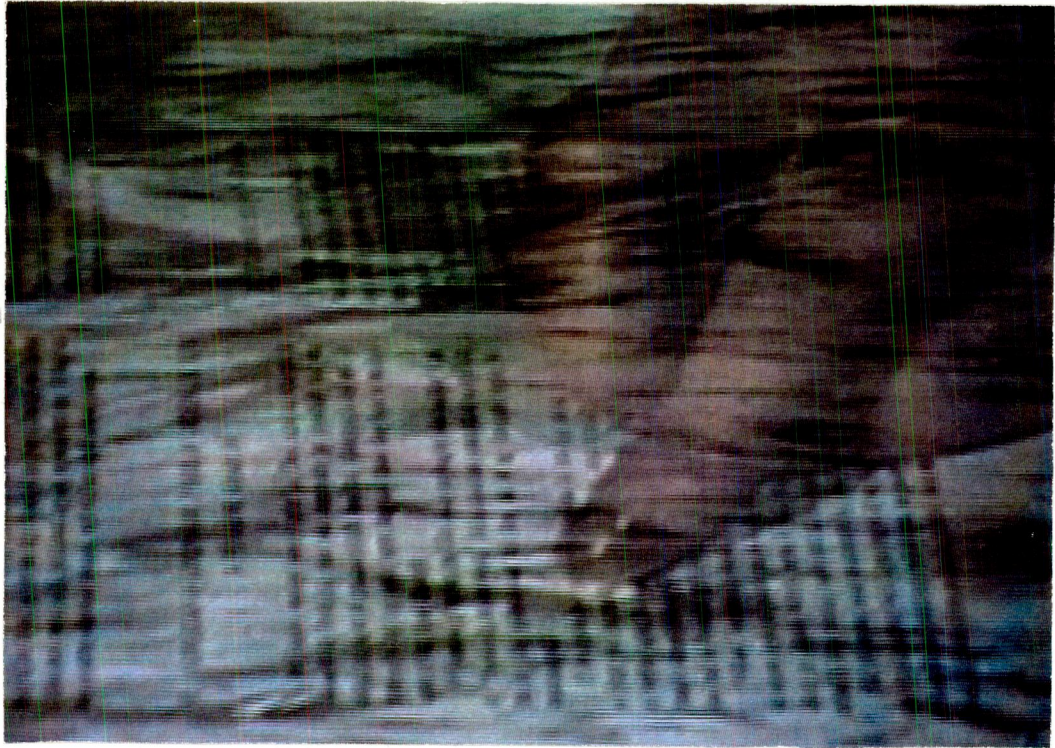
Illus. 9 - From *Turas*

Illus. 10 - From *Turas*

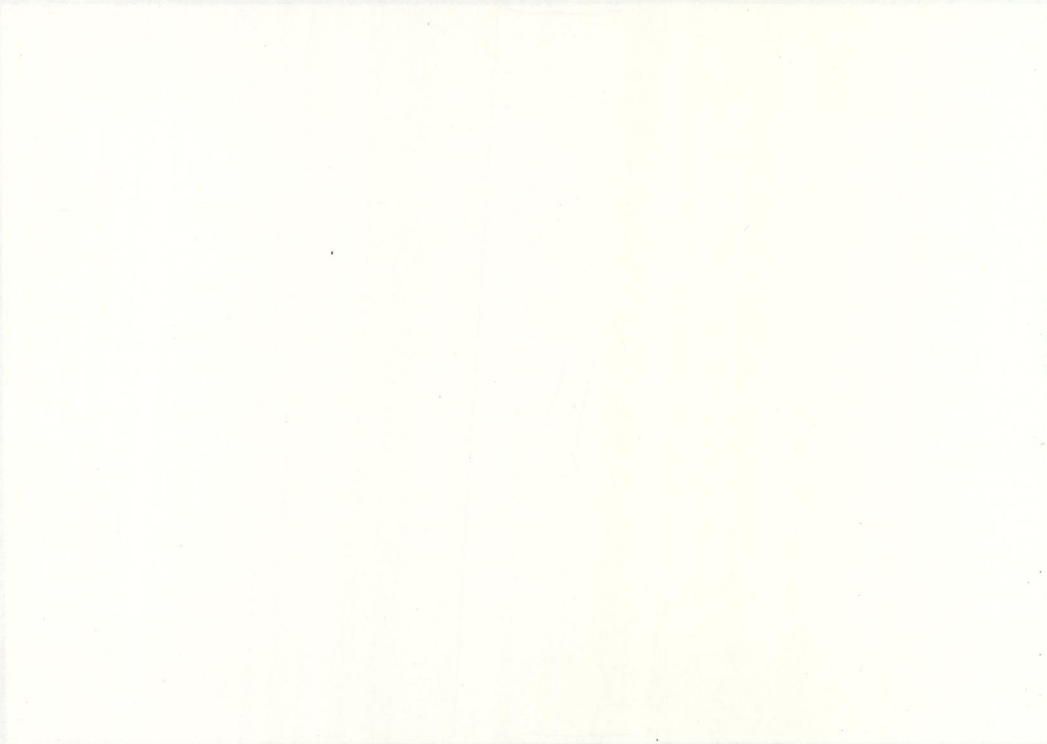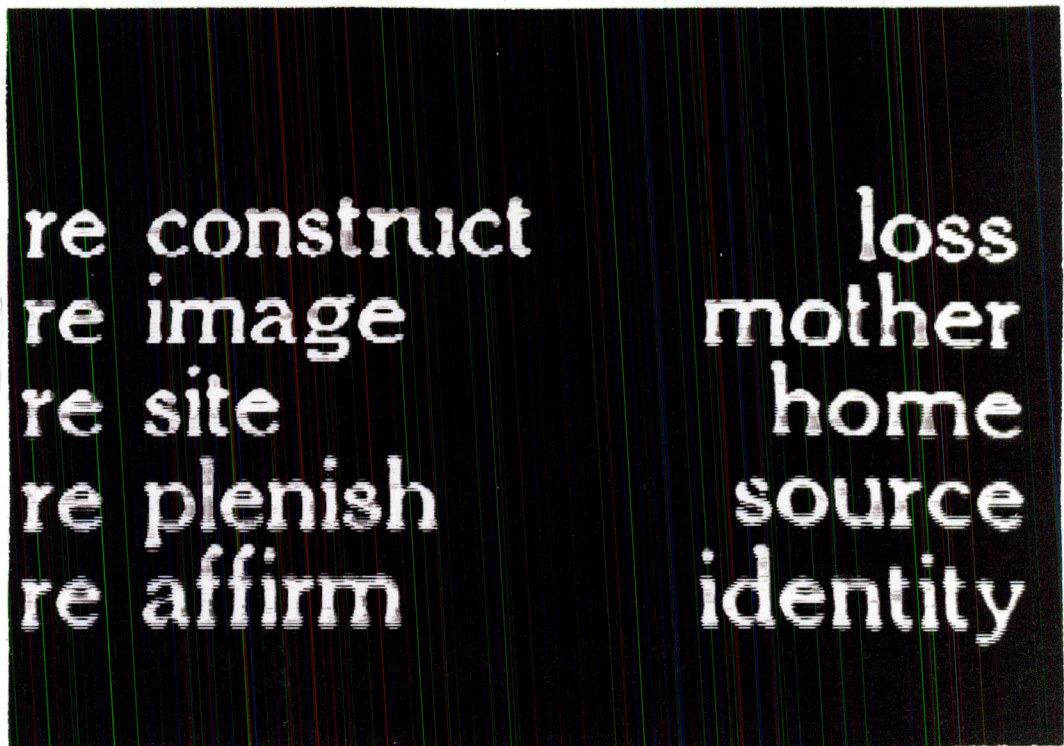Illus. 11 - From *Turas*

re construct   loss
re image   mother
re site   home
re plenish   source
re affirm   identity

Illus. 12 - From *Turas*

viewer, in most cases chronologically, through a particular film or video. Stones also concludes that this particular (false) notion of time adds to the integrity and truth factor of the piece yet also excludes the viewer at a basic level from the processes of assembling opinions on the subject or narrative being displayed.

Frances Hegarty's narrative structures, through their incontinuity with those of the dominant film and video industry seek to undermine the validity of these totalising systems. [1] Moreover, *Turas* proposes to question the viewer's understanding of his/her specific situation and the rigidity of their perceptions and beliefs as upheld by dominant ideological systems.

The different yet also confusing implications that result from Hegarty's subversion of linear and seamless narrative formats point to the fact that the problematic structures which face Irish women are not easily recognisable or resolvable within the constructs of the dominant order. By equating the *Turas* narrative to the course of the River Foyle, the 'mothertongue' works against the flow of the water, where the video begins at the Foyle's estuary and ends at its source. These twists and turns bring to bear further complexities, suggesting that beginnings, endings and solutions are not easily definable or resolvable.

The seamless narrative system which pertains to the dominant order is further undermined in *Turas* through the appearance of three separate sections in the video. For each of these segments explores a smaller sub-narrative, initiating various different aspects of the 'journey's' struggle. The first proposes the journey to "relocate place, re-negotiate territory", the second attempts to articulate this proposal, while the final scene represents an idyllic resolution of the issues at hand.

Whereas these narratives seem to have a particular order and place within *Turas*, the reality is quite different. As with the case of the first two sections, the inherent difficulties of the task set out by the narratives became visible, remained unresolved where they also became quite confusing and therefore, problematic for the viewer. While the final segment undertook to show a resolved outcome of the previous dilemmas, the *Turas* ending is merely a possible solution (one within the domain of illusion), where Hegarty deliberately does not buy into one of the dominant syndromes where she would 'live happily ever after'.

'Narrative closure', as an essential element of dominant film and video structures depend solely on the realising of oppositional viewpoints back into its system. The illusory ending in *Turas* where it is really a possible beginning opens up a space where Irish women can challenge the repressive, narrow systems of patriarchal definition, which as Bronwen Walter argues, "conspires against their advancement", *(Walter, 1988, p.5)*.

Thus, even though the *Turas* narrative seems haphazard and does not flow readily at first glance, the complex structures utilised are symbolic of the multi-layered difficulties which face Hegarty on a day to day basis. Indeed, the frustration and confusion involved in dealing with these dominant opinions presents itself on various occasions throughout the video.

An example of this occurs in Hegarty's editing of the central section, where the 'mothertongue', through specific visual metaphors, attempts to assert itself and grow in confidence. By the end of this section, these images become layered, (Illus. 11), flash spasmodically, gaining in intensity and speed until they become painful to the eye and visibly unintelligible. These representations also signify the difficulties in the struggle between (female) images and (masculine) technologies. In an interview, Frances Hegarty referenced this group of images noting the significance of the oral transference which also becomes difficult to comprehend "dealing with the upcoming loss of my own mother and all that it entailed, I came to a point where I could no longer speak in the Gaelic tongue", *(McLoughlin, taped interview, 1996)*. This in turn draws connections not alone to her experience but to those of many other immigrants who came up against overwhelming feelings of loss, be it of family, place of birth or home.

A further example of the *Turas* editorial structures aligning to Hegarty's circumstances is evident amid the confusion of the previously described cacophony of images and sound.

Throughout these flickering images, the woman's head appears each time turning more and more to face the camera. The final image in this section before the screen goes blank, reveals a frozen image of a woman's face staring intently at the

viewer, [2] (Illus. 13). This scene can, therefore, be perceived as a form of defiance or a show of courage to those unsympathetic to her situation. For Hegarty envisaged *Turas* as a "generational thing", something she had to work through to find and explore this space of cultural loss and dislocation, in order to lay a foundation for other Irish women artists to work from. Thus, she uses this specific editorial addition to initiate a challenge to other women, to see, understand and explore her and ultimately their own situations in Britain.
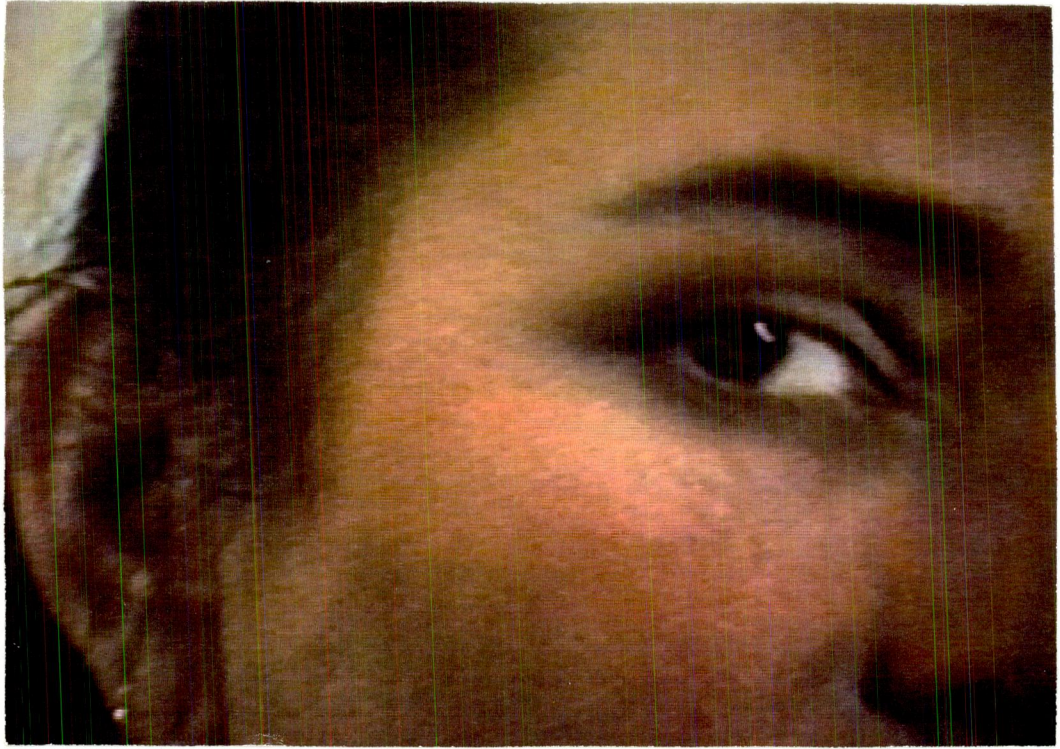
Illus. 13 - From *Turas*
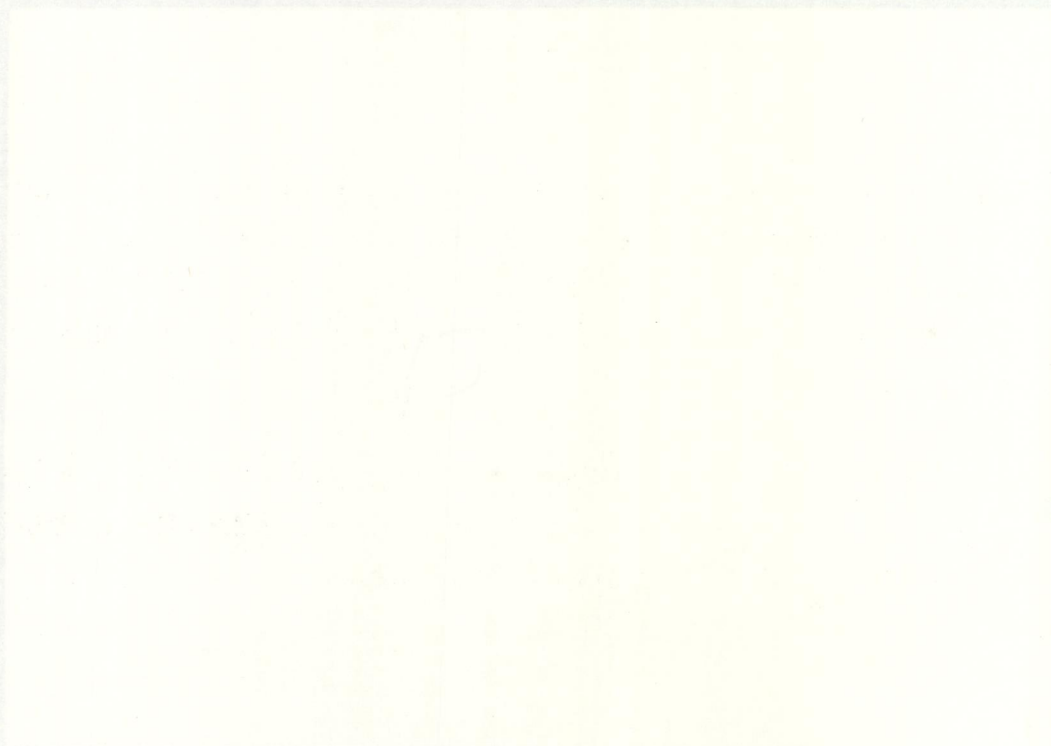
Endnotes - Chapter One

(1)   However, her critique of the dominant film and video industry's construct of continuous time, as it moves between a desire for the audience to identify with her piece yet also (through the above critique) imposes a distance between them, can in fact, go quite some way to alienating many British and Irish viewers.

(2)   This inclusion here could be linked to a recognition or a critique of the pallocentric gaze as an underlying feature of not alone the video medium but many other patriarchal systems of representation.
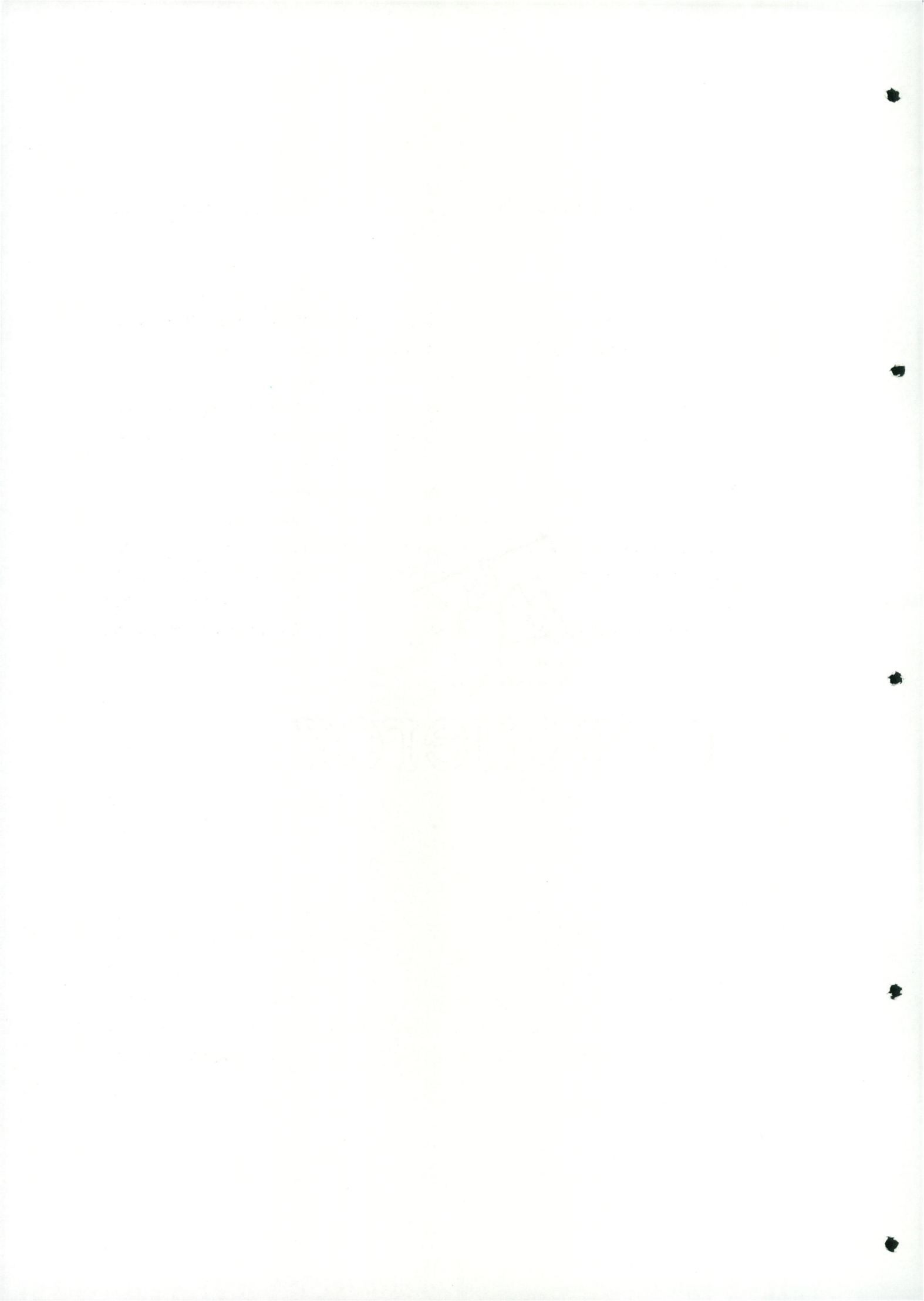
CHAPTER TWO

Within this chapter, some of the important aspects of Irish immigrant identities within Britain will be discussed in relation to Frances Hegarty's video-piece *Turas*. I will concentrate on Hegarty's acknowledgement of the individual's inseparability from his or her past as effected by a British colonial system of definition, also revealing her concerns surrounding the function and implications of ideology and myth as they are used in the process of defining 'Irishness'.

It is difficult to dispute that the present identities of Irish men and women are still very much defined by a British post-colonial climate. Indeed, various attitudes concerning the Irish, many of which border on essentialist notions of 'race', exist within Britain causing much friction between both 'peoples'.

By acknowledging post-colonial realities as an integral yet (dominant) ideologically based aspect of one's experience in Britain, Hegarty sets up the possibility to challenge the implications of such representations. Through certain narrative and metaphorical constructs, she references a physical colonisation and British presence in Ireland.

Indeed where the sounding of a bugle echoes at the beginning of the video, metaphorical connections can be made from this sound to a time when hunting was a popular pastime of the British aristocracy in Ireland. As the bugle invades the silence of *Turas* so too bullet fire disrupts the peace on two separate occasions, symbolising the physical struggles which resulted and still results from the colonial discourse between Britain and Ireland.

It is also significant to note that the bugle and bullet fire interrupt at key stages in *Turas*. The bugle at the onset of the video locates the tone of the piece recognising the colonial past as having a direct bearing on present identities. Just as the narrator introduces the intention of the journey, as an attempt by a (female) metaphor, 'the mothertongue', to overcome patriarchal representations [1] (symbolised by the River Foyle), the bullet fire interjects, signifying its undesirable yet, undeniable presence within such a discourse.

Chandra Miller argues that many of the racist characterisations pertaining to Irish people are colonial in nature and largely fictitious, created by English rulers as a response to specific needs at a precise moment in British history. "The English did not invade Ireland - rather they seized a neighbouring island and invented the idea of Ireland", *(Miller, 1995, p.21)*. In the last few hundred years, the British Empire has diminished significantly in size and stature, necessitating the development of a new relevant identity which culminated in the construction and crystallisation of colonial notions (the 'Irish') as the antithesis of what was considered 'British'. Descriptions of Ireland throughout British ideological systems depicted it as a "wild and unregulated land where treasons, murders or thefts go unpunished offending the definitively English qualities of order and civility", *(Miller, 1995, p. 21)*. Concurrently, Mary Hickman also discussed racist representations of the Irish in nineteenth century Britain where their Catholic faith was equated to "inherent national characteristics, which made them prone to violence and uncivilised behaviour", *(Hickman, 1995, p.15)*. That post-colonial system of representations effected and to a greater extent defined, how Irish immigrants were perceived and accepted in modern-day Britain is significant in order to understand and situate the historical consequences of these prevailing definitions.

Evaluation of the Irish by the British are referenced throughout the introductory narrative of *Turas* as it plots and anglicises the course of the river, (reminiscent of similar attempts to rename and represent Irish people), "from it's mouth at Inishowen Head, down through Derry City... and west to it's source in Lough Finn, Donegal", *(Turas)*. Inishowen, Derry and Lough Finn are all based on Irish names and have distinct meaning within the Irish language. Yet, as a result of their Anglicisation, this inherent value has become seriously undermined. By physically distorting Irish placenames, [2] (evident in *Turas*) and by totally banning the Irish language, the British sought to ensure an English containment of the Irish within Ireland.

A prime source for many of the derogatory characterisations which effect Irish people in modern-day Britain is the British Press coverage of the 'problems' in Northern Ireland. Based on colonial ideology, the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) produces numerous negative representations of the Irish. Philip Schlesinger discusses this particular point in <u>Putting Reality Together</u>, describing the totalising nature of BBC news analysis as one that makes 'law and order',

'violence' and 'terrorism', its key analytical terms, *(Schlesinger, 1978, p.205)*. In fact these docontextualised reports of violence fail to re-analyse the historical basis of the conflict and cannot but contribute to a dominant British view of the troubles as largely irrational and caused by Irish terrorist activities.

Attitudes towards the Irish in Britain are greatly effected by the political struggles between the Northern Irish people themselves and the British. Indeed, the Irish centre in Camden, London get frequent abusive telephone calls asking questions similar to: "why don't you bastard murderers go back to your own country?", *(O'Faolain, 1996, p. 1)*. That these struggles are reflected throughout *Turas* signifies their importance to any explorations of an Irish presence in Britain. The connection within *Turas* to the political dilemma of 'the six counties' occurs where the narrator names and defines part of the River Foyle as a "political divide". For in fact, the River Foyle, at the mid point of its journey to Lough Finn, acts as a division between the Donegal and Derry sides of the border, physically and politically separating the 'north' from the 'south' of Ireland, (Illus. 14). Furthermore, the bullet fire discussed earlier in this chapter holds further political significance within the video as it echoes the physical violence and loss of many men and women due to the troubles in Northern Ireland.

These spaces pointed out by Frances Hegarty are not merely references to general Irish political struggles within a colonial climate but also to specific attempts being made by many Irish women to reassess the political implications of colonialism. [3] Assertions by the 'mothertongue' against the force and course of the river can then be seen as an analogy for attempts being made by women in Ireland and Britain to counteract the force and continuity of patriarchal, social and political representations. That this particular recognition and strategy initiated by Hegarty holds immense importance to the women living in Northern Ireland and Britain is significant where both groups are doubly colonised by the dominant order, which is either male, British or a combination of the two.

The immense psychological trauma which structures of colonialism impart through totalitarian and racist representations call on the 'credibility' of many powerful systems for its justification. Based on concepts of ideology, [4] British cultural institutions constructessentialist notions of Irishness as reference points for the definition of Irish people. Where these institutions seek support from

Illus. 14 - From *Turas*

equally ideological and historical based systems of myth they also rely on further problematic notions of 'race' and stereotyping to uphold constructions of Irishness. In order to understand how this was (and still is) the case necessitates a consideration of these processes taking on board their importance as signifiers for the Irish residing in Britain. By investigating them in conjunction with representational choices made by Frances Hegarty in *Turas*, I propose to discuss the difficulties which became evident in such explorations.

For Irish people living in Britain, the concept of 'Irishness' as underpinned by numerous racist representations is a central and compulsory demand of any reflection on identity. Mary Stinton Cosgrove's argument in <u>Circa</u> concurs with this putting forward the opinion that strategies to undermine 'race' as an unchanging 'metaphysical' and stereotypical process are required. For it is through the context of an historical reading that Irish people can gain a better cognition of their present identities. Moreover this reading also points to a possible site where the contestation of colonial representations can take place, *(Stinton - Cosgrove, 1990, P. 18)*.

In fact, increased intellectual interest and debate in Ireland, within periodicals like the <u>LIP, Field Day Pamphets</u> and <u>The Crane Bag</u> (to name but a few), indicated the realisation of this need to form a theoretical critique of 'Irishness'. Further magazines directed at the art market, like <u>Atlantis</u> and then <u>Circa</u>, gave many artists in Ireland and throughout her diaspora the theoretical backup to begin working with and exploring notions of Irishness, as directly linked to negative representations of Irish people.

While Frances Hegarty sought "to find and explore the concept of an inherent Irishness" in the video, *(McLoughlin, taped interview, 1996)*. The actuality of this claim within the *Turas* imagery is quite complex. For many cliched representations of Ireland and its people are visible throughout the video piece. Where much of the imagery follows the course of the River Foyle back to its source in Lough Finn, many views of rolling luscious green fields cascading down to meet the river's edge can be seen, reminiscent of many romantic paintings and photographic depictions of Ireland. Indeed, these images remind one of the intensely colourful yet, extremely stylised scenes of John Hinde's postcard representations which characterise and typify Ireland, (Illus. 15, 16(a) & 16(b)).
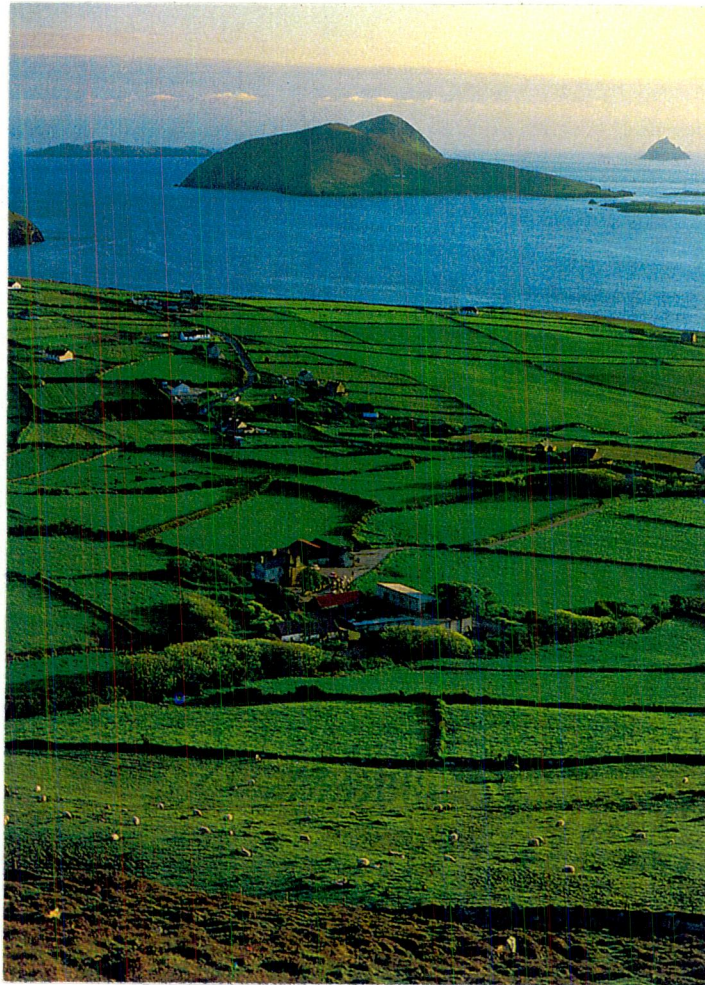
Illus. 15 - From *Turas*

Illus. 16(a) . - A view of the Blasket Islands - *Real Ireland Design Ltd.*

Illus. 16(b) -   Ireland People and Places - *John Hinde Ltd.*

Of consequence to an understanding of *Turas* as dealing with the situation of Irish women culturally dispossessed is Belinda Loftus' discussion on the totalising representations of Irish women during the last century. Produced for British consumption, an extremely popular image of Irish women as a "winsome (naive) colleen", (Illus. 17) became relevant at this time, *(Loftus, 1990, p. 22)*. Concurrently, the fact that much of the female representations launched on the Irish market during this century were produced by English artists and manufacturers is a further significance to historical and female specific investigations of fixed and oppressive characterisations. To this day, tourist depictions of the 'Irish colleen' further shows her as, possessing 'national characteristics' of long flowing red hair and freckles, (Illus. 18 and 19).

The image of the Irish colleen, although maybe not deliberately included, is evident throughout *Turas*. For a young woman appears regularly in the video, her long flowing hair blowing in the wind as she descends lightly from the wild grassy slopes to the river bank, (Illus. 2 and 3). The inclusion of these images where they seem not to engage with their underlying constraints merely serve to hark back to familiar descriptions of the Irish colleen - as young, wild and blissfully ignorant. Moreover, that the appearance of the girl - woman allows for a reading of her attitude as carefree, is significant to a discussion of Hegarty's strategies of critique within *Turas*. Frequently evident in *Turas* these characterisations of the Irish colleen in fact, go some way to undermining contestations being made in other areas. Indeed, notions of nostalgic sentiment, which result from Hegarty's depictions, also points to a further possible negative critique of *Turas* - as pinning for the past where present complexities seem too difficult to handle.

Further displays of nostalgia are also evident in a discussion on the appearance of traditional Irish bodhrán music at key stages [5] throughout the piece. Even the title of the video (*Turas*) appears in a particular typefacing utilised by Frances Hegarty for its specific reference to an Old Irish Celtic Script, (Illus. 20).

If these symbols in *Turas* merely initiate sentiments of nostalgia and or uphold dominant characterisations of the Irish, the question that should then be asked is of their value within a critique of British colonial subjugation.

Illus. 17 - The Irish Colleen

Illus. 18 - The characterisation of an Irish woman immigrant
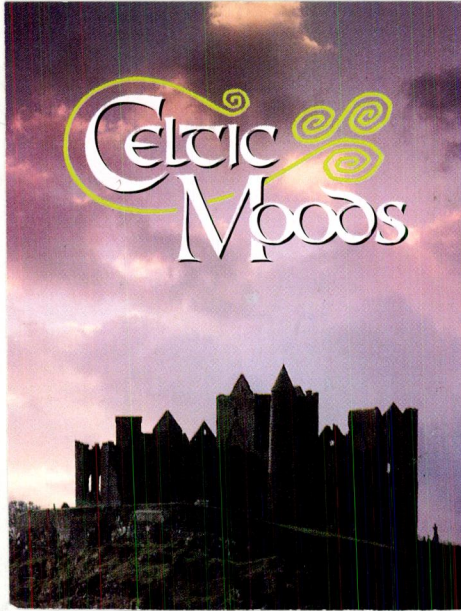
Illus. 19 - *Anna Livia:* A monument to and characterisation of Irish women

Illus. 20 - An example of Celtic typefacing

SIDE 1
Tracks 1,2,3,4,5,6,7 (Trad. Arr Alan
        Connaughton) Celtic Music
Track 8 (Pete St. John) Celtic Songs

SIDE 2
Track 1 (Walsh) Crashed Music
Tracks 2,3,4,5,6 (Trad. Arr. Alan
        Connaughton) Celtic Music
Track 7 (Shaun Davey) MCPS

Fionna Barber also asked a similar question of Frances Hegarty's piece, arguing that the essentialist nature of the representations were not "as critically oriented as they might have been", *(McLoughlin, taped interview, 1996).* While Barber's opinion can be viewed as quite negative, she also acknowledges that in general Irish women working in Britain felt a sense of distance, geographically perhaps from these sort of cultural symbols, *(McLoughlin, taped interview, 1996).* Even though this points to a possible reason for Hegarty's attitude towards characterisations of 'Irishness' it still does not alter the fact that the images uphold their construction by the dominant order.

It should also be said that although much of the Irish imagery is retrogressive in nature a heightened critique of the appearance of music within *Turas* may give respite to this negative discourse. For traditional music, song and dance were key areas where many Irish men and women questioned their colonial relationship to Britain. Indeed, from the 1980s to this day, traditional Irish music classes and sessions are significant meeting places for numerous Irish people in Britain. These assertions of Irish culture and heritage mirrored in *Turas* became immensely important expressions of solidarity between many Irish people facing a common enemy: British colonial oppression. [6]

Explorations of 'Irishness' should furthermore take into account key underlying processes of myth making. For, as Richard Pine argues, to mythologise (one's country and its inhabitants) is an inevitable historically based ideological tendency which occurs at a certain point in all cultural cycles. Yet, when referring to the specific situation of the Irish in Ireland, he also puts forward a relevant point for the Irish in Britain exposed to strong traditions of romantic myth making. He contends that "it can happen that a civilisation can be imprisioned in a (traditionally mythological) contour which no longer matches the landscape of fact", *(Pine, 1985, p. 99).*

Of particular significance to *Turas* where it was a way of dealing with the imminent loss of Frances Hegarty's mother (who was her only connection to Ireland) is her complex use of the myth of 'Mother Ireland'. A potent nationalist emblem, various popular representations of it exist, ranging from 'Hibernia', a representation of Ireland itself, to the weeping figure crying over her lost sons, (See Rita Duffy's characterisation - Illus. 21).

Illus. 21 - *Rita Duffy, Belfast Pieta*:
120cm x 90cm: oil and charcoal on wax paper

It is also significant to note that to this day museums and heritage parks still invest in nineteenth century images of the forlorn mother mourning the loss of her son either to death or immigration, (Illus. 22).

The feature of the mother figure within *Turas* concurs with the above account of 'Mother Ireland' as a depiction of sorrow and loss. Standing for the memories and past histories Hegarty had, in a way, left behind in Donegal the mother figure thus encapsulating notions of pain and displacement. Indeed, it is true to say that the entire video, from the echoing of the bugle at the onset to the ongoing transference in Irish between mother and daughter, reflects Frances Hegarty's sense of both the physical and cultural loss of Ireland.

Whilst investigating this mirroring of myth [7] in *Turas* similar problematics to those previously discussed of 'Irishness' should be taken into account. For these connotations cannot but reflect ideas of nostalgia as they frequently uphold constrictions of the Irish.

When viewed in isolation, these mother images can be perceived to be quite nostalgic and patriarchal in nature, yet when put into the context of the entire video, further alternative readiness became visible. Hegarty uses the transference between mother and daughter as a symbol for her desire to alleviate her dislocation. When the young woman listens to and learns Irish from the mother figure, she also accords a certain amount of power and status to the latter: "will you teach me how to speak Irish? Of course, I will teach you how to speak Irish!" *(Turas - translation from Irish)*.

As Hegarty empowered the mother figure with an importance, she also pointed to the knowledge imparted by the older woman as a device for the other to learn from past histories and to re-appropriate them to suit her present complex situations. In effect, this relearning process could be seen as one of the main themes in *Turas*. For memories and history are what "makes our lives .... our coherence, our reason, our feelings, even our actions, without it we are nothing", *(Huyssen, 1995, p. 5)*.

So as Frances Hegarty utilises the myth of 'Mother Ireland' in a different way throughout *Turas* realigning it to her specific agenda, she ultimately questions the place and value of mythic structures in Britain. Indeed, through a recognition of
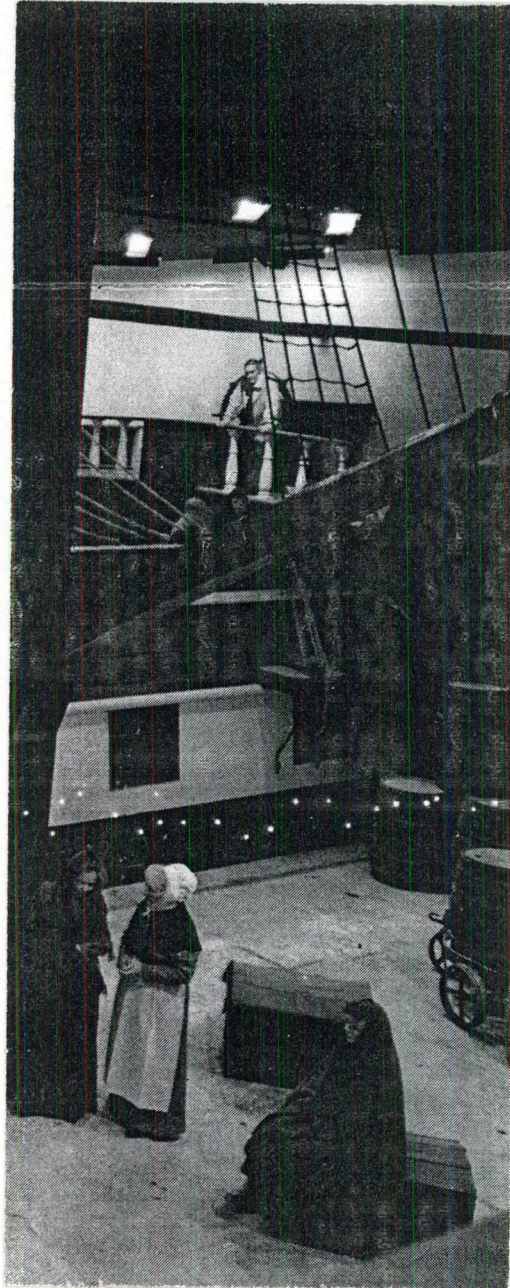
Illus. 22 - The Irish Colleen - Ship and Dockside Gallery,
Ulster American Folk Park
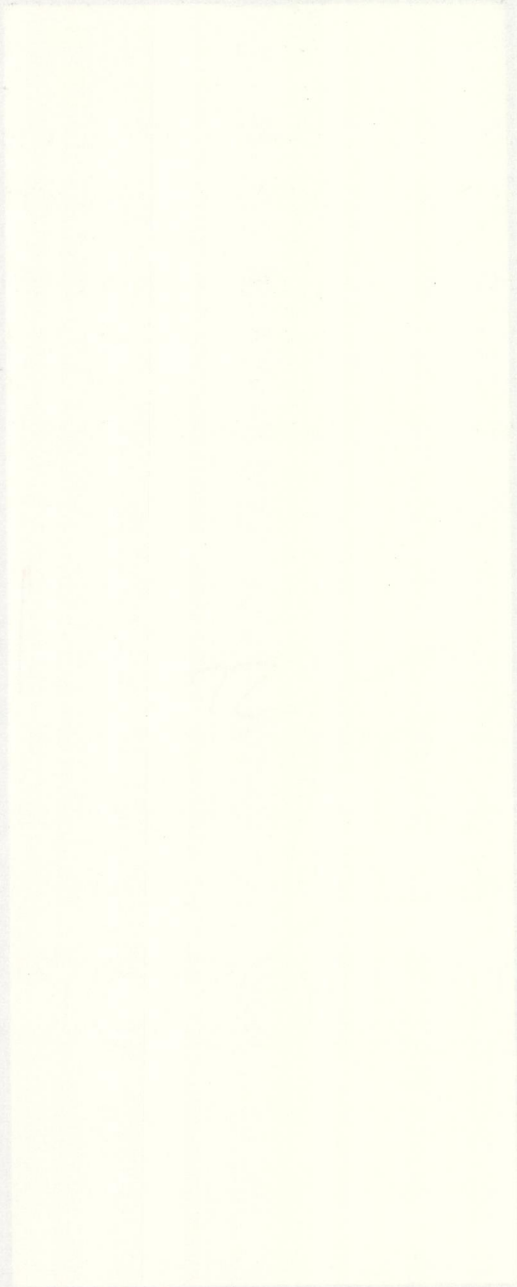
the negative and repressive mythic imagery associated with women in Ireland and also immensely significant to those in Britain, Frances Hegarty further acknowledges the power of myth as a patriarchally based ideological tool of subjugation. The task of realigning derogatory female representations set out by Hegarty is one that many Irish women face, further indicating the necessity of a female recovery and re-appropriation of 'culture' and 'history'.

Through a discussion of colonialism, Irishness and myth, as they appear in *Turas*, I have within this chapter indicated the problematics which can ensue from such explorations. In the following chapter the complex difficulties pertaining the Irish language as a signifier and site of colonial contestations will be explored.
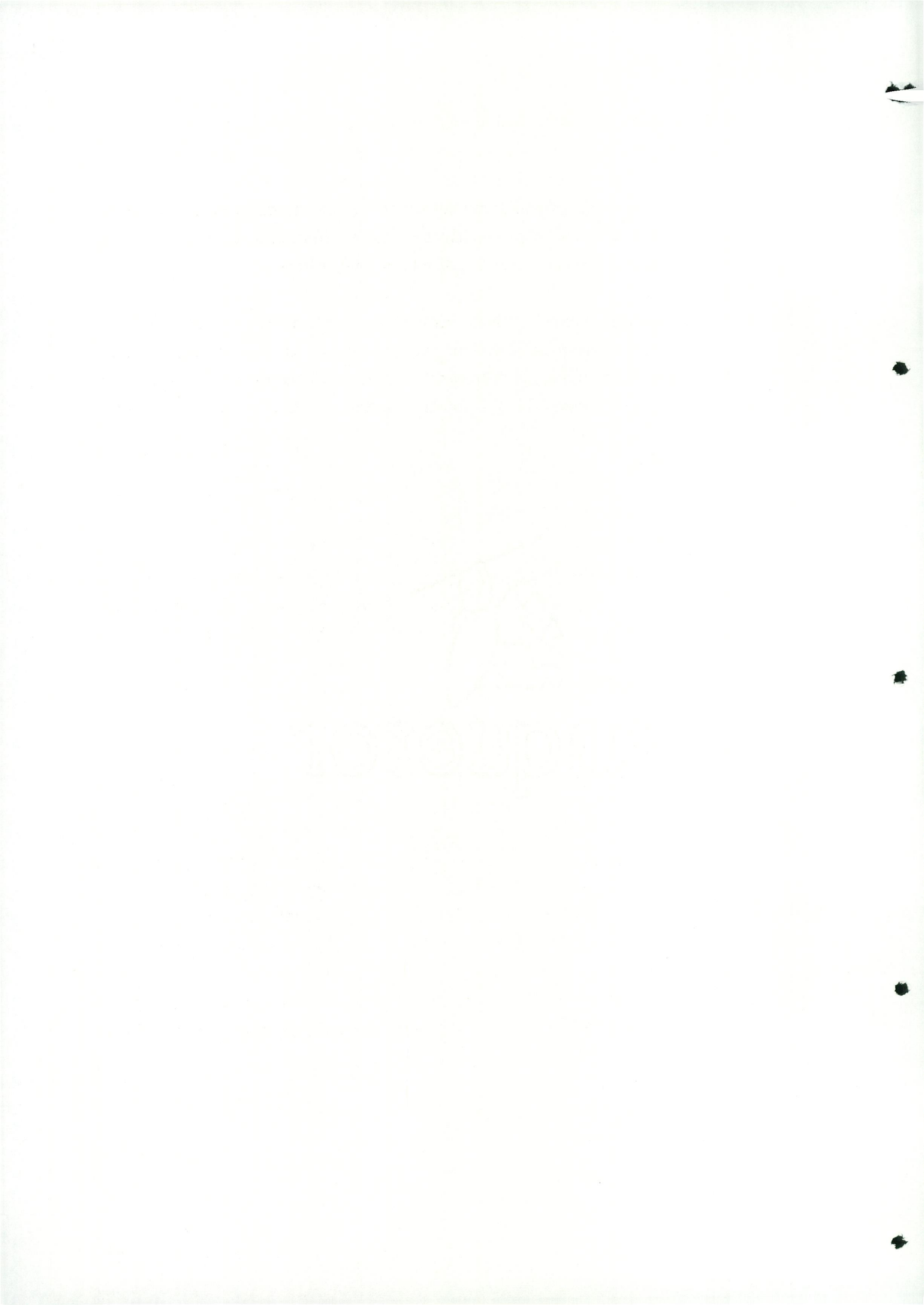
ENDNOTES - CHAPTER TWO

(1)   Both sounds could be viewed as a symbolic interference of the public space (patriarchally dominated) over the private one (commonly associated to women, the home and family, all problematic notions in themselves).

(2)   Another Irish woman artist - Anne Tallentire dealt specifically with this occurance in *'The Gap of Two Birds"*, 1988, where she "was looking at the absence of history through the way maps were mapped and translated by the British authorities where the real place became lost", *(McLoughlin, taped interview, 1996).*

(3)   This discussion is evident within <u>LIP Pamphlets</u> written by Gerardine Meaney and Edna Longley.

(4)   Napolean Bonaparte attaching the proponents of democracy argued ideology to be "a diffuse metaphysics, which in a contrived manner, seeks to find and effect the legislation of peoples", *(Williams, 1983, p. 154).*

(5)   Referenced in Chapter One.

(6)   However, Edna Longley puts forward the view that 'Irishness' "with its totalitarian tinge, ought to be abandoned rather than made more inclusive", *(Longley, 1990, p. 9).*

(7)   Further investigation of myth maybe seen in *Reflections on Dependence and Independence* by Richard Pine, where he quotes Deane and Kiberd as suggestion that "the past must be decolonised, demythologicalised, released from a psychological straightjacket". Yet, he also acknowledges the merit in the speech by Kearney which points to myth as "a two-way street. It can lead to perversion (bigotry, racism... totalitarianism), or it can lead to a projection of genuine utopias" - (The Universal Goal of Liberation), *(Pine, 1985, p. 100).*

CHAPTER THREE

The difficulty of articulating a dissident position and creating new meanings from within the structures of a dominant order are posed and explored within *Turas* in terms of 'language'. Consequently, in this final chapter, I will investigate the implications of the physical presence of 'Irish' in the video taking into account diverse aspects of it's occurrence in *Turas*, as they are also signifiers for further features of Irish life in Britain. Finally, I will also discuss this presence of Irish in *Turas* as Frances Hegarty proposes it to be a relevant contestationary site for the situation of Irish women living in Britain.

The importance of language to any group of people is reflected by Brian Friel's statement in <u>The Crane Bag</u> where he argues that "it is not the literal past...that shape us, but images of the past, embodied in language", *(Friel in Pine, 1995, p. 97)*. Inextricably tied to concepts of 'home' and identity, language is immensely significant to those physically and culturally dislocated people whose speech, as Kristeva pointed out "is quickly erased having no past or power over the future", *(Kristeva, Voice Over, 1995, P. 2)*. Indeed, language is an extremely complex and layered system of expression, reflecting for many dislocated individuals the perplexities involved in any explorations of cultural loss. An understanding and critique of language is, therefore, a crucial procedure whereby these people can challenge the structure and implications of colonialism. Significantly then, it is also a key site of contention in the work of many Irish artists in Britain. [1]

As stated in the previous chapter, the inclusion of the Irish language by Frances Hegarty in *Turas* allowed for a symbolic connection to the loss of her mother and by extension Ireland. In addition, then the unreconciled, confusing imagery and oral transference, described at the end of the first chapter, further transforms into a metaphor for the "pain" which ensued as a result of her physical and cultural dislocation from Ireland.

Throughout *Turas*, Hegarty explores the Irish language as a means of making sense of and dealing with the complications of appropriating the loss of home and assimilation into a different society. Indeed, the significance of an individual's accented 'Irish' to the process of assimilation is presented in *Turas*, where the
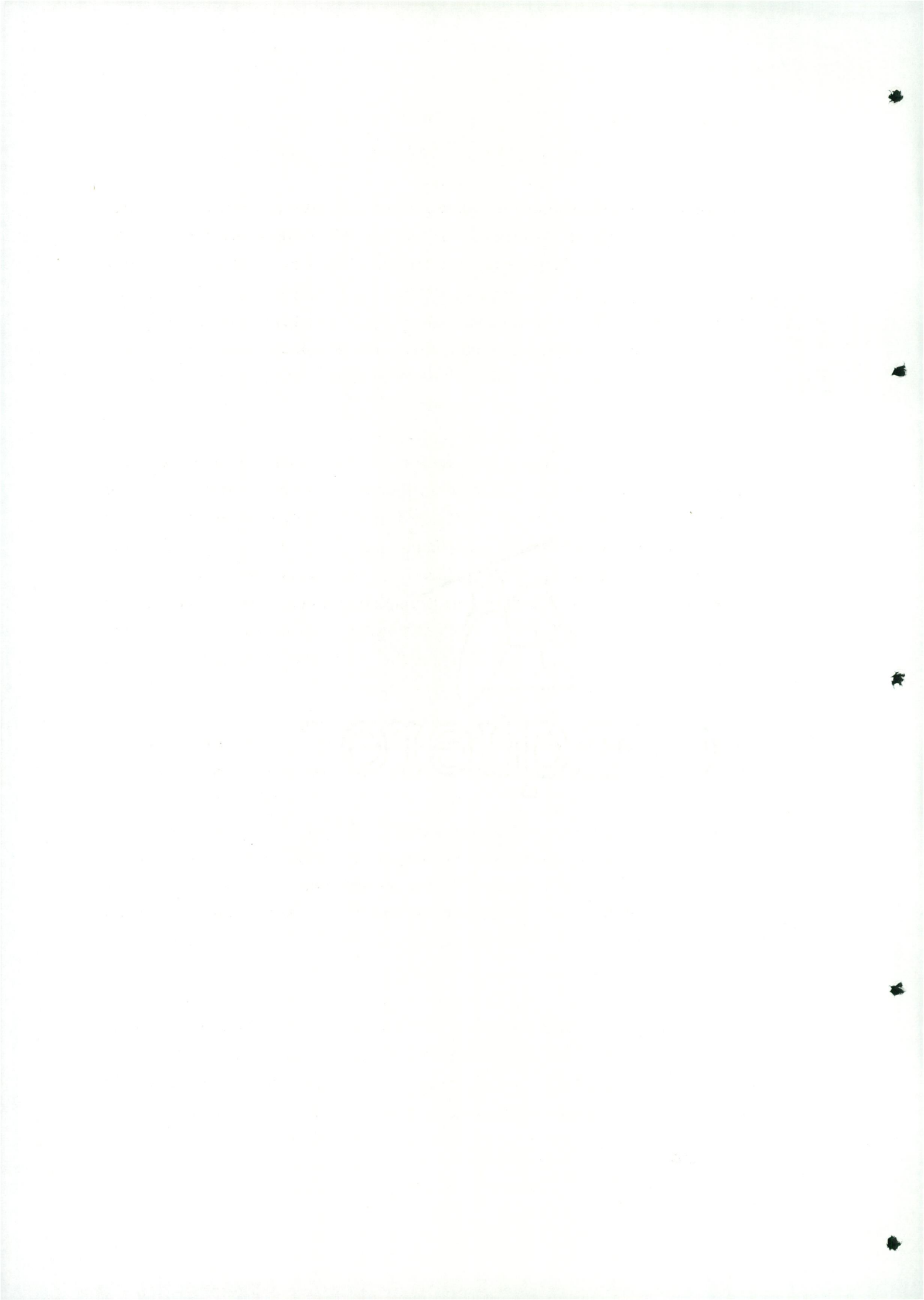
resulting difficulties point to it as another troublesome engagement for the Irish in Britain. This is reflected in *Turas* where younger women pronounce and re-pronounce the Irish colloquial phrases and accent of the mother figure in an attempt to learn and assimilate it. Indeed, as she recognises that her Irish language and accent has been distorted by time and a separation from 'home' she aspires to include it as an important aspect of her past history and by extension her present identity. Richard Pine also argues for this procedure where to "jettison all knowledge all experience would surely serve" to gravely undermine the historical foundation by which a relevant identity could be formed, *(Pine, 1995, p. 99)*.

Where Frances Hegarty acknowledged the necessity for such an attention to one's accent, the articulation of the procedure in *Turas* mirrors its intrinsic complexities as a process of assimilation in Britain. For the desired re-situation of the Irish accent in *Turas* where it layers and confuses the language can hinder the accessibility of the Irish transference reflecting in turn that not all solutions to multicultural problems are resolvable. This then can point to a recognition of the problematic process by which many Irish individuals deliberately alter or seek to change their accent as a result of British discrimination. Though this may be necessary as a counterpoint to the harsh reality of racial abuse, the complex physicality of the re-appropriation in *Turas* indicates the need for it to be addressed as a possible simplification of the solution. [2]

Of increased significance to this discussion on identity construction then is, Hegarty's direct engagement with the history of the Irish language as one to which access had been denied. Hegarty's use of 'Irish' in *Turas* makes reference to the problematic English/Irish language dichotomy evident throughout a British colonisation of Ireland, [3] where it resulted in the banning of the 'native' Irish and the instigation of English as Ireland's primary language. That Irish physically appears in *Turas* then allows it to be seen as an element of defiance to colonial and post-colonial discussions.

However, further investigations of the complex multicultural situation in which such a language of defiance would seek to exist also equates its actuality to the concept of 'nativism' as discussed by Ken Hardy. He equates this concept to a striving for the reversal of colonialism and the re-instigation of essentialist pre-colonial attributes "a fundamentalist doctrine, it asserts the 'nature' of a culture",

(Hardy, 1994, P. 46). In reality, as this desire is an illusionary one it is therefore, is a fruitless endeavour. This possible negative reading of *Turas* then indicates the necessity for any visual practitioner using the Irish language in their art works to be aware of it as problematic where suitable alterations should be considered.

Madam Sarup further discusses the difficulties involved with essentialist 'nativism' as connected to those of 'ethnic absolution'. He argues that minority groups faced with hostile acts, such as racism, draw in on themselves gaining strength from their shared history, *(Sarup in Robertson (ed.), 1994, P. 95).* Indeed, during the last two hundred years or so in Britain "there was a resurgence of interest in exploring Irish history" in Irish studies, language classes and conferences", *(Lennon, McAdam, O'Brien, 1988, P. 10).*

Furthermore, the solidarity that ensues from such assertions of ethnicity is also visible in *Turas* where Hegarty chose not to translate the Irish into English. Through this unwillingness she potentially alienates much of the audience within British exhibition venues who might have otherwise been sympathetic or open to a reading of her situation in Britain. Furthermore, this video could then be viewed as Hegarty's desire not to directly incorporate or seek a recognition from a British audience. This in turn, goes some way to positioning the British individual as extraneous to Hegarty's exploration of dislocation which seems to undermine the purpose of most of *Turas*, as it seeks an understanding of the Irish situation in Britain. It should also be said that this refusal also distances numerous Irish people (the subject of her video) whose access to or comprehension of the Irish language has been minimalised due to no fault of their own. Subsequently, where a translation can drain the emotion and particularity from what is being originally said, its presence within this work of art could, in fact, have added to the understanding of the piece and Hegarty's intentions within it.

In a recent interview, Frances Hegarty stated that she had debated whether to use subtitles or a "voice over" in *Turas* to help alleviate these negative aspects of her piece. After much contemplation, however, she decided that a translation could
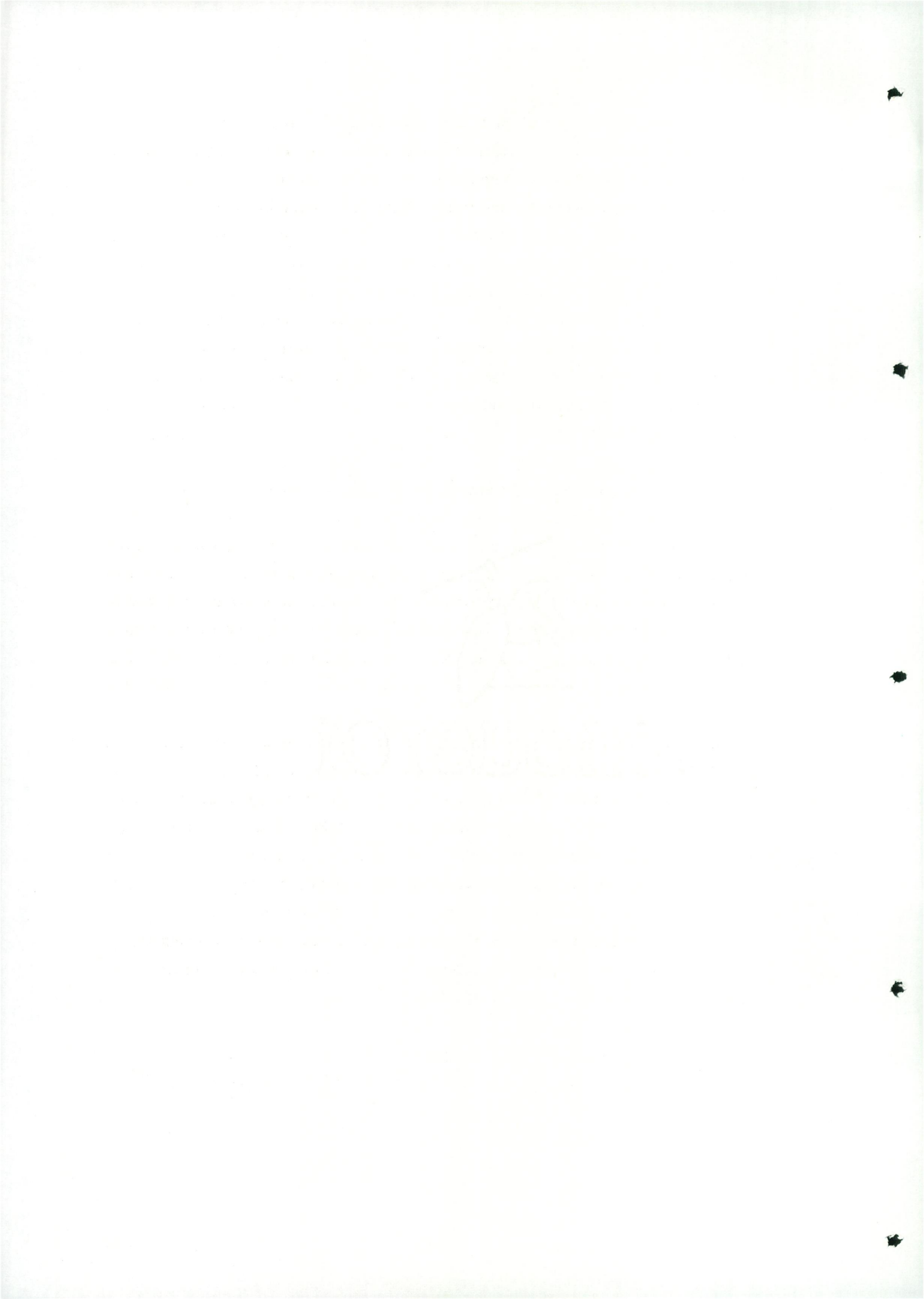
lead to further difficulties and insurmountable notions of language interpretation and translation. "What is interpretation?... How does one interpret language? What are the effects of such interpretations?" *(McLoughlin, taped interview, 1996)*. Indeed, language translation at any specific point in time is a difficult undertaking, for works are constantly changing in relation to their political, social and cultural landscape.

Shirley McWilliams in the catalogue <u>Voice Over</u>, puts forward similar concerns to Hegarty regarding the underlying features of translation. She contends that interpretations of language are "products of mediation" refracted through layers of linguistic history and tradition where words can slip, become re-interpreted and mis-interpreted. Indeed, as a result of the ongoing colonial and political difficulties between both Britain and Ireland, false interpretations by either category of viewer could lead to a mis-understanding of Hegarty's intentions.

I would also point to a further significant interpretation of Frances Hegarty's refusal to translate which takes into account the physical existence of the Irish language in relation to the entire *Turas* narrative. She claimed that concerns of realigning and re-constructing an Irish speech and by extension history and culture necessitated the exclusiveness of the unadulterated transference in Irish, *(McLoughlin, taped interview, 1996)*.

Indeed, this aspiration to a synthesis between her previous colonial identity and present diasporic subjectivity is mirrored in the language of *Turas*. Reflected by the younger woman's desire to learn the native Irish language from the mother figure the former's language (and accent) is re-appropriated to deal with her complex past and present identities. The formation of a relevant strategy of subjective exploration is then proposed by Frances Hegarty where it would neither totally privilege the past or present histories of an individual but result in a mutual understanding between the two. Effectively then, she proposes the appropriation of a 'native Irish' language as a possible site and vessel for the contestation of Irish oppression in Britain. [4]

Fionna Barber argues a position (for Irish women artists) not unlike that proposed by Frances Hegarty in *Turas*. This position originates both from within the

dominant culture, where it seeks an appropriation of her present identity and outside of it through the proposed re-aligning of previous histories. Moreover, Barber also argued that this contradictory and difficult position distances the artist from assimilation yet, is a pre-requisite for "this kind of art", *(Barber, 1994, p. 67).*

This acknowledges the difficulty facing Frances Hegarty in her use of the Irish language which is also reflected in the re-evaluation of language as it is made further specific to Irish women. This occurs through the connection between the oral tranference and the myth of a feminine oral tradition, where the latter pertained to the 'old-style' method: story-telling, by which a mother hands down her previous knowledge and history to her daughter. As this reflection can seem to privilege a mythic reasoning it also points again to similar problematic discourses outlined in Chapter Two. Yet, Frances Hegarty critiques this through her attribution of the status of teacher to the mother figure [1] where this role is the main one through which she proposes the contestationary intention of the piece. So, as this myth is placed alongside the other critiqued patriarchal constructions, it seeks a re-alignment with the context of the entire narrative intention of *Turas.* Significantly then, the desired re-situation of the Irish language evident throughout the video, became visible in the final *Turas* scene, where the restoration of a re-appropriated 'mothertongue', (through the equal and harmonious transference between mother and daughter) carries "The (Irish) words that name and repossess the space for Irish women in Britain", (Illus. 23), *(Hegarty, unpublished writings, 1990).*

Indeed, as this scene is merely a proposed ending and since identity can never be fully articulated known or fixed, the increasingly problematic task of utilising the 'native' language within such artworks, becomes a question of dealing with 'language' as a shifting signifier, ".... there is no 'real' end (to the difficulties inherent to language as a signifier), only that complex and constantly shifting sense of possibility", *(Valentino, 1994, P. 61).*
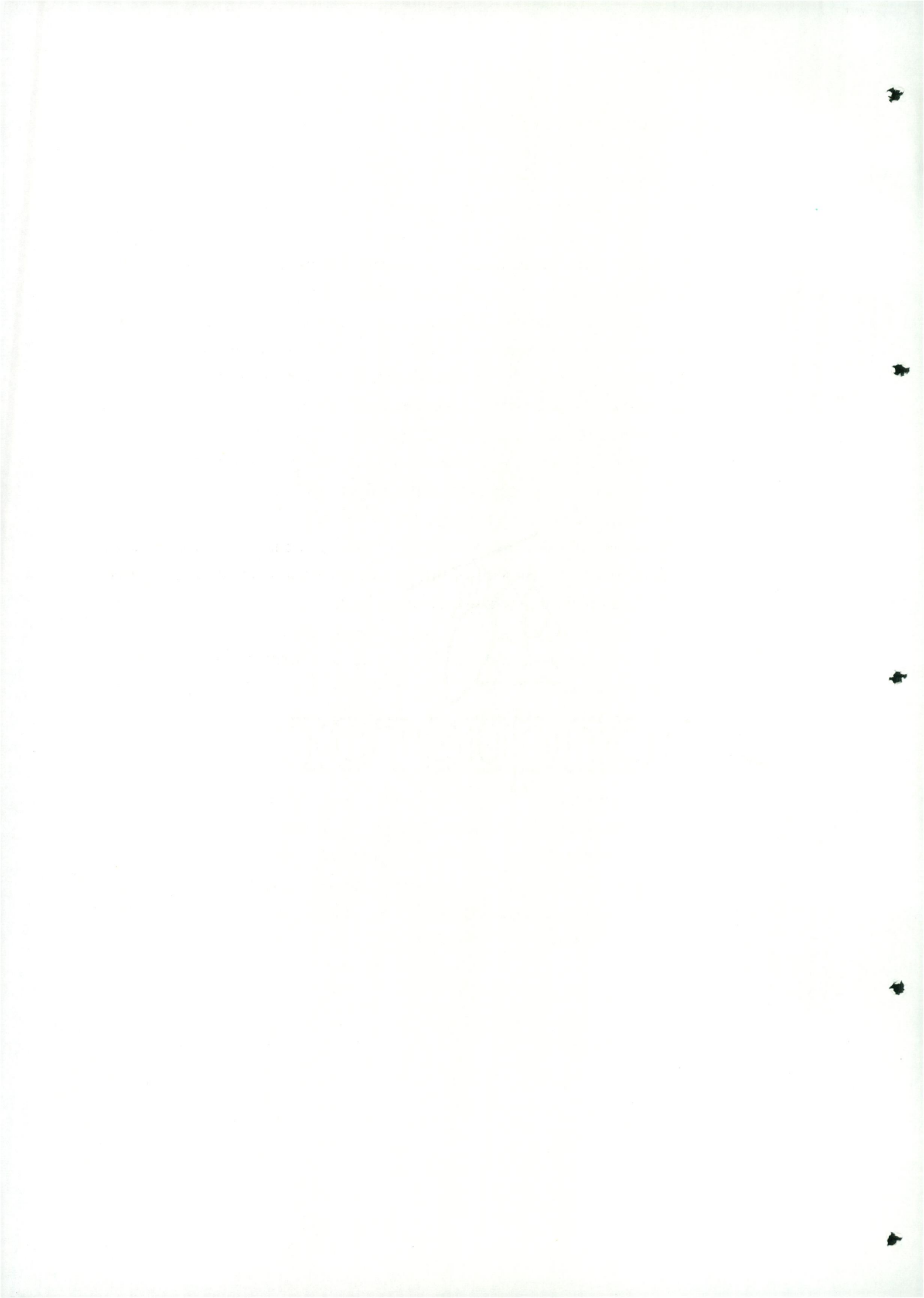
(1) Namely, Anne Tallentire's 'The Gap of Two Birds', (London), (1988), Melanie Councel, 'Installation of the BSR Factory', (Derry), (1990), and Christine O'Leary's 'Wave/Another Country', (London), (1991).

(2) A framework that proceeds from absolutes can foreclose on a solution reducing the complexity of the problem, (Sunder Rajan in a discourse on the specificity of feminism).

(3) Also discussed in the beginning of Chapter Two in relation to the anglicisation of Irish placenames.

(4) This is also reflected in previous discussions of myth and Irishness as informed by colonial ideology, where she used and attempted to critique some of their constructions, (See Chapter Two).

(5) Outlined in the exploration of Hegarty's engagement with the myth of Mother Ireland, Chapter Two.

CONCLUSION

The agenda within *Turas*, as with this thesis has been to expose and explore the relations of power which are contained within partiarchal institutions, in order to seek an interrupution of its continuity. For, through such interruptions, the possibility of rupturing certain oppressive systems of representation can be realised.

Frances Hegarty's response to these systems has entailed a 'journey' through a network of video images which she offers as an opposing set to those masculine ones.

Turas on the one hand can be understood as the exploration of Irish women's subjectivities as they derive from colonial structures, on the other hand, through its historical specificity, it also proposes a radical interrogation of identity.

Where this analysis of the video goes some way to explaining the situations of Irish women in Britain, it also signifies, through Hegarty's difficulty in articulating images and notions of Colonialism, Myth, Irishness, Womaness and Language, the complexities of the task at hand. Moreover, whilst Hegarty recognises that these concepts can lead to ideas of nostalgic 'nativism', she also proposes them as a useful transitional phase, allowing for the space to challenge and re-conceptulise dominant understandings.

So where *Turas* does not seem to align with dominant constructions, it can be perceived as a critique of patriarchal continuity. Even though many women (numerous feminists among them), [1] have attempted to undermine this continuity of oppression, through the re-appropriation of various patriarchal institutions, it still very much remains an entrenched facet of most societies.

To conclude then, as this realisation has yet to be achieved, *Turas* can be viewed as a brief interruption of patriarchal continuity and might be seen a a tentative step in offering up an alternative.
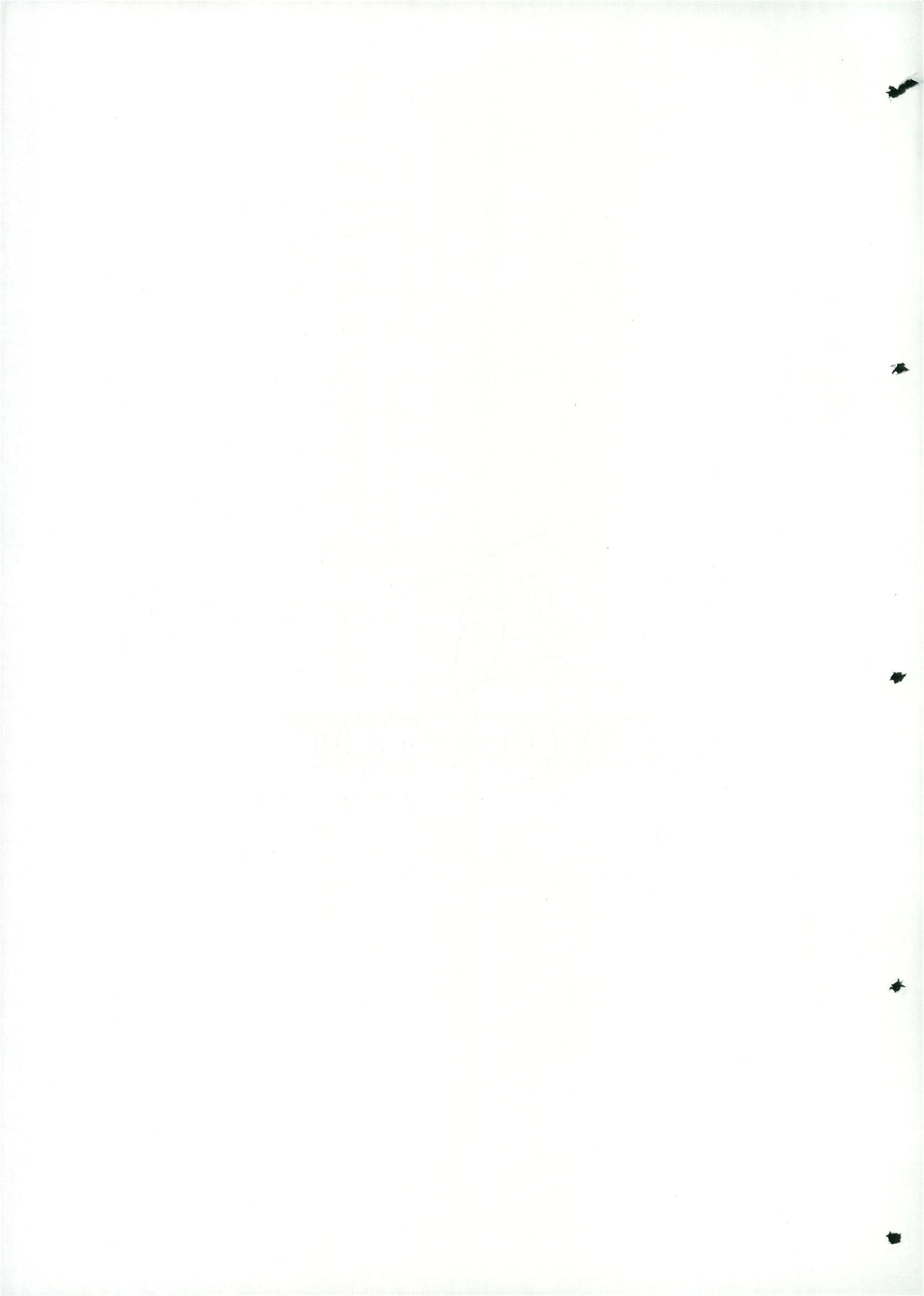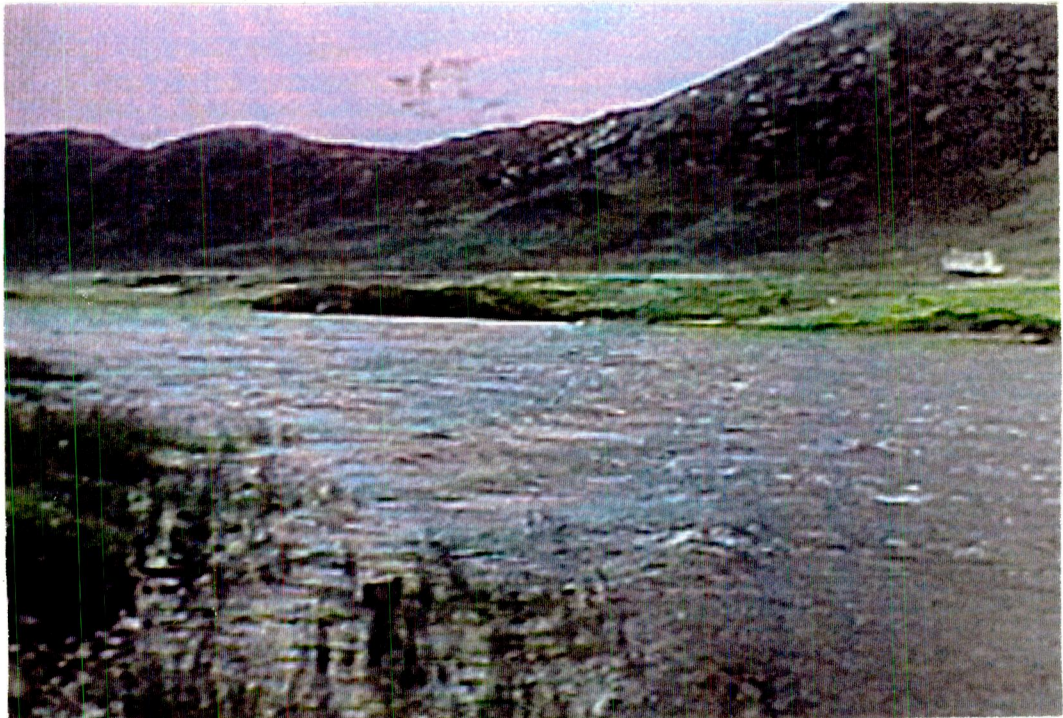
Illus. 23 - the restoration of the re-appropriated 'mothertongue' -
the peaceful lapping of the river against the river bank -
From *Turas*

ENDNOTES - CONCLUSION

(1)   For e.g. Sangari and Vaid proposed a 'relational' feminist histography through the "recasting (of) women against the backdrop of colonial history", where investigations of women's subjugation would relate to other given patriarchal discourses of history and ideology, *(Sangari and Vaid in Radhakrishnan, P. 83)*. In other words, this proposal, which is reflected in *Turas*, seeks to acknowledge the force of 'prior placement' resulting from such structures as nationalism and colonialism.

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