



Locky Morris:
*Past
Conversation*,
1997;
courtesy
Orchard
Gallery



Phillip Napier:
Gauge, 1997;
courtesy
Orchard
Gallery



work-seth/
tallentire:
Dispersal,
2000,
installation;
courtesy
Orchard
Gallery



Ciarán
O'Doherty:
Untitled, 2001,
mixed media,
variable
dimensions;
courtesy
Context
Gallery



Phil Collins:
from **Face
Value**, colour
photograph;
courtesy the
artist

But it is very important to know whether the state, society, law and power are required because man is a beast to his neighbor (homo homini lupus) or because I am responsible for my fellow. It is very important to know whether the political order defines man's responsibility or merely restricts his beastiality. It is very important, even if the conclusion is that all of us exist for the sake of the state, the society, the law.¹

Once a centre for news media, winter 2000/2001 saw Derry become a mini film studio. The Bogside and its legendary 'aggro corner', where riot seemed for many years imminently possible, a flammable vapour in the air awaiting a spark, became a centre for rival Bloody Sunday films. It saw a queue waiting to pretend to riot, to become pretend victims of pretend murderers in the actual site of a mass killing. Soggy sponge bricks were thrown at pretend British troops for the film cameras while nearby in the Guildhall lawyers were making several thousands a day (they are predicted to have made millions by the end of the affair) in the Saville Bloody Sunday Enquiry. The Enquiry itself can seem as much of a spectacle as that of soggy bricks thrown at pretend soldiers in the new Northern Ireland. The worth or value in Saville - that it is at least a forum of some

sort for the victims' families and for the witnesses within a tortured and scarred community - is blurred in a mass of state machinery, bureaucracy and image.

Any reference made to the ethical issues of power, duty, right, obligation; and likewise to the aesthetic affects of imagination and projection; in effect, against such a background, any reference to the total quandary of pretence and justice in contemporary art is thrown into sharp relief.

Bloody Sunday, shown at the Orchard Gallery, featured works that made direct reference to the day and its legacy: Willie Doherty's *30th January 1972*; Locky Morris' *Past Conversation*; Philip Napier's *Gauge*. Each of the works had been seen previously, but they were seen somewhat anew and together for the first time in the Orchard Gallery. Within the public and historical reference of the works, there remained an intense degree of intimacy. Doherty's work was perhaps the most formal of the three, two slides projected back to back on a free-standing screen; a still TV image of the day, and a photograph of the site of a Bloody Sunday shooting. This analytical dissection of the image was lifted out of formal concerns and into a personal emotional effect by the impact of the sound element of the piece; recollections by passers by in Derry in 1993 of Bloody Sunday and its media image. Bloody Sunday has been mediated by the image to a remarkable degree; it is the source of several iconic images. Yet it also remains an intensely personal memory, interior, a recollection, a scar, for those of Derry, much of Ireland, and further afield.

Within Locky Morris' and Philip Napier's pieces, the aural was equally the method which allowed an intimate connection to the event. Morris' *Past Conversation* was a piece of stunning simplicity, clarity and sincerity: in a smaller gallery room, two small speakers played a piano lament, against the Bogside Jimmy Porter's illicit recording of army radio communication in the Bogside on Bloody Sunday. Napier's installation *Gauge* was fourteen weighing scales attached to fourteen suspended speakers, each of which intermittently announced "I'm sorry." Napier and Morris in some senses threw the events of the day back against its instigators - the troops, the state. The soldier recorded on the Porter tape, and each soldier who killed one of the day's fourteen dead, carry the weight of their acts on Bloody Sunday within them throughout their lives. The interiors of such identities are spaces which can perhaps only be intimated at, never fully mapped.

A previous show at the Orchard, **DISPERSAL** by work-seth/tallentire, made oblique reference to identity and ethics. For two months before their arrival in the gallery the artists John Seth and Anne Tallentire had sent random map references to an unknown assistant in Derry. This assistant chose a random number of objects from that designated area on the Ordnance Survey map of Derry, and took north, south, east and west slides and video footage of each location. The result was eleven boxes of random objects, urban and rural detritus and debris - stone, stick, discarded paper, bits of pipe, wood, etc. - and a series of images of nondescript locations. Each object was inventoried and tagged: and for the first two weeks of the exhibition the artists worked at transforming the gallery space into imagined and re-imagined constructions of possible relations between these objects and images. Gallery detritus of planks, disassembled tables, monitors, computer screens, were used to imagine and create paths and destinations within the space, each destination a collection of objects and images. A remarkably organic yet also intensely conceptual event was the result: a two-week performance of ideas in action, forging links, fusing debris, effecting structures and meanings.

Face Value, an exhibition of video and photographs by Phil Collins at the Context Gallery, displayed varying cases of the effect of power and vulnerability on structures of identity. The video piece, *The Marches 2000*, featured four screens; two were talking heads, with friends of the artists answering questions on love, life, identity; two featured footage of last year's Drumcree and other Orange parades. The latter scrutinized the historical legacy of identity politics in Northern Ireland: a drunken dance at an Orange bonfire became a mesmeric display, an excess of alcohol and a posture of victory colluded in an image which steered itself powerfully into the mind. Such image seemed to embody both self-assurance and its contraries: and such themes recurred throughout the exhibition. A photograph of an LAPD policeman, riot helmet on, baton clutched at hips, held a similar tension: the uniform acting as identity, effacing any self-identity, state power made a physical presence yet equally made anonymous, the riot visor and sunglasses making the cop a near parody of intimidatory power: yet all the same, still an image of power and intimidation. Collins has remarkable vision, and in one series he turned it on himself, in instances of his treatment for testicular cancer. Alongside these images of male assurance and instability, Collins had a series of photographs of Belgrade, a scarred physical site, in its

own tenuous convalescence, and also a spectacle of symptoms of male effects.

In all of the above, the works featured varying identity - its assurances and its contraries - acting alongside varying constructions and relations. *Tilt* at the Context Gallery featured an installation by Ciarán O'Doherty, and the video piece, *Gravity*, by Romek Delimatra. (Here I should declare an interest as curator of the show.) O'Doherty's piece was a greenhouse with structures, systems and routines of pumps, water, tubes, spotlight and sensors. Delimatra's video used digital imaging to create a single minute of the descent of fragments of an airplane, plummeting towards the distant earth. Thinking now of each of the works, I'm reminded of the eponymous central allegory in Goethe's novel *Elective Affinities*. In the novel an educated amateur scientist is trying to express his passion and his understanding of chemical/physical reaction and processes, the marvel of observing what one at first cannot comprehend, that relation between elements

which seem so dead, and which are yet so full of inward energy and force... You should observe them with a real personal interest. Now they seek each other out, attract each other, seize, rush, devour, destroy each other, and then suddenly reappear out of their combinations, and come forward in fresh, renovated, unexpected form; thus you will understand how we attribute to them a sort of immortality - how we speak of them as having sense and understanding...²

Allegory is generally much too programmatic and overdetermined. But for *Tilt*, and equally as some kind of relation between each of the works and shows considered above, that sense of a sort of immortality, a sort of understanding, seems a suitable end.

¹Emmanuel Levinas, *Ideology and Idealism*, in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Se-n

Hand, Oxford: Blackwell, 1989

²Goethe, **Elective Affinities**

work/seth-tallentire: **Dispersal**, Orchard Gallery, Derry, November 2000

Phil Collins: **Face Value**, Context Gallery, Derry, January 2001

Bloody Sunday, Orchard Gallery, Derry, January/February 2001

Tilt, Context Gallery, Derry, March 2001

Declan Sheehan is a screenwriter and critic.

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