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National College of Art & Design

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A View of Home

An analysis of identity, with specific reference to Irish identity and its
representation in Anthony Haughey's series <u>Home</u>.

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Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Design and Complementary
Studies in Candidacy for the Degree of Bachelor of Design, 1999.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all those who assisted me in this thesis including the following:

Dr. Niamh O'Sullivan, my thesis tutor, for her advice;
Anthony Haughey, for the interview on <u>Home</u>.

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Introduction

When I first saw Anthony Haughey's series <u>Home</u> I was overwhelmed by a feeling of identification and familiarity. Many of the scenes photographed were reminiscent of my childhood home and experiences; there was an intrinsic "Irishness" about them which was borne upon me on an unconscious, rather than a conscious level. I was also aware of a tension in the series, which, though familiar, I could not quite explain. On further examination of the series, and specifically on how and why it exuded such a sense of "Irishness", it became apparent that it was the shared experiences, practices and images between some of these homes and my home that made them so familiar. It is the accumulation of specifically Irish rituals, references and symbolism that gives the series its "Irishness". I saw symbols in the photographs, Celtic and religious, that I had hardly noticed in my childhood home, though they were pervasively present. Apparently these symbols, which are specific to Irish households, existed in my subconscious and their representation in home brought them to my consciousness, thus making very real the idea of national identity as constructed from experiences, images and interactions with national institutions.

The editorial of <u>The Crane Bag Vol. 1, No. 2</u> (Hederman and Kearney (Eds.), 1982, p.92) questions what makes us feel Irish.

> *"Is it like being Jewish, is it something embedded in*
> *your psyche or physiognomy? Is 'Irishness' a certain*
> *sediment in the soul or chemistry in the blood stream?*
> *Is it something inherited or something 'caught' from the*
> *environment?"*

While these questions may be rhetorical, it is easy to assume that there is an essential bond between Irish people, that Irish identity is indeed something

one is born with, something that remains essentially fixed throughout one's life. This might explain why I identified so thoroughly, with photographs of families I do not know, in <u>Home</u>. On closer examination, however, it occurred to me that the series was in fact a representation which deconstructed this notion of essential identity.

In order to explore this further, in this thesis, I will examine the question of identity and Irish national identity, with particular reference to its representation in <u>Home</u>.

Chapter One examines the work of a number of authors who have written about culture and identity. It deals, particularly, with the constructionist model of identity, which challenges the concept of essential identity. It suggests that identity is constructed through underlying structural processes in culture and society and is fluid rather than fixed. Stuart Hall describes this model of identity as de-centring the sovereign individual, and giving rise to its reconception as post-modern. The post-modern subject is characterised as having no centred identity, but a multiple or fragmented sense of identity. (Hall, Held and McGrew, 1992) Writers such as Jonathon Rutherford (1984), Liz Bondi (1993) and Madan Sarup (1996) espouse the conception of identity as multiple and fluid. They regard this as a basis for a more equitable society, that is, one which is not structured as a dominant centre with subordinate groups at its margins, but, as a multi-positional structure, in which power is dispersed. Each of these writers, refers to the importance of language and representation, in structuring concepts of identity, including, national identity.

Chapter Two examines structuralism and how it relates to the deconstruction of essential identity. Structuralism is described by Richard Kearney as a method of analysis that examines the underlying structural laws that effect

meaning in different modes of signification. (Kearney, 1986) Structuralism was developed, primarily, in relation to linguistics, by Ferdinand de Saussure. In his novel approach to language, he analysed its hidden structures and how these predetermine and effect the surface meanings of language or speech. Influenced by Saussure, Roland Barthes took, what is referred to as, a semiotic approach to culture. He read culture as a system of signs and looked to the structures of cultural events and texts to uncover the hidden ideologies that might inform them. His approach to culture supports the idea that cultural texts can be influential in society, in terms of the meanings they construct. My intention is to apply some of these ideas to a study of Home, with specific reference to how Irish identity is represented in the series.

To put this study in an Irish context, Chapter Three looks more closely at Irish identity. It examines the cultural nationalism that dominated the early decades of this State's history. The promotion of cultural nationalism, which is associated with tradition, involved the conception of identity as essential. Elsewhere, however, the concept of an essential identity was being challenged, by a variety of new theories, that arose from the experience of modernity. These theories contributed to the conception of identity as constructed. The Irish return to tradition, in the face of a modernising world, may have been an attempt to establish some sense of independence and a secure and separate identity.

A number of authors, analysing Irish culture, refer to a "crisis of identity" that is to be found in the Irish consciousness. This is often characterised as a dichotomy between tradition and modernity. Kearney writes about "the transitional paradigm" by which he means, the attempts, by Irish artists and writers, to resolve the tension between tradition and modernity in Irish identity - to make a transition from past history to the future. (Kearney, 1988) Luke

Gibbons (1996) refers to the need to re-read Irish culture and cultural texts and to look for their tranformative qualities. It is, in part, a transformation from traditional to modern attitudes that he is espousing.

Post-modern identity has been characterised as de-centred and fragmented. Post-modern texts reflect this character and are therefore ideally suited to representing the contradictions and complexities of Irish identity. Home is a post-modern text and Chapter Four will examine how Haughey deals with Irish identity in this series. I have chosen to deal with Haughey last since my analysis of his work is so much influenced and informed by the theory which is presented in chapters one to three. In Chapter Four I will argue that he does not present romantic or stereotypical images of Ireland, but ones that reflect the "crisis of identity" that has existed in the Irish psyche.

Home is a photo-essay based on four families living in Ballymun, a North Dublin suburb. Haughey is related to one of the families. It is a series of twenty-nine colour photographs which were exhibited together with the text of Article 41 of the Irish Constitution, dealing with the rights of the family in Ireland. These documentary photographs were taken between 1990 and 1991 by Haughey who lived and worked in Ballymun for over a year. They can be read on two levels: the first is literal, in that they describe the circumstances in which these families live, depicting the ups and downs of family life, its chaos and quiet moments, its strains and the joys; the second is symbolic, as these images are littered with symbols that refer to social and cultural discourses that exist outside of the images, in Irish society. These symbols point to insights into the layered and complex identity of the families photographed and other families throughout Ireland. Aside from issues of personal identity, other ideas raised in the series concern issues of national

identity, including the influence of religion, cultural nationalism, colonial history, violence and modernity in Irish society.

Born in Keady, Co. Armagh, Haughey now lives and works in Dublin. He graduated from West Surrey College of Art and Design, Farnham, in 1991 with a degree in Film Photography and Video (B.A. Hons.) <u>Home</u>, Haughey's first major body of work was produced between 1990 and 1992. The critically acclaimed series, was exhibited in the Gallery of Photography, Dublin, in 1992. It toured extensively and is represented in the collections of a number of institutions in Ireland, Britain and France. These include The Irish Arts Council, Dublin, The Crawford Municiple Art Gallery, Cork, Centre de la Photographie, Nord pas de Calais, France, The Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and the National Museum of Film Photography and Television, Bradford. The work has also appeared in numerous catalogues and publications both in Europe and America.

Chapter One   Theories of Identity

Essentialism

The origins of modern man can be traced back to Renaissance humanism, a rationalist movement that placed man at the centre of the universe. Subsequently, Rene Descartes asserted that, through pure reason the human could discover the truth of being. This belief assumes that absolute truth exists and that both knowledge and identity are independent of culture and history. It further assumes that the individual is an autonomous agent, born with an essential identity, that develops but remains essentially unchanged throughout one's life . The Age of Enlightenment in eighteenth century Europe reinforced the concept of man as a sovereign individual, rational, scientific and capable of understanding human history. (Hall, 1992) This belief influenced the way society and the world has been perceived and categorised, and is regarded as highly influential in the thinking and politics of Western liberal democracies today. (Bondi, 1993; Rutherford, 1990 and Sarup, 1996)

As modern society grew more complex in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the social sciences developed, so did the concept of the sociological individual. Here identity is seen as developing in relation to society, as opposed to independently from it. (Hall, 1992) Hall, however, points out that this concept of the sociological individual does not necessarily rule out the idea of an essential core within the person that is his or her true

identity. I would suggest that the perception of people, as sovereign individuals, is still common today. Nationalism, for example, depends on the idea that there is a national essence that binds the nation's people and differentiates it from other nations

Notwithstanding the above, identity is widely experienced as multiple and fractured in contemporary society. Hall refers to a "crisis of identity" in late modernity. He associates this crisis with changes in the social and cultural structures of modern society which he claims are "fragmenting the cultural landscapes of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race and nationality which gave us firm locations as social individuals." (Hall,1992, p. 275) Sarup argues that in the modern world the individual is involved in many different social worlds in a lifetime, but is never fully at home in any one of them. He, therefore, describes the contemporary individual as homeless. (Sarup, 1996) This appears to contradict the idea of a sovereign individual with a unified identity. Nevertheless, Bondi maintains of liberal humanism, that "It remains the dominant hegemonic view in Western liberal democracies." (Bondi, 1993)

Post-modernism

Hall identifies a number of theories, outlined below, which he describes as "ruptures in the discourses of modern knowledge" (Hall, 1992, p.285) and which , he suggests, have contributed to the "decentring" of the subject and its reconception as post-modern.

Marx, says Hall, by seeing the alienation of the worker as a result of the structure of class relations, pointed to the idea that the individual is born into pre-existing social and historical conditions with which s/he must contend. In the 1960s, this was interpreted by Louis Althusser in a way that decentres the

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modern individual by shifting agency away from the individual and concentrating instead on the influence of social and historical conditions which operate beyond his/her control. Freud's theories of the unconscious raised the idea that beyond our conscious thoughts, and the realm of reason, lies a part of ourselves that we cannot fully know or control. Jacque Lacan's reading of Freud argued that we are not born with a unified identity which grows within us, rather our identity is formed in relation to others, so that we gradually learn to feel that we are unified beings.

The above theories suggest that identity, "...is constructed through structured processes rather than being innate or pre-given," and they offer, "...a direct challenge to the assumptions and certainties of liberal humanism." (Bondi in Keith, Pile (eds.), 1993, p.86)

A Critique Of Essentialism

The concept of the autonomous individual, each with an essential identity creates the opportunity for all individuals to be regarded as equal. The universality of mankind has been used for emancipatory purposes and in support of equality. However, Bondi points out that this concept,

> *"...has turned out to be as much a mechanism for subordination as a counter to it, because its supposed universality rests upon a suppression of difference. Moreover, the differences that are suppressed are differences from those who occupy positions of power and who have the authority to define knowledge. And the spurious claim to universality effectively creates excluded minoritized groups Thus, to qualify for equality means becoming indistinguishable from the authors of this viewpoint: white, western, bourgeois men."*

(Bondi, 1993, pg.86)

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Here the concept of universal identity and truth is regarded as upholding a system of hierarchical relations and power structures that suppress difference. This is reflected in the binarism of Western language. Rutherford writes that, "In the hierarchical language of the West what is alien represents otherness, the site of difference and the repository of our fears and anxieties." (Rutherford, 1990, p.10)

Within the polarities of this language, one term is always dominant over the subordinate other, e.g.: reason versus insanity; male versus female; citizen versus foreigner. Rutherford goes on to write that, "The centre invests the other with its terrors. It is the threat of the dissolution of self that ignites the irrational hatred and hostility as the centre struggles to assert and secure its boundaries, the construct self from not-self." (Rutherford, 1990, p.11) He argues that if the term "difference" can be reconceived as representing the hybridity and multiplicity that characterises modern identity, rather than otherness, or that which is unacceptable to the centre, we might develop new attitudes, new attitudes of tolerance and an acceptance of the fluid nature of identity. He therefore espouses a politics of difference that is "...a critique of essentialism and monoculturalism..." and that "...recognises both the interdependent and relational nature of identities..." (Rutherford, 1990, p.10)

Rutherford is not alone in his critique of essentialism. The concept of identity as destabilised and fractured, as an ever changing and always incomplete process is to be found in many cultural texts. Bondi refers to identity "as process, as performance and as provisional... always both internally fractured and externally multiple" (Bondi,1993, p.97)

This post-modern sense of identity is a direct challenge to the concept of the sovereign individual which has dominated Western thought since the

Renaissance. It is anti-humanist as it views identity as constructed rather than as an inherent essence in each human being. Many argue, however, that post-modern identity can be a liberating concept, one that sees difference as positive rather than alien and regards the fractured nature of identity, so typically described in traumatic terms, as acceptable.

National Identity

Not only would Sarup consider the affinity felt between nationals to be constructed, but also, the sense of "Irishness" that I experienced in seeing Home. In Identity, Culture and the Post-modern World, he writes "Nations foster a sense of belonging...states are engaged in the incessant propaganda of shared attitudes. They glorify and enforce ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural homogeneity..." (Sarup, 1996, p.131) He argues that it is through the construction of narratives that the idea of a nation with a cohesive identity is produced.

Benedict Anderson argues that nations are a relatively recent concept. (Anderson, 1983) Nationalism became a formal expression only in the nineteenth century. He refers to nations as imagined communities, pointing out that one can only ever meet or know a very small number of one's fellow nationals so that a shared national identity must be imagined. One of the things that Anderson associates with the rise of the nation, is the decline of the concept of the world as divinely ordained, and the rise of the idea of man as a sovereign individual capable of reason, autonomy and self-fulfilment. He argues that nations are conceived as sovereign and limited, precisely because, they were conceived of in the Age of Enlightenment. Anderson also points to

the importance of the novel and of newspapers in the representing and imagining of the nation. He writes that "The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation which is also conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history." (Anderson, 1983, p.31) Here, again, we see the connection being made between representation and the concept of identity and nationhood.

There are implications here in terms of power and control, since those who are in a position to create the narrative decide how to define the nation, what is accepted and what is excluded. Culture and representation can, therefore, be regarded as key elements in society. Gramsci acknowledges the power of culture in society when he refers to cultural hegemony, explaining that dominant classes in society maintain control by influencing popular opinion through ideological coercion and consent. He regarded cultural hegemony as being dynamic in nature. (Kearney, 1986) It can, therefore, be won or lost. Said also emphasises the role of culture and representation in shaping empires and nations when he refers to "a gathering awareness that cultures are humanly made structures of both authority and participation." (Said, 1994, p.15) It is through representations that we create and absorb identity. Cultural representations are therefore, powerful, political tools.

The conception of the nation as limited or sovereign may be seen as one of the problems with the way the nation is imagined. Those who are not citizens of the nation are seen as foreigners, and those who do not conform with the behavioural 'norms' of the imagined community are regarded as deviant. In this hierarchical way of thinking, the second term is conceived as the 'other' of the first, it is the creation of the first. While the first term is at the centre, the second one is in the margins of this conception of reality. (Rutherford, 1990)

In light of this, there are many who see the need to rethink the nation. Representations are, and will be important, in terms of providing new ways to conceive of the nation or other forms of community identity. It is with this in mind that I will examine how Haughey narrates the nation in <u>Home.</u> First, however, I will examine how representations can be regarded as constructing identity.

Chapter Two   Structuralism and Identity

Structuralism

If identity is constructed rather than inherent, how is it constructed ? There are many approaches to this question but I want to look at the semiotic approach here, as it deals specifically with the construction of meaning and identity through cultural representation.

The linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857 - 1913), regarded as the father of structuralism, looked at language in a novel way, one that would contribute greatly to the notion of the decentring of the individual, and laid the basis for semiotics. Language had previously been viewed as a referential system which expressed purely the intentions of the speaker. This view places the individual at the centre of language and meaning; it implies that "things" have inherent or essential meanings that are simply reflected in language. (Hall, 1997)

Saussure saw language as a cultural and social system of rules within which the speaker must work. In his structural analysis he divided language into two distinct elements; language (*langue*) and speech (*parole*). Language is the overall system of rules and codes which we share and use in order to communicate. Speech is the particular act of communication which uses the rules and codes of the language system. Whereas speech is produced by the speaker, language is not, and without the system of language, speech can have no meaning.

In his model of language, Saussure defined the *sign* as the relation between the *form* (spoken or written word, image etc.) and the *concept* (the idea of the form). He called the former the *signifier* and the latter the *signified* and together they form the *sign*. "Both are required to produce meaning but it is the relationship between them, fixed by our cultural and linguistic codes that sustains representation." (Hall, 1997, p.31,) Saussure stressed the arbitrary nature of the relationship. The meaning of a sign is not essential, natural or fixed, but is a matter of social convention. He argued that the meaning of a sign is determined by the difference between that sign and other signs in the language system.

In this model, language is seen as a system of signs that are given meaning through socially established codes. This proposition has a number of implications. It implies that meaning and identity are produced through signifying practice and not inherent in things and people. That is not to say, however, that we have total control over the meanings we produce. Though linguistic codes are socially constructed, once produced they are not easily changed. When we speak, we generally use the accepted social codes in order to be understood. What we say is, therefore, never original but must reflect social and cultural meanings already established in language. Finally, if meaning depends on social and cultural codes, it must be fluid rather than fixed. Language is an open-ended and fluid system and so, therefore, are meaning and identity.

Kearney describes structuralism as a method.

> *"Its aim is to analyse isolated events or meanings in terms of their underlying structural laws. It seeks to comprehend particulars by describing their interrelationship within the totality of general codes which govern them. It looks for the deep and often hidden structures beneath the surface manifestation of meaning".*

(Kearney, 1986, p.240)

Those who followed Saussure did just that, applying his method to a wide variety of signifying systems.

A Semiotic Approach

Barthes applies structural analysis to a broad variety of cultural activities. He approaches culture as a system of signs, in what is referred to as a semiotic approach. Similar to Saussure's view of language, he did not see cultural texts as simply the "intentional" products of the author but "as a complex interplay of structural relations, governed by a social or collective system of signification". (Kearney, 1986, p.321) He, therefore, examined the structure rather than the mere content of cultural texts to uncover their hidden meanings - meanings that reflect the underlying cultural and social ideologies which inform the text. Barthes' analysis, therefore, included sociological, historical and ideological considerations as well as formal ones. According to Barthes, apart from the overt and consciously read messages of cultural texts, there are invisible ideological messages conveyed which are picked up unconsciously. He calls these myths. In his analytical model there are two orders of signification. There is the denoted message which is the literal or obvious message with a signifier, a signified and a sign. But beneath this message,

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using it as a signifier, there is a connoted message. The connoted message is related to the ideologies and value systems of a culture. A highly simplified example of Barthes' mythological system is the wearing of an Aran jumper. On a denotative level, we link the knitted article (signifier) with our concept of it (signified) and recognise the Aran jumper (sign). On a connoted level, this sign can be linked to culture, more generally to its ideologies and meaning. The Aran jumper may then signify ideas of Irishness. At this second level of signification "we are beginning to interpret the completed signs in terms of the wider realms of social ideology - the general beliefs, conceptual frameworks and value systems of society". (Hall, 1997, p.39)

In Mythologies Roland Barthes makes the distinction between the denotative and the connotative functions of a photograph. (Barthes, 1973) While what is denoted is that which is literally described by the photographic image, the connoted meaning is regarded as an interpretation of the image and is related to its cultural context and the belief and value systems of the society from which it emanated. Barthes highlights the complexity of the photograph as a signifying system, rejecting the idea that it can be regarded as simply reflecting reality. The mirror-like quality of a photograph belies its complexity as a system of signification. While a photograph appears to record history it actually removes its subject from history, thereby losing the context of the original scene and much of its meaning. In the light of more recent cultural and photographic theory, it is now accepted that photographs must be viewed as signifying systems through which meanings are constructed rather than reflected. Victor Burgin refers to the intertextuality of the photograph, pointing out that it refers to a variety of other texts, beliefs and ways of thinking that are taken for granted in culture at the particular time. Though these texts do not appear in the image, they affect its meaning. He also examines the 'looks' of photographic representation. The signifying system of

photography presents not only a subject to be viewed but also a point of view. This system obscures the textuality of the photograph, setting the viewer up to receive its information passively, as fact, rather than to read it critically, as a text. (Burgin, 1982)

Reading The Texts

I would argue that any text can be analysed for the cultural ideologies and influences that inform it, whatever these influences are, and however diverse and mixed they are. At least, one opinion of these influences can be expressed in an analysis. If we accept that meanings are constructed and fluid, and subject to interpretation, then we must accept that there are numerous possible readings of any text, none of which can claim authority over the meanings in the text. Barthes, however, shows that there are connoted meanings in texts - ones that relate to culture and ideologies, that are historical but may appear natural. I would argue that an ongoing re-reading of texts is an important thing, if only to remind us that meanings are made, and that we have a responsibility in terms of being aware of what meanings we construct, and what constructions lie behind our beliefs, and through them, understand our actions.

By looking more closely at our texts we may become conscious of some of our unconsciously held beliefs. We may be enabled to evaluate these beliefs in terms of the history that produced them, and ask why they are necessary, and whether they still serve a purpose. We might find that it is time to let go of some of our beliefs, or to reform them in relation to today. It is in the light of the idea that meanings, ideologies and identities can be constructed or promoted through texts that I want to examine the representation of Irish

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identity and ultimately, Haughey's series <u>Home</u> and how it deals with national identity.

Chapter Three: Irish Identity

Identity In The New State

Irish identity has been formed in relation to its colonial history. Having being colonised since the seventeenth century Ireland achieved independence from British rule at the beginning of this century. Under the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 6th of December 1921, the 32 county island was partitioned with 6 counties remaining under British rule while the other 26 formed the new state which was formed in 1922. The drive towards independence had included a cultural revival. In the latter half of the nineteenth century Douglas Hyde founded the Gaelic League to promote the Irish language and traditional Irish culture. "Hyde saw the Gaelic revival as an 'intellectual movement' which would make Ireland interesting for the 'Irish' by making the present a rational continuation of the past." (Kearney, 1988, p.11) The Anglo-Irish literary revival of this time also sought to provide a sense of cultural unity to a society which history had left divided and factious. Yeats, in particular, is associated with promoting the idea of a collective Irish identity, formed in ancient times, through his use of Irish folklore and mythology. According to Kearney, this is not unusual,

> *"Most contemporary nations and states invoke*
> *indigenous myths which provide a sense of 'original*
> *identity' for their 'people'. The symbolic or ritualistic*
> *reiteration of these myths is thought to redeem the*
> *fractures of the present by appealing to some*
> *foundational acts which happened at the beginning of*
> *time and harbour a sense of timeless unity. Such mythic*
> *origins are frequently connected with figures of*
> *motherland...Such figures generally lie at the root of*
> *myths of national sovereignty."*
>
> (Kearney,1997, p.108)

Referring to Ireland, Kearney describes revivalism as, "something of an orthodoxy in the early decades of this century". (Kearney, 1988, p. 10). This revival of the idea of an original, unified identity, relies on the conception of Irish identity as essential and unchanging through the ages. The new State's promotion of cultural nationalism can, perhaps, be interpreted in part as an effort to establish independence from Britain, to unify and provide a sense of identity for the Irish people who, for generations, had experienced dispossession under colonial rule. The decision to imagine the nation in this way was perhaps an effort to become self-possessed. This idea of national identity, however, would never have reflected the diverse reality of identity in Ireland. Particularly Irish identity, which, through years of colonisation and emigration, was so fragmented and ruptured, an experience which, as Gibbons remarks, is akin to the dislocating experience of modernity.

In Britain, and areas of the continent, the industrial revolution had happened and modernity was being embraced at this point. The traditional structures of society were being uprooted and replaced by modern structures. The writings

of Beckett and Joyce, and their concern with language, questioned the notion of essential identity and atested to the dislocating experiences of modernity. Saussure was developing his structural approach to language. These ideas were the precursors to the conception of identity as constructed, a concept that has been associated with modernity and post-modernity. For the time being, however, modernity, which would realistically have to be embraced by Ireland eventually, was shunned, in exchange for some secure sense of identity.

Tradition Versus Modernity

Michel Pheillon has noted a dichotomy between modernity and tradition in the ideology of a variety of Irish discourses. Regarding an analysis of letters to the Irish Times he writes, "an analysis of their underlying structure revealed that they manifested only a few central dichotomies. These dichotomies included the constant opposition of 'tradition' as against 'modernity'." He noted that while tradition tended to be associated with, "national, conformity to nature, religious, idealism" and evaluated positively, modernity was associated with "cosmopolitan, interference with nature , profane, materialism" and evaluated negatively. (Pheillon, 1984, p. 47) Despite the reality of modernity it would seem as if there is an unwillingness among some Irish people to let go of the ideologies and attitudes associated with tradition.

This dichotomy is also noted by Kearney (1988) and Gibbons (1996). They emphasise the importance of cultural narratives in finding a way to traverse the dichotomy between modernity and tradition in Irish ideology, to move from the past into the future. As Kearney puts it, "Narrative is where the text of imagination interweaves with the context of history. It is a point of transit between past and future". (Kearney, 1988, p.10) In his analysis of a selection of Irish cultural texts Kearney differentiates between the extremes of revivalist

texts (those that look to the past in an effort to find a unifying Irish identity), radical modernist texts (those that repudiate the past in the belief that a new identity needs to be constructed unhampered by the myth of original or essential Irish identity), and texts that occupy a middle ground. However, he regards all of them as reflecting the crisis in Irish identity, and an attempt to make a transition from the past to the future in Irish identity and he says, "The transitional paradigm exemplifies the essentially conflictual nature of contemporary Irish experience, it expresses the multiple complexities and paradoxes which inform our sense of history". (Kearney, 1988, p.14) Gibbons argues that Irish culture and cultural texts contain evidence of how the fragmentation and dislocation of colonialisation was dealt with by Irish society in the past. Furthermore, he also argues that present cultural practices and traditions must be analysed, to reveal their role or purpose in today's society. An understanding of the role of traditions in modern society, of the needs they fulfil, may point to the need for changes in society. If we regard identity as fluid and changing, we can acknowledge our past and traditions but also move on and embrace change.

The modern experience is characterised by rapid change, uncertainty and even alienation. According to Kearney, "The modernist mind prefers discontinuity to continuity, diversity to unity, conflict to harmony, novelty to heritage." (Kearney, 1988, p.12) The radical modernist insists on a break with the past and a facing up to the ruptures of modernity. While the ruptures of modernity loom about us and ahead of us, however, the ruptures of the colonial history loom behind us. As Gibbons puts it, "Ireland is a First World Country with a Third World memory." (Gibbons 1996, p.3) He argues that from an imperial centre, the tradition of the old order was indeed stable and secure before the ruptures of modernity. However, from a colonised position, society was already ruptured and fractured by the colonial experience. While the

government of the new Irish State had opted to look inward and to promote a simple, self-sufficient rural community, rather than to look outwards and to embrace industrialisation and modernity, the destabilising and alienating experience associated with modernity had already been experienced in Ireland during its history of colonisation.

With this in mind, it is easier to understand why the Irish people went along with the traditional ideologies promoted by the newly formed state. The transitional crisis between past and future that is manifest in Irish cultural discourses is perhaps explained by this history. I would argue that when radical modernists repudiate or deny the traditional ideologies of cultural nationalism outright, they also deny that cultural identity is formed in relation to history. If we categorise traditional cultural nationalist ideologies as "wrong" we suggest that there is another set of ideologies that is somehow "right". We, therefore, run the risk of replacing one inflexible constraining identity with another, of replacing one form of binarism with another. While the revival of traditional ideologies does not serve the Irish in modern times, rather than repeating the colonial denial of a people and their culture we need to accept our history, learn from it and move on from it. If modernity has taught us anything it is the need to find new ways to imagine home. However, if we deny history, I believe we risk finding a new stable but disabling identity.

From Past To Future

The traditional ideologies associated with Irish identity; united Ireland as a political priority; Catholicism as our national religion; the Irish language as our first language; and the revival of traditional Irish culture, have become inadequate in the face of modern reality. The idea of an unconfused and pure

nation, distinct from the rest of the world, is unthinkable in the face of globalisation, the arrival of other cultures in Ireland and the Irish diaspora. The ruptures and fragmentation associated with modernity challenge any single definition of Irishness. The pressure to find a new way of defining Irish identity is increased by the strong hopes for peace in Ireland as a result of the Peace Process. These tensions between modernity and tradition are apparent in Home, which becomes a further testament to the need for a rethinking of Irish identity and nationhood.

Most people would accept the need to belong and to feel part of a community. Yet it seems that the concept of an essential identity, that is reliable and stable, and that binds a community together has its problems, particularly in modern times. Practically speaking, the problem with the promotion of an essential national identity is that its promotion can involve the suppression of difference and therefore lead to inequality. Furthermore, as we have seen, it is those who are in power who define what is acceptable and what is not. How then do we achieve a sense of security, how do we get to feel at home? It appears that we need to conceive of identity in a new way. Bondi suggests that we see identity in terms of subject positions, so that rather than asking, "who am I?" we ask, "where am I?" (Bondi, 1993). This conception of identity takes into account the fragmented and fluid nature of identity today. It allows us to associate with a number of identities at once, but stresses the need to be aware that subject positions are always constructed. In this way, identity becomes a process - always in the making. Home can, therefore, be imagined as, not so much where we come from, but where we are going to. Similarly this conception of identity may help to resolve the Irish transition from the past to the future, without repeating the sense of dispossession associated with colonial times. Rather than imagining home as a specific place with a specific identity, it can be imagined as a place to travel toward. Identity then becomes

a journey. It is in this context that Kearney says, " the migrant mind recognises that 'homecoming' is an imaginative quest, not a literal event." (Kearney,1988, p. 185)

How can Irish identity come to be accepted as an ever-changing phenomenon? It has been argued that cultural texts are involved in the construction of reality and identity. Through texts we can be enabled to see things in new ways. I would argue that post-modern texts must be useful in allowing Irish identity to be reconceived, and in enabling a transition from our past history to a modern future.

Post-modern Texts

Post-modernism accepts the fragmentation and instability of identity and meaning. Post-modern texts are likely to celebrate the instability of meaning and the multiplicity and fragmentation of identity. Rather than attempting to rationalise or provide universal theories about truth and life, they are more likely to deal with issues in a localised and subjective way. Rather than assuming that because identity is fluid there can be no real sense of identity, and that, therefore, such notions should be excluded from or repudiated in their texts, they would accept that because identity is fluid, there can be multiple senses of identity, not only in society, but within an individual. Post-modern texts are likely to be reflexive, acknowledging the input and presence of a subjective author. They, therefore, become open-ended and non-authoritarian. By avoiding judgement, the post-modern approach can juxtapose numerous seemingly contradictory meanings and identities without forcing them into opposition. The traditional and the modern can, therefore, sit together more easily in a post-modern text.

"Having taken one's distance from the 'homeland', physically or mentally, you can return to it and find there something of immense and lasting value. Traditions of myth and music can be explored again with a new found and non-fanatical freedom. This is where Modernity's obsession with absolute novelty and rupture - its frequent repudiation of historical memory - is perhaps tempered by a post-modern awareness that we cannot afford to not know our past. Rupture is complemented by remembrance ... We are more ready to acknowledge that the waters are muddied.

(Kearney , 1988, p. 186)

If a structure is created within which the modern and the traditional can be conceived together this may open up a space in which to move forward to new and open conceptions of identity. In this space the opposition of tradition and modernity can perhaps be replaced by a belief that one can be both Irish and cosmopolitan without undue conflict.

Chapter Four   Home

An Introduction

Home is a photoessay. Its images work together in a discursive but coherent examination of Irish society. A post-modern text, in which identity is presented as fluid and fragmented, it contains a symbolism that prompts a questioning of Irish identity.

The first photograph (Fig.1) introduces some of the themes prevalent in the series. It is a close-up shot of a corner filled with clutter. A picture of Our Lady with palm hanging above, and a postcard from London in a letter rack decorated with shamrocks evokes assertions about national identity, the relationship between Church and State and Ireland's complex relationship with Britain. Emigration is part of Irish life, accepted in a country that cannot sustain its people, and while Britain is the old enemy in terms of Irish nationalism, it is there that the majority of emigrants go when they leave Ireland. This reference to the Irish abroad, highlights the fact that identity is not bound by territory. Having said that identity is not fixed either; the word Viking appears behind the postcard from London, referring to the earlier invaders who became " more Irish than the Irish themselves". A can of 3-in-one oil seems to connect the Holy Trinity with the smooth running of traditional Ireland! The shamrock, one of Ireland's most widely recognised national symbols, also symbolises the Holy Trinity, so the connection between traditional Irish identity and religion, is reiterated and ostensibly made

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Figure 1   Introducing The Themes

From the series <u>Home</u> 1991   Anthony Haughey

meaningful. Identity is, therefore, introduced as a complex, layered, and fluid thing.

The photographs that follow include images of homes in which traditional elements of Irish identity are evident. There are a number of allusions to violence in the series, perhaps references to the Northern question and how militant nationalism co-exists with religion in Ireland. (Figs.2&3) These photographs are also concerned with the practical and material circumstances of the families. The living conditions, the cramped spaces, worn interiors and the faded clothes cannot be overlooked. The ideologies and traditions apparent in the pictures, must be viewed in relation to these social conditions. (Fig.4) Other influences are also present, to the extent that the pressure on these traditions in modern times is apparent. A sense of the difficulties of transition from tradition to modernity, a tension between past and future, is pivotal to the series. The image that concludes Home is of a boy sitting over a blank jig-saw map of Ireland with the pieces in a jumble to one side. (Fig.5) The Pope smiles from a poster in the background beside a St. Bridget's cross. Ireland, it seems to suggest, is there to be reconstructed. The question is, "What will we make of Ireland in the future?" Home does not aim to answer this question, it is investigative rather than solution orientated.

Context

Article 41 of the Constitution of Ireland, enacted in 1937, reflects the romantic nationalism of its time, as the government of the new State attempted to establish its independence and nationhood after a long colonial history. It also reflects the power of the Church in this State and its influence on national identity. Article 41 (1), determines that: "The State recognises the family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of society..."

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Figure 2   Religion And Violence

From the series Home 1991   Anthony Haughey

Figure 3　　　Nationalism And Violence

From the series Home 1991　　Anthony Haughey

Figure 4   Shopping

From the series <u>Home</u> 1991   Anthony Haughey

Figure 5   "What will we make of Ireland in the Future?"

From the series <u>Home</u> 1991   Anthony Haughey

and"...guarantees to protect the family." Article 41 (2) defines the woman's role as one within the home, stating that, "The state shall therefore endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home". Although Article 41 (3) banned divorce to protect the family, this paragraph has since been amended. In the modern world these aspirations are outdated, and would be regarded by many as an infringement of the right of the individual to freedom of choice. By preceding <u>Home</u> with Article 41, Haughey draws attention to some of the ideologies that have shaped Irish identity. The text predicates a critical reading of the photographs in the context of these ideologies.

Home is associated with belonging. It is usual for people to identify themselves in terms of where they come from, their hometown or homeland. Conkelton describes home as follows, "The idea of home has many resonances. Home is perceived as shelter and sanctuary, a profound complex of ideas and emotions, a conceptual enterprise as well as a specific location - it is a patent expression of culture and the individual." (Conkelton 1993 p.1) Haughey's series embraces the idea of home in this broader sense.

Haughey's Approach

In <u>Home</u> Haughey captures the richness of life in these families; the effort, tension, joy and comfort that is part of life. He also provides a narrative that runs through the series, using symbols; text, objects and images, that exist in the homes, as a system of signs, pointing to social and cultural issues that affect these families and many other Irish families. This narrative is allusive rather than dogmatic.

Traditional documentary photography, in which the aim is to effect social change, simply by photographing social injustices, has increasingly given way to more consciously subjective and reflexive documentary practices. (Wells, 1997) This approach involves the examination of society and culture rather than the presentation mirror images. It acknowledges theories that challenge the notion of objective and absolute truths. Haughey's work reflects these developments and is informed, according to Martin Parr, by "an understanding of the issues and language of contemporary photography." (Wells, 1993, p. 49) Home owes much to traditional documentary practice in terms of its realism and spontaneity, however, the structure of this work, its reflexivity and its use of symbols, all ensure that this series is an active interrogation of its subject, not a static presentation of supposed fact.

Haughey describes the project as a re-evaluating his own experiences of growing up in a large family. (Ni Ruiseal, 1998) In this sense, it is quite a personal investigation. The extent to which this series deals with social and national issues, is an indication of the influence that society and its institutions, particularly those with power, have on personal identity and on the family.

Haughey lived and worked in Ballymun for over a year during the making of Home. His intention was to portray the families from an intimate position. Though he is related to one of the families, the project involved the development of a comfortable relationship and trust between him and each of the families. It was within these relationships that the spontaneity and intimacy of the photographs in Home became possible. The project also involved Haughey's own research into the issue of identity and its representation. Documentary photography, in Ireland, has tended to be in that magnum tradition of grainy, black and white, downtrodden photographs,

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where the subject is regarded from the outside; the exotic "other". Haughey's use of colour is, therefore, of particular importance in these photographs, reflecting a desire to break with the view-point associated with that black and white tradition. He uses colour to express an intimate, subjective, viewpoint. He associates it with the family album, referring to its snapshot quality, its immediacy. (Ni Ruiseal, 1998) The intimacy of the photographs is also expressed by the fact that the majority of the photographs are close-up shots.(Fig.6)

Home is layered and dense and its meanings are fluid, reflecting the complexity of identity and social relations. These are the type of complexities, that are being addressed by Bondi when she theorizes about fluid subject positions, and by Rutherford in his theory of "difference". They are the social complexities of modernity that have contributed to the decentring of essential identity. They are the complexities of Irish history that are the result of history. Haughey deals with this full picture of society in Home. Rather than taking an approach that isolates single issues, issues that in reality do not exist in isolation, Haughey responds to the whole, to the tangled thing that society is, to its contradictions and its complexities. In postmodern style, he declares his subjectivity, avoiding authoritative statements and grand theories, he embraces the fragmentation and dislocation of the society he photographs.

Structure

The interrogative quality of Home, its density and richness as a text, depends largely on the structure of the work. Through the editing process, Haughey uses symbols that already exist within the images, to create a narrative that refers to the historical, social, cultural and political circumstances that affect

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Figure 6   Close-up Cowboys

From the series <u>Home</u> 1991   Anthony Haughey

the lives he is photographing. This narrative is separate to, though dependent on, the literal narrative of everyday life denoted in the images. Its affect is to deconstruct Irish identity. It is also reflexive, highlighting Haughey's presence in the photographs. The underlying structure of the text is a fragmented and fluid one, in which meanings are not stable, in which the single omniscient perspective, is replaced, by a multitude of possible perspectives. This structure reflects a post-modern sensibility.

Figure 7 illustrates this point. It is one of a number of photographs of this family.(Fig.8) On one level this image denotes the family relaxing: one member is making St. Bridget's crosses, another is fixing his bike, while a third sits reading the Irish Catholic newspaper in which the headline reads, "North's Burden of Intolerance". This presumably refers to sectarian intolerance in the North of Ireland. In a second system of signification, however, the proximity of this headline to the title of the paper, which defines itself in terms of nationality and religion, is ironic. It is equally ironic in relation to Article 41 of the Constitution, which illustrates the conservative and Catholic orientation of this State, which may give rise to intolerance to alternative beliefs and ways of life. The association between the church and state is picked up again in the making of St. Bridget's crosses. St. Bridget is a patron saint of Ireland and the crosses are symbols of both religion and nation. The fact that the symbol is being constructed is interesting as it highlights Irish Catholic identity as constructed and underlines the influence of representation, in this case the St. Bridget's cross, in constructing such concepts. A second headline in the paper reads, "Crisis in Africa". This is an appeal to help poverty stricken, third world countries, bled dry by the first world. Looking at the poverty experienced by the families in Home, one feels that the crisis is here, in this part of Dublin. Here is a family, loyal to both nation and religion, ideal, according to Article 41 of the Constitution, yet they are not being served

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Figure 7   "Crisis In Africa"

From the series <u>Home</u> 1991   Anthony Haughey

Figure 8   Watching Over The Family

From the series <u>Home</u> 1991   Anthony Haughey

by the State or Church. Much like the people of third world countries, they appear dispossessed in their own country, affected by unemployment and poverty and many forced to emigrate. The crisis is particularly poignant in relation to this family, precisely because they still hold traditional values. However, as this series shows, these values are under severe pressure in the modern world.

Tradition Versus Modernity

It is not satisfactory to discuss the issues raised in <u>Home</u> separately as this would belie the whole nature and structure of the series which acknowledges the inter-connection of the issues that shape identities. Notwithstanding the above, there is a theme which permeates the series, this is the tension in Irish society, between a traditional past and the future.

As previously noted, a number of authors have identified a dichotomy between Tradition and modernity in representations of Irish identity. <u>Home</u> certainly reflects this paradigm.

Alongside the images of tradition, the symbols of nationalism and catholicism, there are images in which Irish identity appears swamped by American and British culture. Figure 9 is of a large family. The wall facing the camera is covered in family photographs. The word "Paddy" is visible in one corner of the room, while another corner contains a religious alter. Two of the children have their hair in curlers in preparation for a Feis. The room is full of references to traditional Irish culture. Contrasting with this, in Figure 10, the wall facing the camera is covered in Micheal Jackson photographs. Irish culture and the Religious altar is replaced with American culture and a shrine to Micheal Jackson. Both scenes are at home in Ireland. Time and again the

Figure 9   An Irish Family

From the series Home 1991   Anthony Haughey

Figure 10   Michael Jackson

From the series <u>Home</u> 1991   Anthony Haughey

influence of British and American culture is depicted in the series. The reality of course is, that both are as much a part of present Irish culture as anything specifically Irish.

Figure 11 shows four children riveted to a computer screen. Behind them on a dark wall is the message, "Irish is important for our future", further back in the darkness is an image of La Pieta. On one hand the symbolism appears to suggest that the Irish language is not so relevant in modern Ireland, and that the influence of religion is becoming dimmer still. If the future for these children is in technology, this, like a window to the outside world, appears to contradict the message that Irish is important for their future. There is an assertion that insular, nationalist ideologies have had their day and that Irish identity must be forged in relation to the world outside. While traditional Irish culture may be important, it will be so, only, as part of a more cosmopolitan future.

By examining Irish identity and cultural nationalism in a specific context, I suggest that Home shows that a transition from tradition to modernity involves much more than a simple decision to put aside old ideologies and move on to the future. It illustrates the importance of the role culture and traditions can play in life. The cultural nationalism in depicted in Home is about more than the fun of the dance or the beauty of the language. It also symbolises freedom and independence. It could be argued that the poverty, emigration and unemployment that affects some sections of society in Ireland means that freedom and independence, if only economic, are not realised in everyday life. It is perhaps no coincidence that cultural nationalism and militant nationalism are more prevalent in working class areas of Dublin, than in prosperous areas. It may be part of a struggle to achieve a sense of identity and stability, where

Figure 11   "Irish Is Important For Our Future"

From the series Home 1991   Anthony Haughey

circumstances militate against this. Paradoxically, it is the nation, the subject of this loyalty, that has failed its people.

Tradition is not an empty thing, its not something that can be put away because it seems to be outdated. This is where a text like <u>Home</u> is so important. It encourages a more profound examination of cultural identity and its traditions. As Gibbons (1996) points out, an understanding of our traditions, and the reasons they exist, is an essential basis to real change in society. <u>Home</u> takes us some way to a better understanding of Irish cultural identity.

These readings express my views of the photographs and not necessarily Haughey's. He explains that the photographs were taken spontaneously and that it was in the editing process that the symbols, which were to be found in the scenes already, were made to work together, creating a narrative that attempts to deal with issues like national identity, religion, politics and so on. (Ni Ruiseal, 1998) Of course, once one begins to read the photographs symbolically, numerous meanings can be read into the text. The series then takes on a life of its own in relation to the viewer, who can take up his/her own journey around home.

Conclusion

This thesis opens with an examination of two concept of identity. Essentialism, a philosophy that has dominated the West since the Renaissance, sees identity as stable and unchanging. This view has been associated with binarism, a structure of language and thinking that reduces differences to polar opposites; the essential "centre" and the inconsequential "other". Within this structure there is little room for the negotiation of identity and much scope for intolerance. Another view, associated with the fragmenting and dislocating experience of modernity, regards identity as constructed, fluid and ultimately, undefinable. This model of identity is regarded by many as beneficial, in that it allows the constant redefinition of society and a way of thinking that may be the basis for an inclusive society, more tolerant of diversity. Post-modern texts, in their structure, tend to mirror the multi-perspective and fragmenting experience associated with modernity. On the basis that representations are involved in the construction of meaning, the post-modern text may enable the conception of identity as constructed.

Chapter Three identifies a "crisis of identity" that is to be found in the Irish consciousness. This is associated with a dichotomy between tradition and modernity, the past and the future, that must somehow be negotiated. I suggest that traditional Irish identity is associated with the conception of identity as essential and that a transition to modernity might be aided by the conception of identity as constructed. Representations of Irish identity are important in terms of how Irish identity will be conceived. With this in mind I analyse Home.

I would argue that Home reflects the need to find a new way to imagine identity and the nation. The structure, composition and detail of the photographs frustrates any single or simple reading of them, thereby, pointing to the instability of meaning. The use of symbolism within the photographs point to the constructed nature of identity. This questioning of the origin of beliefs, the suggestion that they are constructed rather than inherited, uproots the certainty of essential identity. Haughey's home is not stable but is always under construction, always changing.

Kearney (1998) and Gibbons (1996), respectively, write about the need to make a transition from past to future, to transform our vision of Irish identity. I suggest that Home gives some insight into the complexity and difficulty of such a transition in everyday life. The series captures the tension that exists for the generations that have to negotiate such change. There is a sense in Home of the number of influences and needs there that exist, pulling peoples lives in different directions, a real sense of the fragmented, dislocated, Irish identity.

The success of Home lies in its representation of the complexities of Irish identity and in its interrogative quality. It does not repudiate tradition but it does suggest that there is a need to rethink identity and the nation.

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