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THE DEVELOPMENT OF IRISH FEMINIST PERFORMANCE ART IN THE 1980s AND EARLY 1990s

The conservative political, economic, and social climate in Ireland during the 1980s inspired many women engaged with feminism to embrace the ‘personal is political.’ In particular, a number of referenda and events underscored women’s bodies as a site upon which the struggle for sexual and bodily autonomy was waged. Women artists adopted performance art as a feminist strategy to question essentialist and monolithic constructions of the ‘Irish woman’, whilst responding to the political and social realities of women’s lives.

This essay focuses on key performance practitioners such as Alanna O’Kelly, Pauline Cummins, and Mary Duffy examining the central issues that emerged from their feminist interventions, particularly around the representation of the body. The emphasis on the body in performance art as the primary means of expression presented these artists with an interesting challenge as they navigated identity and gender politics and grappled with the difficulties of representing the female body while subverting dominant patriarchal norms. I argue that by combining art practice with feminist activism, these artists partook in a type of embodied politics, that is provocative personal acts that exercise and resist power in local sites or through collective acts, resulting in the development of a culturally specific performance art movement in Ireland.

Opposite: Mary Duffy, *I grew up being grateful*, 1994. Photo courtesy of the artist.

IRISH FEMINISMS AND PERFORMANCE ART

The development of performance art as a medium of expression adopted by many Irish women artists working in the 1980s can be understood as a response to the conservative political and cultural climate. The status of women within Irish society came under intense scrutiny with the burgeoning second-wave Irish feminist movement in the 1970s. Women's perceived place under the political and religious ideologies that shaped the Irish nation was enshrined in Article 41.1.2 of the Irish Constitution (1937): 'In particular, the State recognizes that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.' This patriarchal dictate that women best served the nation by focusing on their maternal responsibilities in the home inspired feminist groups as they agitated for equality, both in the workplace and in the home, by specifically targeting the removal of the marriage bar in the public sector, financial parity, equal access to education and importantly, the availability of contraception.[1]

As the 1970s drew to a close, feminist efforts shifted to the struggle for women's bodily and sexual autonomy. In 1979, the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, a non-directive volunteer organisation, was established amidst efforts by groups like Women Against Violence Against Women to raise awareness about domestic and sexual abuse.[2] Though birth control was made legally available by the Health (Family Planning) Act (1979) for married couples, both doctor and pharmacist could refuse to provide it on grounds of conscionable objection. Abortion had long been prohibited in Ireland under Sections 58 and 59 of the *Offences Against the Person Act* (1861). However, the pro-life Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution (1983) asserted the right to life of the unborn child as being equal to the life of the mother, in effect making the legalisation of abortion impossible without a further Constitutional amendment. As a result non-directive pregnancy counselling services were halted and in 1986 a High Court injunction was enforced against providing information and assistance to women seeking to travel abroad for terminations.[3] Although abortion was legalised in the United Kingdom under the Abortion Act (1967) it was not permitted in Northern Ireland meaning that women in the north, like those in the Republic, were forced to travel to overseas to England and elsewhere for the procedure. When Irish voters returned to the polls in 1986 the referendum to lift the Constitutional ban on divorce was overwhelmingly defeated. Assessing the

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impact of these events it can be asserted that feminist concerns on the island of Ireland at this time were distinct from their counterparts in the United Kingdom, Europe, and United States. For Irish feminists the body emerged as a lens through which the intersection of personal, political, theoretical, and practical concerns could be focused.

The surge in feminist cultural awareness around gender and sexual inequalities meant that women working with performance and time-based processes such as Pauline Cummins, Mary Duffy, Alanna O'Kelly, Frances Hegarty, Anne Tallentire, Anna O'Sullivan, and Maggie Magee grappled with certain issues around representing the body. Performance art afforded women artists a method of creating art that circumvented traditional fine arts practices like painting, drawing and sculpture that were historically determined by male artists. Performance art enabled both self-reflexivity and broader cultural awareness that fed into identity politics at the time and became a way for Irish women artists to engage with the body as a site of lived realities. Irish art critic Dorothy Walker noted that with the exception of Nigel Rolfe and Danny McCarthy, '[i]t is a noticeable aspect of contemporary Irish art that the most advanced work in the new media of performance and video is created by young women...'.[4] Many of the works created by the practitioners discussed in this essay created during this time were body based performances either live or to camera stem from the theoretical and conceptual concerns of performance art, particularly as they focused on the performance of subjectivities.

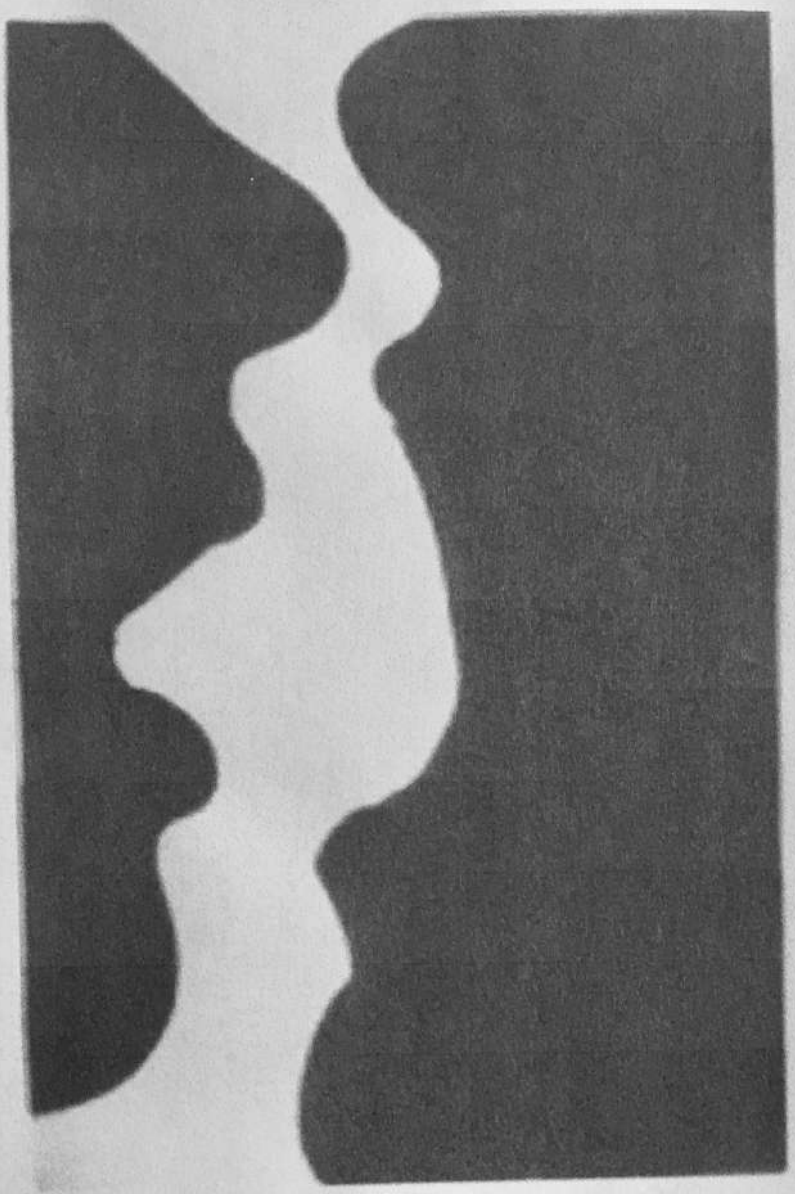
Pauline Cummins's artistic practice is intimately connected to her politics. The controversy surrounding a mural Cummins created in conjunction with the *Irish Exhibition of Living Art* (1984) installed at the National Maternity Hospital, Holles Street can be understood as a crucial moment in her performance practice. Interested in exploring issues around pregnancy

and motherhood, Cummins completed the mural entitled *Celebration – The Beginning of Labour*, based on a previous work, depicted female figures holding a birthing mother aloft. The whimsical nude figures evoked the joyousness of the impending arrival. The mural was removed shortly after its completion by hospital authorities without the artist's consultation.[5] Reflecting on the installation of the mural, Cummins remarked: 'My experience of physically reproducing the painting in the courtyard of the hospital was very exciting, because people within the hospital would come and show their support even though others wanted to destroy it.'[6] This experiential aspect to the installation of the work can be understood in relation to how the body occupies space in performance, particularly in this highly gendered space of the maternity hospital. Cummins found that a related action of tying pink and blue ribbons onto the wrought iron railings outside the hospital similarly sparked a dialogue with interested parties as to the purpose of her efforts while aiding Cummins in her task. Both of these actions, which can be considered as Cummins's early encounters with the conceptual aspects of performance art enabled her to shift her practice from the confines of the studio and gallery grounded in traditional media created for passive spectators to performance and video work energised by the presence of active participants.[7] In a further extension of this transition and her desire to connect with 'real people', in 1986 Cummins became the first artist-in-residence to work with women inmates in Mount Joy prison.

For Mary Duffy it was the experience of her body as a 'political weapon' that provided the impetus for the shift in her practice towards performance. In the early 1980s Duffy, a disabled artist born without arms as result of thalidomide, an anti-nausea drug prescribed to women during pregnancy between 1959-61, was politically involved in the Women's Campaign for Disarmament that opposed the basing of cruise missiles at the Greenham Common Royal Air Force base in Berkshire, England. Her involvement was inspired when she saw graffiti in London in 1980 that read 'Nuclear War Means Thalidomide Forever.'[8] Yet the realisation of her body as a site of power did not happen until some time later. She describes:

> When I became involved in non-violent direct action at ... Greenham Common in England, it usually meant using our bodies to barricade an exit or an entrance at the base, we would be forcibly removed by police lifting or dragging women by our limbs. When police grabbed my empty sleeves and pulled, my clothes came away

Opposite top: Alanna O'Kelly, *Echoes*, 1983. Photo courtesy of the artist.
Opposite bottom: Alanna O'Kelly, *Ómos*, video stills from The Crypt, St Mary's Abbey, Dublin. Part of the Performances at Project. Photo courtesy of the artist.



> with them. They were then confronted with my half-naked body, with its uniqueness, its roundness and its threat.[9]

Though Duffy had not intended for her body to be used in this way, the anxiety producing provocation of its nakedness and disability became a way for her to connect the personal with the political. *Wishbone* (1983) a performative photograph in the Irish National Self-Portrait Collection (Limerick) indicates the potential of her body to function in this capacity. Duffy's body emerges from the darkness, illuminated by a sliver of light. The tilting angle of her head and raised leg form a strong diagonal yet the illusive quality to the image evokes the particular dynamics at work around identification and representation in Duffy's performances.

Alanna O'Kelly was similarly concerned with nuclear armament, inspiring her collaborative performance *Realignment* (1984) with Duffy performed at the *Mark Your Mark* Festival, Belfast (1984). Her first aural performances which incorporated keening were inspired by what she witnessed at Greenham Common entitled, *Sounds Around the Base*, when approximately 30,000 women gathered to raise their voices in protest to armament. O'Kelly heard a group of women calling out and crying in a way that reminded her of keening, or *caoineadh na mairbh*, the Irish funerary practice of crying for the dead. Describing her first experiments with the power of her own voice she recalled:

> I will always remember that moment in my studio on Gardiner Street. I had this real bangy old tape recorder sitting on a chair. I went over and crouched down beside it and I just let these sounds out of me. As I continued, they became very long and very deep, real belly sounds.[10]

The embodied nature of these first solitary experimentations with performance was primal and visceral. The physicality of bending her body, compressing her stomach and opening of her mouth as sound was forced outwards recall vomiting, but they also suggest that for O'Kelly, the body in performance is about embracing the abject. *Echoes* (1983) an early collaborative performance with Trish Haugh at the Douglas Hyde Gallery, consisted of O'Kelly and Haugh making sounds with the exhalation of breath into each other's mouths. This performance drew upon Inuit throat singing, a practice where two women facing each other make sounds into

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each other's mouths through inhalations and exhalations. As each took turns acting as a resonance box, the sound of their spent breath exiting the body and echoing in the other's drove the performance onwards. These physical performances later formed the basis for O'Kelly's now seminal work, *Chant Down Greenham* (1984-88)

Each of these artists experienced a moment when embodiment, or the experience of being present in their own bodies when placing themselves in a certain situation became of central importance to their artistic practice. In light of this there are several interconnections that can be drawn between the works of these three artists. Each artist aimed to highlight issues of bodily autonomy, that is the right to make decisions regarding one's health, reproductive health and sexuality. The landmark case *Gladys Ryan v the Attorney General* (1965) clarified that Article 40.3.1 and 2 of the Irish Constitution extends to the unenumerated right to bodily integrity. Bodily integrity is defined as 'the inviolability of the physical body' contending that the self-determination of human beings over their own bodies is a personal liberty and basic human right.

Questions of bodily autonomy surrounding women's experiences of childbirth were explored in Cummins's slide/tape piece entitled *Ann Kelly is a Midwife* (1986) shown at the Neighbourhood Open Workshops (NOW), Belfast. Cummins interviewed midwife Ann Kelly, who assisted her on the homebirths of her three children. The work commented on the increasingly medicalised management of birth in Ireland as images associated with hospital births like stirrups, doctors hidden behind masks, and needles interspersed with reassuring images of Ann's face, eyes, and hands. Ann spoke with quiet confidence about the potential empowerment of the birthing experience and the inherent capabilities of women's bodies. In 1997, controversy surrounded Ann's practice when An Bord Altranais, the

regulatory body for nursing professionals, sought a High Court injunction to halt her midwifery practice after receiving complaints against her by The Master of the National Maternity Hospital when Kelly presented a woman requiring assistance for a difficult labour to the delivery ward for admission.[11] Despite the concerns by hospital authorities that Kelly had underestimated the potential risks to baby and mother, the infant was delivered safely. The mother supported Kelly's management of her labour and even aided the midwife in locating legal representation. Though proceedings dragged out over two years Ann was eventually vindicated. Artworks like this raise questions about women's bodily rights during childbirth, and, perhaps unsurprisingly, remain worryingly relevant in the contemporary context as rates of caesarian deliveries in Ireland continue to soar. Moreover, in recent years the extent of physical and psychological suffering caused by symphysiotomies in Ireland has come to light. A controversial surgery that involved sawing the pubic bone to widen the pelvis during childbirth, symphysiotomies were carried out without consent on birthing women in Ireland between 1940s and the mid 1990s. In Ireland the Catholic Church, which ran most of the maternity hospitals, advocated the method as caesarian deliveries meant that women would have to avail of birth control to limit the amount of children they could bear. Women who underwent symphysiotomies suffered incontinence, difficulty walking and chronic pain. In this respect, a work like *Ann Kelly is a Midwife*, that subverted the unnecessary medicalisation of childbirth while celebrating and empowering women's birthing choices, highlights the desparity that still exists in Irish society.

The collaborative installation by Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh, *Sounding the Depths* (1992) that contained a series of video projections, performative photographs, and sound installations was expressly concerned with bodily autonomy and sexual politics. In the first space, large composite images depicted the mouth of a woman with her lips tightly clenched, wringing hands and the two halves of a cockleshell being manipulated, edges grating against one another. In the second room, a large format projected video elaborated upon the shell/mouth/body images, imbuing them with activity. A mouth appeared, framed in a circle of light, reminiscent of the character Mouth from Samuel Beckett's *Not I* (1972). The tongue shifted slightly and the sounds of saliva were heard. A composite image of the mouth projected onto the torso appeared forming a face with breasts for eyes. The sound of the breath was slightly drawn; a shallow but

Opposite top: Alanna O'Kelly, *Realignment*, 1983. Photo courtesy of the artist.
Opposite bottom: *Extracts performance*, Paris, 2012. Photo courtesy of the artist.

warm, gasping 'ha.' The mouth was highlighted by a directed light source, like a flashlight, that shone into its opening. This emphasis implied the expected submersion of the viewer. The mouth opened wide to form a perfectly round circle, allowing the tissue of the soft palate and throat to be exposed, suggesting the act of swallowing. In the final room were several large four by six foot cibachrome colour photographs depicting the mouth superimposed on a female torso. The size of the mouth projected onto the body was akin to a visual consumption of the body. Although the mouth is the site of spoken language, in this work the vocalisations of this body communicated through breath, saliva, grating shells, and the jarring sound of grinding teeth, were potential non-verbal threats. When alive, the shell of the cockle, a bivalve mollusc is shut tightly, though it may be prised opened. The symbolism of the open cockle in this work is inspired by the empowerment of speaking from the depths of the body.

Sounding the Depths attempts to comprehend the fusion of the psychological and physical body. There was a tension established between surfaces and textures throughout the installation. The shells and composite images of teeth and torso alluded to the vagina dentata, a myth about a toothed vagina that reiterated fears about castration anxiety. The projection of the mouth dominates the body because it is of equal size to the torso. The movements of the shells and mouth highlighted a desire to sever the cultural expectations placed on the body, reiterated during a video sequence where a pair of hands, cradled one on top of the other, were outstretched and cupped like those waiting to receive Holy Communion. Next, the mouth slightly opened, in a movement reminiscent of the utterance of 'The Body of Christ' when the Eucharistic sacrament is offered from priest to communicant. Unlike the transubstantiated male body of Christ, the female body offered in the work was not easily consumed.

Sounding the Depths set up a dialogic tension between the performance of female bodies, as recorded and projected throughout the installation, and the experience of viewers' bodies as they as moved sequentially through three separate rooms. For the artists this was conceived of in relation to the idea of the gaze. Cummins remarked 'as the woman gazes down into herself there is no gaze that concerns her except for her own. The "male gaze"[...] grazes on the surface of the body. This work is concerned with a depth that cannot be possessed by passing consumption.'[12] This self-gazing in manifested in the 'head down' position adopted by the artists as they observed the projection

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of the image upon their bodies. However, in relation to the viewer, who was literally inserted into the heart of the work, the act of gazing, defined as looking intently, appeared to be eclipsed by the embodied responses to the work. Irish art critic Bruce Arnold remarked: 'But the voice sound, the liquid dripping, the gleam of mucus, all have a compelling, nearly hypnotic force to them.'[13] Artist Jaki Irvine noted that the work, contextualized in strictly woman-centred terms, employed strategies that were understood to be fraught with issues about identification:

> The female viewer is encouraged to embark on a similar process of self discovery. The political strategy adopted here is a familiar one in terms of feminist artistic practices [...] Yet despite the fact that a sense of community and solidarity between women is a necessary prerequisite for women grouping together to effect political change, it is still a strategy which is inherently problematic.[14]

Likewise, art historian Hilary Robinson notes one of the most challenging aspects was premised upon the expectation of bodily relationality: 'Some women to whom I spoke on the night of the private view found it challenging, or even frightening, to be in a situation which, they felt, expected them to identify with images representing the possibility of inhabiting a body deeply sexed and the site of enunciation.'[15] Though female sexuality in this work fluctuated between celebratory and threatening, the very idea of representing the naked female body, in such startling realism, was tremendously provocative given the restrictions on women's bodies during this time period.

Crucially, the anxiety raised by the unbounded body in *Sounding the Depths* forced the viewer to confront the perceived boundaries between self and Other. By engaging with the cultural representations of Irish women and sexuality in the 1980s and 1990s *Sounding the Depths* threatens normative

representations.[16] In the wake of the debates about sexual autonomy in Ireland, *Sounding the Depths* discouraged celebratory identification by destabilising the viewer's experience of self, providing a highly visceral understanding of how the margins of the body engage with the politically charged debates about women's bodies. In this particular work the performative, sensory, and embodied experiences of the viewer, as one of many bodies within this bodily performance, suggests that the subject-object relationship is carried throughout the work, implicating the viewer in the making of the work's meaning.

Embodiment in Alanna O'Kelly's works, expressed either through sound or physical presence, is of central importance. A number of her works like *Chant Down Greenham* (1984-88), *No Colouring Can Deepen the Darkness of Truth* (1992), *Ómós* (1995), *A'Beathú* (1996), and the *Burial of Patrick Ireland* (2009) employ keening, or *caoineadh na mairbh*, the marginalised oral tradition of crying for the dead that she reclaimed in order to articulate the importance of the past in the present.[17] O'Kelly's *Ómós* was performed the crypt of St. Mary's Abbey, Dublin. The audience was guided from the Project Arts Centre to the location and handed the following statement upon entering the cold, darkened crypt:

> I am twelve years old
> I run, barefoot, dressed in an old coat
> I see two gentlemen, traveling in a coach
> On the road from Leenane to Westport
> I run beside their coach
> I don't ask for anything
> I keep pace with them
> They tell me over and over that they will
> Give me nothing
> I do not ask for anything
> I keep my silence
> They shake their heads, ignore me, debate
> And argue, wonder at my perseverance
> I keep pace with their wheels
> I do not speak
> I do not look at them
> They give me a fourpenny piece
> I take it
> I turn on my heels and run.[18]

O'Kelly's performance strictly focuses on the actions of the girl and the practice of 'running.' Barefoot and dressed in black, the artist crouched down in the centre of the floor, lit solely by a low spotlight. O'Kelly began to keen facing the floor and turned her head to project the notes to different points of the vaulted ceiling. Standing up, she began to keep pace on the spot with only her feet and ankles lit by the spotlight.[19] As her actions intensified the viewers became aware of the texture and quality to her breath. A spotlight highlighted the contrast between the cold concrete floor and the feet as they lightly tapped the ground. Maintaining an ever-quickening pace, O'Kelly ran continuously in place for 30 minutes.

O'Kelly subverts the distant historical event of the Famine by reinserting the 'personal' back into the past, innovatively setting up the opposition between the subjectivity of a female Famine victim against the patriarchal authority of the establishment. In the original story recorded in the travel journal Rev. William Sidney Godolphin Osborne, a Famine observer, two male travellers watch as a poor adolescent girl stricken with hunger keeps pace alongside their carriage. *Omós* capitulates the hierarchy of the male observers in relation to the impoverished girl through the use of the first person 'I', subsequently privileging the subjectivity of the girl. In *Omós* O'Kelly works with and against the forces of various sounds, articulating a tension between silence and sound that reasserts female subjectivity. O'Kelly's re-written text reiterates the girl's silence, 'I don't ask for anything', 'I do not ask for anything', I keep my silence', 'I do not speak.' In Osborne's version, it is the exhibition of weakness from the girl, which appears as a cough, an involuntary exhalation of air that causes his companion to take pity and throw coins towards her. Yet in *Omós*, the girl does not seek alms, her actions call for recognition of her dignity. The inability to 'speak' highlights the dynamics of the colonial and the gendered relationship, yet in *Omós*, as in Chant Down Greenham, claiming the right to speak is circumnavigated by non-lingual sounds. The breath functions as the ultimate symbol of life, without it, one cannot live. The spotlight on the feet provides a visual affirmation of her presence, yet they symbolically tread a fine line between life and death. In *Omós* the feet of the artist function as a surrogate for the mother who demands respect for her child. In doing so, the body and the breath articulate a recognition of the past.

The title of the work, *Ómós*, is Irish for respect. As an acronym OMOS stands for 'Our Mother of Sorrows', also known as 'Mater Dolorosa.' The image of the suffering mother is common in Western religious art and has been represented in different types of iconography, including the pietà. This

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connection to the grieving mother is also implied in the original location for this performance, in the crypt of St. Mary's Abbey, Dublin.[20] The potential connection to the Virgin Mary is striking, given that until the decline of Marianism in the late 1950s, a special emphasis was placed on the reverence of the Virgin in Ireland. The period in which this performance was produced, at the end of the twentieth century, was a time when the struggle for sexual autonomy exposed unrealistic cultural representations of maternity in Irish society. In this regard this powerful performance recalls the plight of the 14 year old at the centre of the 'X case' (1992). In December 1991, a girl became pregnant as a result of rape by a family acquaintance who had been sexually abusing her for over two years. The girl and her parents sought to travel to the UK to obtain an abortion and in doing so informed the gardai of their plans should a fetal tissue sample be required as proof in the pending case against her abuser. What subsequently followed provoked wide-scale outrage, as the Attorney General successfully sought a High Court injunction that barred her from travelling to do so. Though overturned by an appeal to the Supreme Court, this particular case remains a lightening rod for advocates for reproductive choice in Ireland. In response, O'Kelly's re-running of the girl's arduous journey expresses solidarity not only with calls for women's reproductive rights, but with the journeys overseas women in Ireland make everyday to exercise their right to bodily autonomy.

Mary Duffy's performative photographic works provided a different perspective on the right to bodily autonomy. Ann Millett-Gallant places Duffy's work alongside Petra Kuppers, Carrie Sandahl, Cheryl Marie Wade, and Sally Banes, other disabled women artists whose work exists at the intersections of the feminist art movement, contemporary performance, and disability rights.[21] In the eight panelled photographic work *Cutting the Ties that Bind* (1987) a sequence of images, reminiscent of the motion studies of British photographer Eadweard Muybridge, Duffy's body emerges from underneath white drapery that recalls classical Greek statues. As her

disabled body is revealed from beneath the shroud it challenges normative associations of beauty. *I Grew Up Being Grateful* (1994) was a work created for the *Inside-Out* Arts Council travelling exhibition that sought to explore what it means to transition from childhood to adolescence to adulthood. As a child Duffy was made to wear large, prosthetic arms in an effort to render her body 'normative.' Duffy mentally and physically suffered the negative effects of these non-functional 'arms.' In *I Grew Up Being Grateful* a child's solemn face hidden in partial shadow peers out at the viewer. Her small face appears weighted down by the bulk concealed beneath her jumper, presumably her prosthetic limbs. Text from an earlier exhibition describes Duffy's childhood: 'After all that your gas powered arms are rejected, they are heavy, they hiss, and when your cylinders of gas run empty, from the heavy pack on my back, you've condemned me to walk about with arms outstretched, like as if I've just been crucified.' Arising in dynamic curvilinear lines from the top of her head is a juxtaposed image of her bent legs. They appear not once but twice. The doubling of this part of her body suggests their dual function as both arms and legs. In the upper right hand corner a blurred image is that of the artist rising from a seated position. The double exposure of the photograph articulates a tension between stilling and animating her body. The title of the work likewise tries to complicate the idea of 'grateful', referring to expectations that as a disabled child, Duffy was obliged to feel a debt of gratitude that her situation was not worse. Conversely, to be 'grateful' as an Irish woman meant being submissive, accepting one's lot in life. This aspect of the work highlights the intense pressures of conformity that Irish women faced and acknowledges the risks to those who did not. Read in this way, Duffy's performative photograph can be understood as an embodied refusal for Irish women, both corporeally and ideologically, to be fixed into place.

In her performances and photographs, light and shadow are the defining factors that suggest the tension between presence and absence in these images. Tom Duddy observed: 'The one who is composed, who is formed and shaped, who is exposed to the light, is herself. She causes images to happen by being actively present in them.'[22] In a sense Duffy is sculpting her own body, making the viewer aware of how she inhabits space and the 'negative space' around her body. As a traditional compositional tool 'negative space' is a term that refers to the empty space around a two-dimensional or three-dimensional object. Yet in Duffy's performances her body is more than an object, she is the subject that inhabits the picture plane imbuing it with life. Therefore the light and shadow that so skilfully

conceals and reveals her body questions the viewer's anticipation of the whole and fragmented self.

Though Duffy has garnered considerable international criticism in the past 15 years indicating the depth of her engagement and the power of her performances around disability arts, her performances have received scant historical attention in terms of Irish art. In the slide/tape work *Asking for It* (1986), two bodies appear, Duffy's and that of either friend or lover, they touch and press together in an embrace. The voiceover addresses the difficulties Duffy faced around touching and being touched. 'You tell me that you like to hug trees, you feel that you appreciate it. Sometimes I feel like a tree when you hug me, warm radiating and rooted. Other times I feel like a telegraph pole, straight, unbending and wired.'[23] Yet the title of the work also alludes to the social mores of Irish society that was quick to stigmatise women who expressed their sexuality in overt ways. The right to autonomy is also alluded to in the work *Pride and Prejudice* (1989), two photographic panels that employed written and visual format to highlight 'the problems of a sexual identity when the body is disabled.'[24] A reviewer of the *Sexuality and Gender: Irish Art of the Nineteen Eighties* (1990) was critical of the exhibition of these panels in the show without the accompanying video work: 'Without seeing the full video of which these two panels are but a part, the Duffy piece is itself disabled.'[25] Though the comment is aimed at the difficulty artists often face when distilling performance and time-based work through photographic images, the lack of awareness in suggesting that Duffy's work is 'disabled' by the format in which it is presented in suggests the double marginalisation that disabled women artists, like Duffy, faced in Irish society.

Women performance artists like Cummins, Duffy, and O'Kelly shifted beyond a preoccupation with the formal language of art to interrogate how political engagement, theoretical concerns, and contemporary art revolves around women's bodies. The body as primary material extended beyond the earlier concerns of feminist performance artists as the representation of the body assumed double importance in Irish culture. When Pauline Cummins asserted: 'as a woman my body was my country' she pointed to the enduring legacy of Irish nationhood projected onto the bodies of Irish women.[26] In doing so she emphasised ownership of her own body and attempted to subvert the pervasive patriarchal representations of women. Reflecting on the media frenzy surrounding the Kerry Babies Tribunal (1984), an unsolved murder case in which a young mother, Joanne Hayes, was accused of double

Opposite: Mary Duffy, *Stories of a Body*, 1990. Photo courtesy of the artist.

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infanticide, Cummins explained: 'it struck me very forcibly that her "image" was constructed not only by the media – but also through the very language of the law, the court system, the judge's attitudes. Language is non-visual, but nonetheless creates highly significant images.'[27] The aim of many women was to reclaim the power to create their own images, and what consequently arises in feminist performance art is a tension between the lingual and the embodied. In Irish performance this assumed a new significance as women struggled to find their voices in a culture that had previously silenced them.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the autobiographical performances of Cummins, O'Kelly, and Duffy. The presence of a strong oral culture in Ireland perhaps partially grounds the explanation as to why these artists fused contemporary performance and storytelling, though it is important to note that other feminist performances artists like Rachel Rosenthal and Karen Finlay had also adopted this format. In relation to storytelling, German literary critic Walter Benjamin states: 'The storyteller takes what he tells from experience – his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale.'[28] In storytelling, the latent potential of the narrative enables the active participation of the audience to interpret the embedded meaning.[29] Furthermore storytelling encourages this active participation by providing a framework through which specific collective and individual identities are located.[30] It also enables another means for the personal to become political in feminist performance. As Adrian Kear and Deborah Steinberg suggest: 'Narration [...] both enables and embeds the performative constitution of collective and individual identities; it provides a structuring dialectic mediating the imaginary and the material.'[31]

In the intimate *One Day...In Time (Extracts from Una O'Kelly's Diary November 1981-1988)* performed at the Orchard Gallery in near total darkness, O'Kelly read selected passages from her mother's diary, spanning the public and private divide. Accompanied by pre-recorded sounds of a clock and a typewriter she read out:

> Loughie went back to Aran and seemed a bit lonely leaving. No matter what you do for your children in this world, you can't save them sorrow. I expect it would be better if when they grew up you severed all connections with them and took no interest at all in their doings, at least they'd be less sad at the final parting. The troubles in the North are escalating. The Reverent Robert Bradford was assassinated and several (Ulster Defence Regiment) supposedly innocent people have been gunned down. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) are on the rampage, and now the Unionists are beginning to strike back [...].[32]

The act of reading a personal diary in a performance fuses the normally separate public and private. The performance further accentuates how O'Kelly's artistic practice articulates memory by juxtaposing different temporalities. The act of reading her mother's diaries allowed O'Kelly to reflect personally on contemporary issues. She recalls, 'I was interested in her politics, her reading of the daily news issues, her feelings about Northern Irish people as a southern Irish woman.'[33] This highlights the artist's awareness of the situation in Northern Ireland as a locus through which to examine her own Irish identity. The date selected from the diary, 1981, was a significant year in the Republican movement in Northern Ireland. During this year, IRA prisoner Bobby Sands was elected as a Member of Parliament in a by-election for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, while on hunger strike to reinstate special status as political prisoners.[34] Shortly thereafter Sands died, calling international attention to the stand-off between Margaret Thatcher's government and the interned IRA members. The strike was eventually called off in October 1981, but not before a total of ten men had died as a result of self-imposed starvation. Certainly, the turbulent events of 1981 in Northern Ireland resonated with the then current events in 1988, particularly the highly publicised killing of three IRA members in Gibraltar. Given that the location of this performance was in the Orchard Gallery in Derry City, one of the most contested cities during the Troubles in Northern Ireland, the references to these political events assume a double importance.

This shifting between public and private highlights the political and social position of women during the 1980s. The sound of the typewriter references Una O'Kelly's journalistic background and underscores the public concerns of journalism and the private concerns of mothering. The sound of the clock, indicating the passage of time, serves as a reminder of the distance from the events contained in the diary and of the distance between the artist and her mother. This performance occurred several years after the death of the artist's mother and can be understood as an attempt by O'Kelly to establish a connection with her mother based on memory. Similarly, Frances Hegarty's *Turas* (1995) also seeks to re-establish a connection with the maternal figure through the artist's attempts to regain her lost Irish language. Oral history is often used to reconstruct the personal lives of individuals, relying on the accounts of the individual to emphasise what events were important in their particular narratives.[35] Documents such as diaries and letters are rich sources for women's history, often times the only existing evidence of personal and familial lives.[36] This performance suggests the possibility of retrospectively constructing a personal narrative based on the act of reading private family history. Belarie Zatzman terms this as a 'shadow narrative', one that is constructed in the liminal spaces of subtext and locates itself between histories and the spaces mediated by imagination.[37] The connection between self and Other, or in this case, self and mother is one that the artist seeks to establish in the 'liminal spaces of subtext' literally located in the absences and silences of the diary.

A performed image created in relation to *One Day...In Time* captures the importance of subtext in understanding the potential power of these memories. O'Kelly is photographed on one side of an acetate reaching out to the written page, lightly touching the surface with the tips of her fingers. The camera focuses on the physical connection of O'Kelly with the words, while the image of the artist is somewhat out of focus. This serves to blur the artist's face, giving the impression that it is perhaps the artist or her mother that appears through the page. When reading the acetate, it is apparent that O'Kelly also sees the viewer from a veiled perspective. The page acts as a prism to transmit memory, refracting it in different ways to artist and viewer. From the artist's perspective, the writing is projected onto the distant figures of the audience, metaphorically symbolising the transformation of private concerns into the realm of the collective. As the writing is reversed for the viewer, one is totally dependent on the artist to recall and tell her mother's story. From the position of the viewer, the writing becomes inscribed on O'Kelly's body.

Importantly, the artist's hand touching the page serves as a type of bodily communication. 'The body, however, recognizes and receives communication directly from other bodies, allowing posture, gesture, and imagery to develop as alternative means of transmitting knowledge and feeling of various states of being.'[38] A bodily connection is established through the stilled movement of the outstretched hand whereby the viewer intimately connects with the body of the performer.

Pauline Cummins's *Unearthed* (1988-91) is another performance that explored different aspects of the socio-political situation in Ireland. For Cummins the early physical performances of the 1970s that embraced 'horror, blood, feathers, animals' found in the works of Viennese Actionists were not particularly appealing. Instead she sought to locate her performances in the existing oral tradition in Ireland.[39] She begins by locating her performance in the personal: 'Irish? I'm not Irish... well I'm not really Irish. You see my mother is English.' Cummins questions her own identity and prompts the audience to consider what it means to be 'Irish.' She recalls, 'But I liked having an English mother. She always had great insights into Irish things. She was very funny and she'd point out many contradictions about our society. She was usually right.' Cummins relates several personal childhood recollections that suggest differences between the artist and her mother while projected slide images change intermittently on a screen. It is when she asserts 'Politics never seemed to matter until Derry happened', referencing the killing of thirteen civilians known as 'Bloody Sunday' that the performances transitions from the personal to the political. At one point Cummins lightheartedly asks 'Do you want to hear a joke? What's a head job in Ireland?' She responds 'a hood over the head and a bullet through it.' Repeating her answer again more slowly for emphasis, the change in pace and tone allows the gravity of this 'joke' to sink in for the viewer. An image of her face painted white appears next to where she stands. Her hands, painted black, rise to the side of her face conveying agony and grief. This emotive image is in contrast to her carefully composed live appearance.

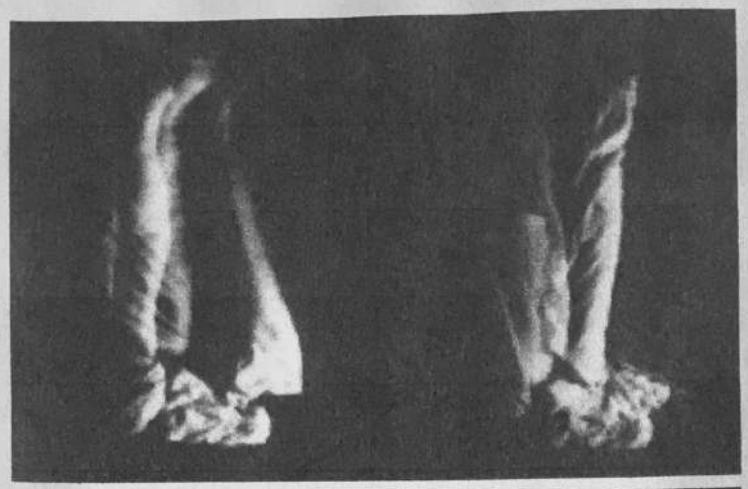
In 1983 Cummins began working on the underlying concept of *Unearthed* as is evidenced from the *Unearthed: Working Drawings* (1983) included in *Irish Exhibition of Living Artists.* These early drawings depict a body partially uncovered from a grave dug in a turf bog. The sketches detail that the skeletal remains are of fired clay and porcelain and wrapped in old bandages, clearly referencing the phenomenon of bog bodies, mummified

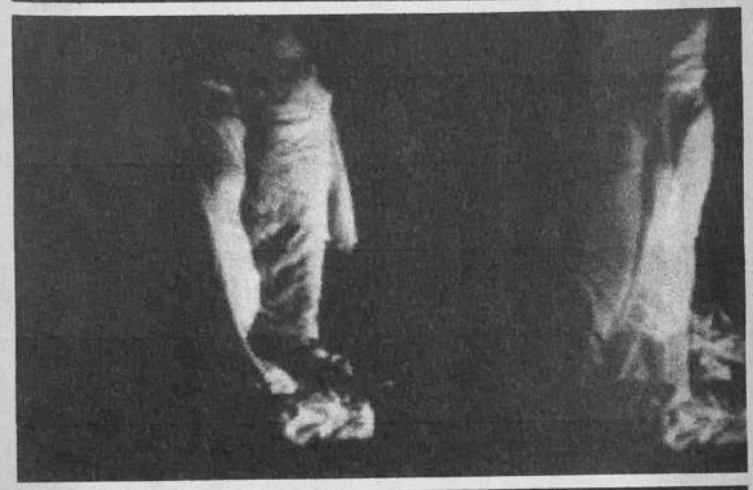
'Nigel Rolfe inserted his naked body into a turf furrow where he lay completely still for several hours, questioning the relationship between the human body and nature.'

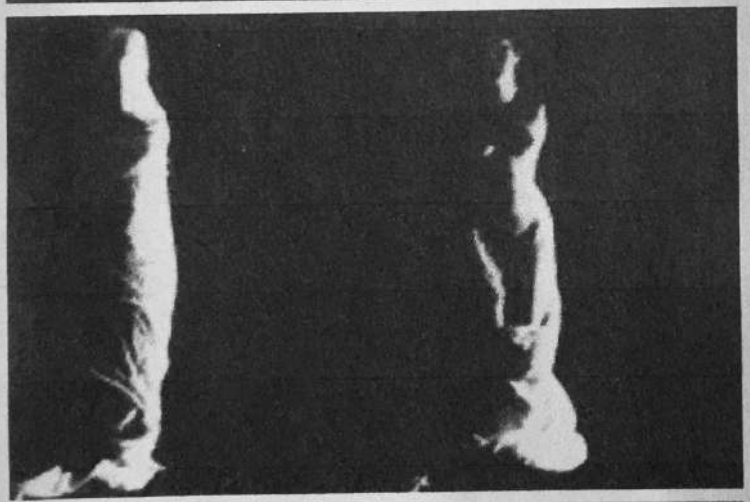
human remains discovered in peat bogs that are preserved through chemical processes. As of 1987 over 80 bog bodies had been uncovered in Ireland since 1750, most date from the late medieval to the modern age, but some have been identified as human sacrifices from the Iron Age.[40]

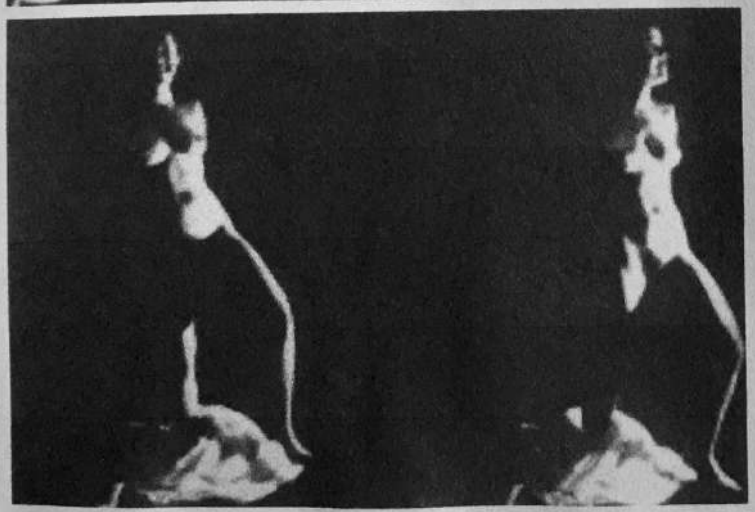
Bogs have fascinated artists least not because as Karin Sanders writes they are deeply uncanny, 'neither water, nor land, bogs are liminal spaces, thresholds between surfaces and depths, ambiguous sites of origin.'[41] *In Bog Action (Aktion im Moor)* (1971) Joseph Beuys ran into a peat bog, allowing his body to sink deeper and deeper into the muck. As his body vanished from sight only his trademark fedora floated on the surface of the bog symbolising his desire to return to nature.[42] In the performance *Ledge* (1981), Nigel Rolfe inserted his naked body into a turf furrow where he lay completely still for several hours, questioning the relationship between the human body and nature. *Unearthed* may also have another frame of reference, Ana Mendieta's *Silueta* (1973-80) series, yet while the body in Mendieta's performances explore the tension between female visibility and material traces the bodies in *Unearthed* emerge rather than recede. Combined with Cummins's voice over: 'I live with these half dead, half alive people, waiting for the cease-fire, longing to be released with them, from this eternal waiting' they take on an ominous tone. Perhaps the most potent images of this performance are a series of raku-fired masks. These masks reference death masks but their appearance, with hallowed eyes and contorted twisted mouths, does not suggest a placid pallor of death, but the grim agony of being bound in this conflict for an eternity. Juxtaposed with the image of Cummins screaming, the symbolic and real bodies communicate the complexities of Irish identities. It is possible to see how the concerns of *Unearthed* resonate in contemporary performance, specifically in works like Amanda Coogan's *Medea* (2001) and *How to Explain the Sea to an Uneaten Potato* (2008).

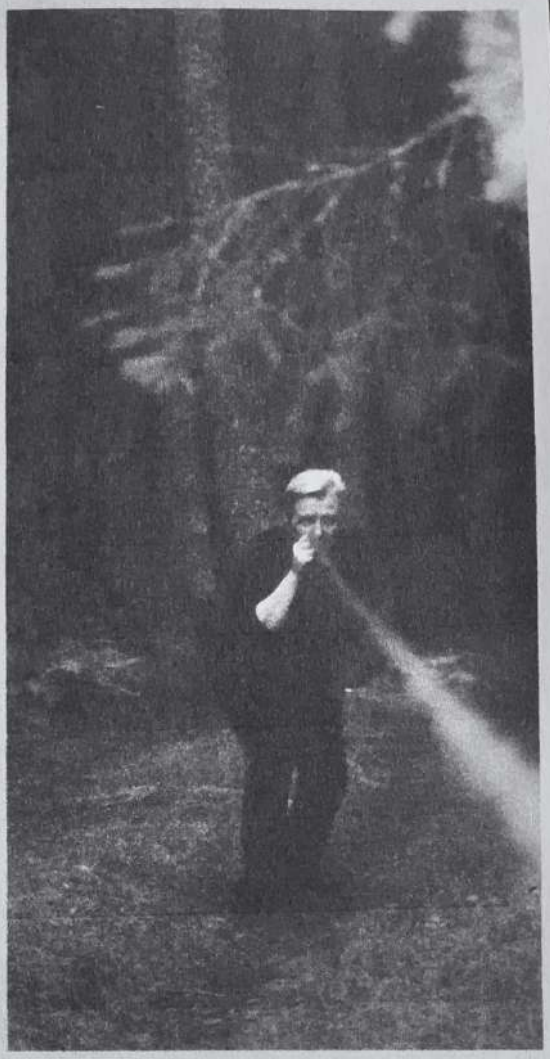
Opposite: Mary Duffy, *Cutting the Ties that Bind*, 1988. Photo courtesy of the artist.



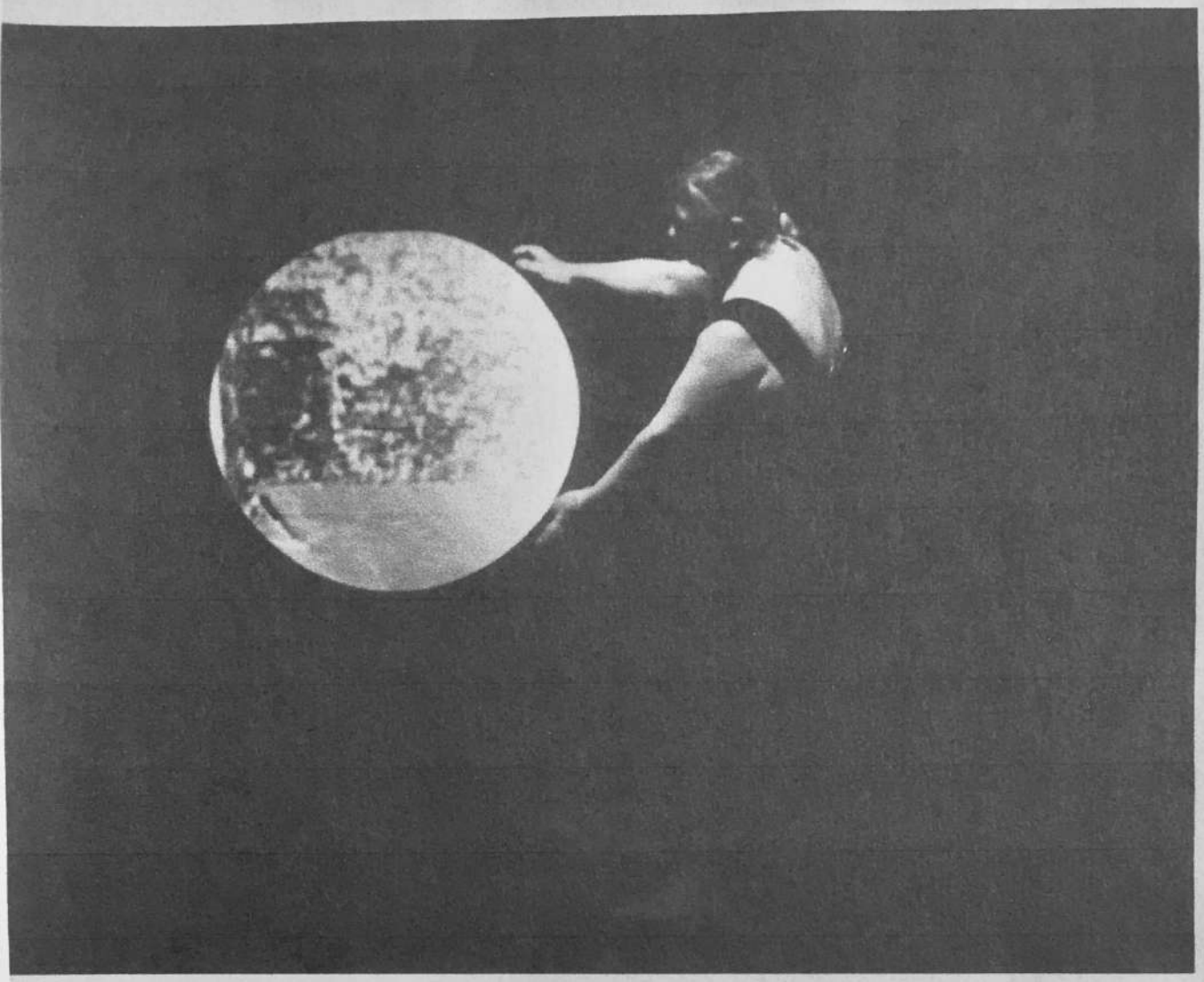








Left: Pauline Cummins, *Unearthed*, 1988-91, Projects UK commission.
Right: Pauline Cummins, *Holy Ground*, Wicklow 2000.
Photos courtesy of the artists.



e Cummins and Louise Walsh, *Sounding the Depths*, 1992, detail of collaborative
hotographic installation, collection of the Irish Museum of Modern Art.
aine Cummins and Sandra Johnston, *Holy Ground*, Wicklow, 1999.
rtesy of the artists.

'The white projected light was sketchy in appearance [...] It emphasised her torso and visually obscured the surface of her body. She recalled memories of hurt and humiliation under the medicalised gaze that stripped Duffy of her subjectivity as a child.'

Mary Duffy's *Stories of a Body* (1991), first performed at the Belltable Gallery, Limerick, adopted the medium of storytelling to interrogate bodily difference. A slide image of stones was projected onto a square pillar in the centre of the darkened gallery. It cross-faded into an image of more stones.[43] The projection slowly dissolved to form a spiral. Then Duffy appeared naked, standing beside the pillar. Her body was illuminated by the projections.[44] The white projected light was sketchy in appearance, reminiscent of scribbled pencil-markings. It emphasised her torso and visually obscured the surface of her body. She recalled memories of hurt and humiliation under the medicalised gaze that stripped Duffy of her subjectivity as a child:

> I stand here like I've stood here many times before so that you can assess the damage. You have words to describe me, and although I cannot give them a voice, I know all of them. But to acknowledge that I can see you, how you discuss me, like a textbook, stick pins in me to ascertain whether I can feel, ask me to perform, is more than I am willing to do. And all the time you are getting about the business of assessing the damage. I built a wall around me. I can't even remember when I began, I don't even know if it had a beginning.[45]

The catalyst for this performance was a visit to a General Practitioner in 1990. The doctor broadly assumed that Duffy harboured animosity towards medical professionals. This experience caused the artist to reflect on how she felt disempowered as a child from the constant medical scrutinisation.

The exchange between artist and viewer is important in understanding how the use of the body in this work can reconceptualise perceptions of bodies. The representation of Duffy's body drew upon a troubling figure that provoked and challenged perceptions about the divide between normative and non-normative bodies. *Stories of a Body* was not only about reclaiming the artist's subjectivity, but also challenging the viewer. As her body confronted audience expectations, it became a site of exchange. Duffy herself has voiced the ambiguous position she occupies: 'Even among my

own community of disabled people I felt that my experience was reflected through another perspective, this time a disabilist perspective – I am one of those able disabled people – the non-wobbling, non-dribbling, well-educated types – in short a "walkie-talkie".[46] It may then be understood that her body inhabits the perceived divide between ability and disability, which in this performance the divide was articulated through the gaze. In moments when the artist remained still, the viewer's gaze actively surveyed her, meanwhile when her body was in motion she disrupted the viewer's gaze by asserting a confrontational look of her own. In observing the shifting role of the viewer in this performance, it is clear that early on, one is encouraged to actively identify with the medical gaze that attempts to harness and control her unruly body. This allowed the spectator to indulge the forbidden desire to have unfettered visual access to her naked body. The realisation that the viewer could transgress the boundaries of a polite gaze while becoming the object of the artist's gaze, in turn, questions the seemingly objective nature of the gaze.

An awareness of this interplay leads to an intense consideration of the viewer's own subjective experience. The work is transformed into a hierarchal exchange between perceived ability and disability, objectivity and subjectivity. In this performance, '[d]isability [...] is a disruption in the visual, auditory or perceptual field as it refers to the power of the gaze.'[47] In *Stories of a Body*, the hierarchy between ability and disability capitulates as the audience listens without intervening while in narrating her experience Duffy claims her right to speak. Though Duffy's work is centered firmly in the personal, it translates to the political, not only in the context of disabilities rights, but allowed for disability to be read as a metaphor for the cultural expectations placed on women's bodies in Ireland. When presented in this embodied manner, Duffy challenged the internalised self-scrutiny that imposed unobtainable models of Irish womanhood, enabling viewers to contemplate the possibilities and alternatives for Irish women.

FEMINIST PRAXIS

Though these artists manifested and sustained ongoing dialogues between performance art, feminism, and Irish society, their practices encompassed another crucial aspect worthy of critical reflection. Irish artists engaged with feminism were inspired by the critiques of international women artists, critics and activists that sought to highlight how the power of pervading ideologies operated to exclude and marginalise women in visual art on the basis of gender. American art historian Linda Nochlin argued that

patriarchal ideologies of power assert themselves over women disguised as assumptions about gender difference, contending that: 'Ideology manifests itself as much as by what is unspoken – unthinkable, unrepresentable – as by what is articulated in a work of art.'[48] Nochlin cautioned that symbolic power is invisible and 'can be exercised only with the complicity of those who fail to recognise either that they submit to it or that they exercise it.'[49] One of the ways in which feminists sought to expose and destabilise this symbolic power was through feminist activism in addition to their attacks on representation. Commenting on efforts of Irish feminists, Margrit Shildrick states: 'For feminists, there has always been the example of some very strong women to look back on, but also a sense in which the repressions that have assailed Ireland over many centuries have taken their toll on the social and political promotion of women in particular.'[50] Moreover, Shildrick argues that for these feminists, theory and practice occupy a symbiotic relationship.[51] Although Fionna Barber argued that Irish modernist artists like Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone were the 'active bearers of culture', the notion of women's agency in relation to art production in Ireland was never more relevant, nor more urgent, than it was during the 1980s and early 1990s as these women sought to assert claims over their own bodies. Therefore, describing feminist performance as 'praxis' is wholly appropriate when considering how women merged the visual, verbal, auditory, and embodied practice with their activism.

The establishment of three collaborative networking groups, Irish Women Artists Link (IWAL, London, 1986), the Women Artists Action Group (WAAG, Dublin, 1987), and the Northern Irish Women Artists Group (NIWAG, Belfast, 1987) coincided with the efforts that artists were making in their individual practices. Though not all of these artists were working in performance or time-based practices, these groups played important roles in promoting the idea of feminist praxis and supporting women artists working in performance. Networking as women artists helped to establish slide libraries (WAAG Slide Library or Women's Visual Arts Slide Library, Goldsmiths College) that served as important repositories of visual record of artists whose works might not be preserved in public collections and exhibition catalogues. These groups enabled women artists to bypass traditional gallery structures, which at the time were unequivocally male-dominated, by offering access to alternative spaces. In the absence of a contemporary art museum, practices like performance, installation, and video practices were similarly reliant on alternative spaces.

Spanning nearly five years, with membership including artists, critics, curators, art historians, and educators, WAAG was perhaps one of the most effective of the three organisations. The goals outlined in WAAG's constitution included expanding the dominant aesthetic to encompass all forms of creative expression; educating the general public about women's contributions to the Arts; ensuring the inclusion of women in the history of art; to promote a viable system that provides an opportunity for realistic economic survival in the Arts, including financial parity and equal access to grants, funding, and employment for women.[52] In 1988 WAAG joined the International Association of Women Artists (IAWA); allying themselves with feminist groups in other countries enabled the group to cross boundaries by sharing common aims and increasing limited resources by pursuing joint objectives.[53] Cummins, Duffy, and O'Kelly were all involved with WAAG to varying degrees, and it is possible to understand how groups like WAAG supported the praxis these artists sought to develop.[54] These feminist groups ran several performance workshops for specialist and non-specialist audiences, meaning that women from different backgrounds could utilise performance as a means of expression. In 1988, WAAG held a two-day performance workshop, organised by O'Kelly, with Frances Hegarty and Anne Seagrave.[55] O'Kelly ran a performance workshop in Derry (1988) and another in Dublin in 1989 entitled *Sounding Out – Sexuality, Voice and Power.* Through their various activities, organisations like WAAG, IWAG, and NIWAG critiqued the institutionalised exclusion of women artists from important exhibitions and attempted to engage feminist praxis on a practical level.[56]

Cummins, Duffy, and O'Kelly had a number of documented interactions with feminist artists from the United States and the United Kingdom. In 1987, they presented their work at a panel organised by May Stevens for the Women's Caucus for Art at the College Art Association Annual Conference entitled *The Politics of Identity: Entering, Changing and Being Changed.* Their work was situated alongside that of Adrian Piper and Cecilia Vicuña, two performance artists known for their feminist interventions into identity and otherness. Disseminating their work in this fashion, amongst artists, critics, historians, in an international setting ensured valuable opportunities for cross-cultural dialogues amongst feminists artists working in different locations. Both Stevens and Helen Chadwick participated in a seminar held by WAAG in Derry (June 1988) where, along with Moira Roth, they discussed different approaches to feminist art, essentially laying the groundwork for establishing connections between work in Ireland and

'Performance art in Ireland, as elsewhere, offers possibilities for engaging in meaningful dialogues: as a process that provokes exchanges about ideas of privilege and power, as an empowering embodied practice and as legitimising critique that unites art and feminist activism.'

abroad.[57] Stevens's influence on O'Kelly is evident on a conceptual level, yet it is clear that she has also been inspired by O'Kelly's work, demonstrating that Irish women artists were engaged in cross-cultural dialogues with other feminist artists. When Stevens's husband, the artist Rudolf Baranik died she commenced a project of spreading his ashes in bodies of water. She travelled to Ireland where she performed the action in Connemara with O'Kelly and her family.[58] This action recalls the private performance O'Kelly undertook at this same location upon the death of her mother for *Dancing with My Shadow* (1988), indicating further interconnections between feminist performances in Ireland and abroad.

CONCLUSION

Though performance art emphasises specific and unique temporal conditions attached to being present in the moment, the assessment of the works in this essay suggest important wider connections with the socio-political climate at the time of their creation. For artists working at the intersections of feminism and performance, these artistic interventions fused the personal and the political. Hilary Robinson, paraphrasing art historian Griselda Pollock, asserts that 'a central task for feminists in Ireland (including artists and art historians) is to critique the concept "Irish woman", not just as a way of writing about the lives of actual women, but as an institutionalised ideological practice of representation in and of the culture.'[59] While Irish cultural nationalists in the early twentieth century appropriated the bodies of women as ciphers for the nation, second-wave Irish feminists challenged these long-standing tropes by rendering visible women's lived realities. In this sense, the performance works of O'Kelly, Cummins, and Duffy were transgressive because they focused on the body, provocatively advocating the subjectivity of the individual against the authority of the establishment. If in Irish society women's bodies are sites of conflict, women performance artists that activated abject and unruly

bodies, or that represented fragmented bodies as a means of countering wholeness that can be controlled, evaded patriarchal authority. On a separate but related point, viewing these historical works from a contemporary perspective allows one to critically engage with the political, economic, and social issues embedded in Irish society. In contemporary Ireland, where the right to reproductive freedom is barred; where a woman's death occurs at a maternity hospital because she was refused a life saving abortion; where the national broadcaster, RTÉ censors a gay rights activist for labelling the vitriolic writings of opponents to same-sex marriage as homophobic; where a terminally ill woman is denied the right to die; where direct provisions for asylum seekers are exposed as grimly inadequate, it is alarmingly clear that bodies and the rights of those bodies continue to remain a pressing concern.[60] Performance art in Ireland, as elsewhere, offers possibilities for engaging in meaningful dialogues: as a process that provokes exchanges about ideas of privilege and power, as an empowering embodied practice, and as legitimising critique that unites art and feminist activism.

1. Linda Connolly and Tina O'Toole, *Documenting Irish Feminisms: The Second Wave* (Dublin: Woodfield Press, 2005), p. 27.

2. June Levine, 'The Women's Movement in the Republic of Ireland, 1968-1980', in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writers: Irish Women's Writings and Traditions*, ed. by Angela Bourke, (New York: New York University Press, 2002), pp. 177-228 (p. 187).

3. Lisa Smyth, *Abortion and Nation: The Politics of Reproduction in Contemporary Ireland* (United Kingdom: Ashgate, 2005), p. 10.

4. Dorothy Walker, 'Looking Back', in *The GPA Irish Arts Review Yearbook* (1988), pp. 26-30 (p. 26).

5. This mural was mentioned in an RTE programme, *I Live Here* (1989).

6. Katy Deepwell, (ed.) 'Pauline Cummins interview', *Dialogues: Women Artists from Ireland* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 33-43, p. 39.

7. Elizabeth Beaucamp, 'Performance Artists End Up with Audience in the Palms of Their Hands', *The Edmonton Journal*, 16 November 1991.

8. Mary Duffy, Unpublished email to the author, 15 February 2011.

9. Mary Duffy, 'Disability, Differentness, Identity', *Circa*, 34 (1987), 30-31 (p. 30).

10. Katy Deepwell, (ed.) 'Alanna O'Kelly interview', *Dialogues: Women Artists from Ireland* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 138-148, p.138.

11. Carol Coulter, 'A Happy Ending for a Midwife's Tale', *Irish Times*, 22 May 1999, p. 8.

12. Alston Conley and Mary Armstrong, 'An Interview with Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh', in *Re/Dressing Cathleen: Contemporary Works from Irish Women Artists*, ed. by Alston Conley and Mary Armstrong (Boston: McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 1997), pp. 118-9, (p. 119).

13. Bruce Arnold, 'Art', *Irish Independent*, 11 May 1992.

14. Jaki Irvine, 'Review: Sounding the Depths, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, 1 April - 9 May 1992', *Circa* 62 (1992), p. 66.

15. Hilary Robinson, 'Disruptive Women Artists: An Irigarayan Reading of Irish Visual Culture', in *Irish Studies Review* (2000), 57-72 (p. 62).

16. In an earlier slide/tape and sound installation, *Inis t'Oirr/ Aran Dance* (1985), Cummins explored female sexuality and the gendering of craft using the nude male body.

17. Other artists have also been inspired by the power of keening. Anna O'Sullivan had a work included in *Divisions, Crossroads, Turns of Mind: Some New Irish Art* curated by Lucy Lippard and more recently Áine Phillips incorporated aspects of keening into her performance *Love Lies Bleeding* (2004).

18. Alanna O'Kelly, *Ómós Statement*, National Irish Visual Artists Library (NIVAL) File.

19. Luke Clancy, 'Live Art: O'Kelly/McClennan/Byrne/McAleer Project Arts Centre', *Irish Times*, February 16 1995, p. 14.

20. Amanda Coogan later used this site for *Yellow: Re-Performed* (2010).

21. Ann Millett-Gallant, *The Disabled Body in Contemporary Art* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2010), p. 38.

22. Tom Duddy, 'Mary Duffy, Belltable Arts Centre, Limerick 20 November-15 December 90', *Circa* 56 (1991), 39-40 (p. 39).

23. Ibid., p. 40.

24. Mike Catto, 'Sexuality and Gender, Douglas Hyde Gallery 23 October-17 November 90', *Circa* 55 (1990), 38-39, (p. 39).

25. Ibid.

26. Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh, *Sounding the Depths: A Collaborative Installation* (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 1992), p. 6.

27. Ailbhe Smyth, Pauline Cummins, Beverley Jones and Pat Murphy, 'Image Making, Image Breaking', *Circa* 32 (1987), 13-19, (p. 14).

28. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1968), p. 87.

29. Ibid., p. 88.

30. Adrian Kear and Deborah Lynn Steinberg, 'Ghost Writing', in *Mourning Diana: Nation, Culture and the Performance of Grief*, ed. by Adrian Kear and Deborah Lynn Steinberg (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 1-14 (p. 9).

31. Ibid.

32. Moira Roth, 'Live Art in Derry,' *High Performance*, 11.1 (1988), p. 58.

33. Ann Wilson Lloyd, *Alanna O'Kelly* (Contemporanea, 1991), p. 52.

34. Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA*, (New York: Palgrave 2002), p. 500.

35. Bridget Brereton, 'Gendered Testimonies: Autobiographies, Diaries and Letters by Women

as Sources for Caribbean History', *Feminist Review* 59 (1998), 143-63 (p. 144).

36. Ibid., p. 145.

37. Belarie Zatzman, 'The Monologue Projects: Drama as a Form of Witnessing,' in *How Theatre Educates: Convergences and Counterpoints with Artists, Scholars and Advocates*, ed. by David Booth and Kathleen Gallagher (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), p. 36. (pp. 35-55)

38. Rebecca Sachs Norris, 'Embodiment and Community', *Western Folklore* 60.2-3 (2001), 111-24 (p. 117).

39. Elizabeth Beaucamp, 'Performance Artists End Up with Audience in the Palms of Their Hands', *The Edmonton Journal*, 16 November 1991.

40. Raghnall Ó Floinn, 'Irish Bog Bodies', *Archaeology Ireland*, 2.3 (1988), p. 95.

41. Karin Sanders, *Bodies in the Bog and the Archaeological Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 7.

42. Thomas McEvilley, *The Triumph of Anti-Art: Conceptual and Performance Art in the Formation of Post-Modernism* (New York: McPherson and Company, 2005), p. 264.

43. Luke Clancy, 'Duffy/Patrickson/Donaghy Project Arts Centre', *Irish Times* February 15 1995, p.12.

44. Pauline Cummins, 'Mary Duffy: Onder Ons Gezegd', *Ruimte* 8 (1991), 26-31, (p. 30).

45. Text from Installation, Rochdale Art Gallery, 1990 in Sally Dawson, 'Women's Movements: Feminism, Censorship and Performance Art', in *New Feminist Art Criticism*, ed. by Katy Deepwell, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 113.

46. *Mary Duffy*, artist's website, <www.maryduffy.ie>.

47. Lennard J.Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body* (New York: Verso, 1995), p. 129.

48. Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd. 1989), p. 2.

49. Ibid.

50. Margrit Shildrick, 'Introduction: Emergent Strands or Theory on Edge?' in *Theory on the Edge*, ed. by Noreen Giffney and Margrit Shildrick (London: Palgrave MacMillian, 2013), pp. 1-9, (p. 1).

51. Ibid, p. 2.

52. WAAG Files, 'Women Artists Action Group Draft Constitution', 15 October 1988, p. 1. NIVAL Files.

53. Breeda Mooney, 'On the Record', *Circa* 59 (1991), p. 50.

54. Pauline Cummins and performance artist Anne Tallentire were respectively founding members of WAAG and IWAL.

55. WAAG Files, Performance Workshop, 1988, NIVAL Files.

56. Fionna Barber and Geraldine Reilly, 'Could do Better... the Hyde and Women's Art', *Circa*, 58 (1991), p. 37.

57. Stevens's *Special Project One plus or Minus One* was installed in the Orchard Gallery, Derry in 1988.

58. Patricia Hills, *May Stevens* (Petaluma: Pomengrante Communications, 2005), p. 61.

59. Hilary Robinson, 'Disruptive Women Artists: An Irigarayan Reading of Irish Visual Culture', *Irish Studies Review* 8.1 (2000), 57-72 (p. 58).

60. The tragic death of Savita Halappanavar (28 October 2012) occurred when she presented at the National University Hospital, Galway with a miscarriage. She was 17 weeks pregnant at the time and requested a termination. This request was denied and she subsequently developed septicemia and died of multiple organ failure. See Kitty Holland and Paul Cullen, 'Woman "denied a termination" dies in hospital', *Irish Times*, 14 November 2012.

Gay Rights activist Rory O'Neill, also known by his drag persona Panti Bliss, was a guest on the Brendan O'Connor *Saturday Night Show*. His interview was later censored on the RTE Player so it would not be available to viewers online. See Michael O'Regan, 'Calls for Rabbitte to give details of reported RTE payment to Iona Institute', *Irish Times*, 13 January 2014, p. 10.

Marie Fleming was a woman who took her case to the High Court, that she be allowed the right to euthanasia, which is currently illegal in Ireland. See 'Marie Fleming loses Supreme Court appeal challenging ban on assisted suicide', *RTE News* 29 April 2013, <http://www.rte.ie/news/2013/0429/387096-marie-fleming-to-hear-supreme-court-appeal-ruling/> [accessed 9 February 2014].

Under Irish law asylum seekers are unable to work, or receive education or social welfare. They are typically housed in direct provisions facilities while their cases await adjudication for refugee status. For information on direct provisions to asylum seekers see: Carl O'Brien, 'State fears reform of system will attract asylum seekers', *Irish Times*, 28 October 2013, p. 1.