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Advertising: Catherine Williams

Subscriptions and Distribution:
Christine Frew

Design Consultants:
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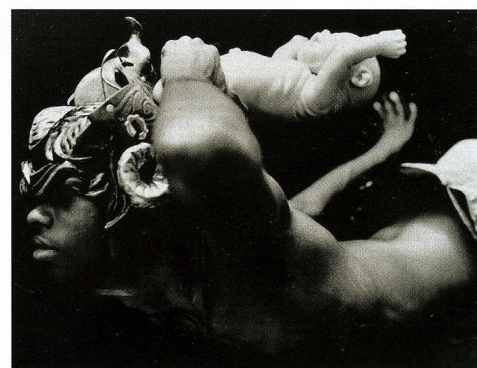
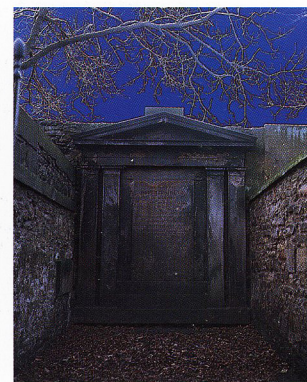
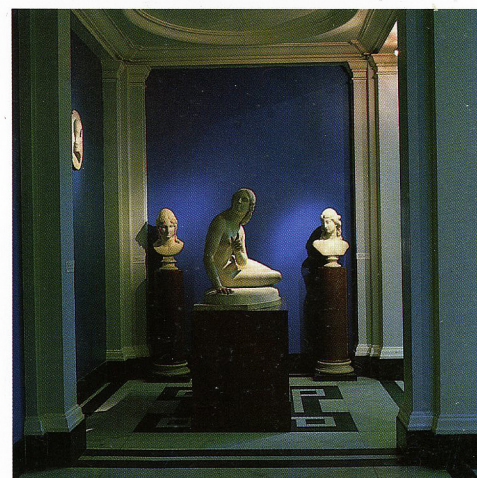
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Disappearing Ireland

Anthony Haughey

MARK DURDEN

"The world has to be dismantled and reassembled in order to be able to grasp, however clumsily, the experience of another. To talk of entering the other's subjectivity is misleading. The subjectivity of another does not simply constitute a different interior attitude to the same exterior facts. The constellation of facts, of which he is the centre, is different."¹

John Berger provides this reflection on the difficulty of writing about the experience of another in his book, *A Seventh Man*. In a text paralleled by a series of black-and-white photographs by Jean Mohr, Berger gives us an account of the painful experience of unfreedom, the story of a migrant worker in Europe. What comes across in this book is an overriding sense of placelessness. Even the final homecoming with which *A Seventh Man* ends - a return the migrant has been dreaming of and longing for all the time he has been away from home - brings with it problems. "Unchanging as the village is, he will never again see it as he did before he left. He is seen differently and he sees differently."²

Much of Berger's account and Mohr's photography is centred upon the experiences of Turkish migrant workers in Germany. Anthony Haughey's photographs concern not the migrant worker, but the complex relationship between the West of Ireland, its landscape and people, and Ireland's diaspora on the East Coast of America. Yet Berger's account still carries particular pertinence to Haughey's pictures of contemporary Ireland. They involve us in a story of emigration and an attempt to give us an account of the lives of those who left Ireland. As Haughey says: "the experience of many first-generation Irish people is one of identity crisis... in between worlds or in limbo, neither existing fully integrated in the home country (Ireland) or host country (America)."³

The photographs which make up both Anthony Haughey's recent book and exhibition, *The Edge of Europe*, accord with Fintan O'Toole's notion of a permeable Ireland. As O'Toole says, it's a place which "on the one hand seems too connected to too many conflicting loyalties of place and on the other seems to melt away into the sea, as if the coastline that surrounds the country were merely a thin membrane that lets in all the flotsam and jetsam of consumer culture and lets out a constant flow of people."⁴

The Edge of Europe stems from the year Haughey spent living in the Irish-speaking community of Dunquin, County Kerry, on the West coast of Ireland. A few miles off the Kerry coast lie the Blasket Islands which are part of the foundational myths of the Irish state. Visiting scholars encouraged the islanders to write their memoirs and these

were placed on the school curriculum as an essential record of a Gaelic Ireland. Yet, as Fintan O'Toole points out, another story of emigration and depopulation is already under way in this literature. Before the first World War more islanders were living in Springfield, Massachusetts, than on the islands themselves. The islanders' desires in relation to America were mixed: "they dreamed of American bounty washing its way across the waves to them."⁵

The islands were abandoned in 1953 and it is the story of the emigration of some of these islanders to America which concerns Haughey. He journeyed to Springfield, Massachusetts, and Hartford, Connecticut, and met and photographed the emigrant islanders. The Irish identity being reflected upon is formed between America and Ireland, as he moves between the communities of the Irish West Coast and the American East Coast. Haughey's subject also concerns the Americanisation of Ireland. This began in the 1950s with the opening up of Ireland as a European base for multinational companies. America's presence is visible in his photos, from the lone basketball hoop in an exposed field in County Cork to the coach load of Irish-Americans seeing Ireland as a John Hinde postcard.

The oral history of the Blasket Islanders is important to Haughey. The book opens with the story of an émigré, Paddy Kearney, who gives us his account of his experience of leaving his homeland for America. He emigrated when fishing was already in decline in the islands and shortly after his brother died of meningitis, with no doctor or priest able to cross to the islands during winter storms. In 1948 he went to Springfield, Massachusetts, where he ended up working for over thirty years at the Bay State Gas Company. Ill health forced him to retire and his home is now the State Municipal Hospital. Yet while he would never go back, he remains unequivocal: "If I was to start all over again I would stay back in Ireland. The island could have been saved a long time ago, if the government bothered to do anything about it."⁶

In Haughey's two portraits of Kearney, he appears confined in the non-places of the institutional corridors of his former workplace and hospital home respectively. He remains awkward and out of place, in limbo. Emigration is seen in terms of dislocation and suffering. If the Kearney portraits are suggestive of the émigré's placelessness, Haughey also makes recourse to quite strong symbolism; in the book *The Edge of Europe* a black crow strung up on a fence is intended as an emblem of the émigré's condition.

But his most striking image is that of The Great

Blasket Island, taken from Dunquin. Black tape on the window through which he took the picture appears to cross out the island. The Great Blasket Island, steeped in foundational myths of Ireland, remains abandoned and unattainable. While the cross can be read as an emphatic reiteration of desertion, this negated landscape also becomes of interest in relationship to recent critical writing on landscape representation. W.J.T. Mitchell has argued how landscape painting can be seen to be "bound up with the discourses of imperialism."⁷ Landscape can both disclose "utopian fantasies of the perfected imperial prospect and fractured images of unresolved ambivalence and unsuppressed resistance."⁸ Mitchell's examples of resistance and anti-colonial landscape formations include a New Zealand painting which is not quite fully accommodated to the conventions of European landscape representations and a photograph by Jean Mohr which represents landscape as contested territory, showing the cubist architecture of an Israeli condominium in the West Bank, its eye-like windows looking down on an Arab village in the distance. Haughey's cancelled-out landscape seems to accord with such representations, a landscape which problematises our viewing position, denies us any imperial prospect.

The sea, void of history and the social, is a special kind of medium for modernism according to Rosalind Krauss.⁹ Yet placed in a sequence of photographs which concern emigration, Haughey's seascapes reflect on the gulf between the Irish West Coast and the American East Coast, and the longing and desires attached to such waters. His empty seascapes are cold and isolating, one looking West from Bloody Foreland, County Donegal, and the other East from Rockport, Massachusetts. In the book, the images are paired with portraits of young immigrants from Ireland, in their early twenties. In the portrait of Niamh, Boston, she gazes out at us, her frontality and inexpressivity reminiscent of some of Walker Evans' portraits of tenant farmers. Paired with the infinite view of an expanse of the ocean, the feeling given is a sense of distance and the impossibility of getting close, of understanding another's subjectivity.

Integral to the myth of Irish landscape as a rural idyll are John Hinde's postcards taken in the late 50s. Their tintured vision of Ireland provides, as Luke Gibbons puts it, "not simply an evocation of an idealised past, but a very distinct form of longing: *nostos*, to return home, *algos*, a painful condition - the painful desire to restore the sense of belonging that is associated with childhood, and the

emotional resonance of the maternal."¹⁰ This is crystallised in "the archetypal image of the thatched cottage from which a mother emerges to welcome her two children approaching with donkeys and creels."¹¹ Such idealisations of rural existence, with their longing for community and primitive simplicity, are also part of Haughey's representation of Ireland. Only his pictures reveal to us the way such a view of Ireland is constructed by tourism. He pictures Irish-Americans who have returned as tourists to their 'home', viewing the landscape as scenes from Hinde's postcards at the Kerry Bog Museum and along a tourist bus route. The Irish-Americans carry visible signifiers of their Irishness: shamrocks on green jackets, one even wearing a shamrock ring. They are as kitsch as the view of Ireland they seek. Irish history is also subject to tourist display. Haughey photographs a famine eviction scene in 'Model World', Newtownmountkenny. His view of this model world is dwarfed by the feet of a visitor, an allusion to *Gulliver's Travels*, a book which Haughey sees in relationship to Ireland: "a metaphor for the relationship between a powerful (giant) coloniser and a smaller nation who chose to fight the invader."¹²

The immigrants' search for a sense of belonging is not without a sense of loss and sadness. The penultimate image in *The Edge of Europe* is a portrait of Billy, who left The Great Blasket Island in 1949 for Springfield, Massachusetts. Taken through his car window, reflections appear to wash him out, he is hardly present. Haughey's metaphoric and suggestive photographs are anchored in particular identifications with place, a longing steeped in the myth of the Irish West. Among his series of photos in Ireland there are few glimmers of life and community - the play of bathers in a small inland pool, the dancing youths at a Christmas party in Dunquin. But these are set against the loneliness of those few bathing figures in a man-made estuary pool in Belmullet, and all set against the overriding sense of the vastness and coldness of the waters of the Atlantic. Haughey's pictures are lamentful, even elegiac, and their lasting impression is of a disappearing Ireland.

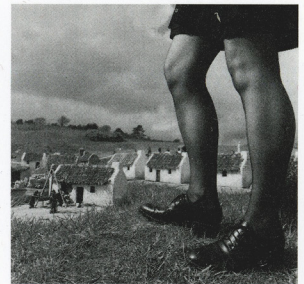
1. John Berger and Jean Mohr, *A Seventh Man*, Cambridge, Granta Books, 1989, p. 94.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
3. From a discussion with the artist, March 1997.
4. Fintan O'Toole, *Black Hole, Green Card, The Disappearance of Ireland*, Dublin, New Island Books, 1994, p. 26.
5. Fintan O'Toole, 'The Edge of Europe' in Anthony Haughey, *The Edge of Europe*, Dublin, The Gallery of Photography, 1996. 6. *Ibid.*
7. W.J.T. Mitchell, 'Imperial Landscape' in *Landscape and Power*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1994, p.9. 8. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
9. Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1993.
10. Luke Gibbons, 'John Hinde and the New Nostalgia' in *Transformations in Irish Culture*, Cork, Cork University Press, 1996, p.39. 11. *Ibid.*, p.40.
12. From a discussion with the artist, March 1997.



PADDY KEARNEY,
SPRINGFIELD, MA, 1996



GREAT BLASKET ISLAND,
ABANDONED IN 1953, 1996



FAMINE EVICTION SCENE,
'MODEL WORLD',
NEWTOWNMOUNTKENNEDY,
IRELAND, 1996

Anthony Haughey
The Edge of Europe





Catherdaniel, County Kerry, 1996



Belmullet, County Mayo, 1996 (opposite)



Mary, St. John Boyle O'Reilly Club, Springfield, MA



Subway, Boston, MA (opposite)