

Transgressing Time and the Familiar Anonymous: Performance in the Work of Alanna O'Kelly and Phil Collins

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Introduction

On reading Jacques Rancière's *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004) I became curious as to how I might consider the art works *Omós*, 1994-95, by Alanna O'Kelly and *How to Make a Refugee*, 2001, by Phil Collins in connection with the ideas he raised on the 'aesthetic regime' and its inherent political address to and of community. Thinking through Rancière's upending of the trajectories commonly associated with modernism and its supposed sequel, allows me to open up these works tangentially to each other, though they seem at first consideration to come from very different sensibilities. In this paper I want to think through an imaginary exhibition of just two works.

Omós is a sound work that is contemporary in its presence, though its cue - poverty during the nineteenth century Irish Famine¹ - is a result of looking back to Ireland's

¹ The Great Irish Famine began in 1845 and its direct effect was acutely felt for six years. The failure of the potato crops following repeated blight infestations compounded widespread hunger, related diseases and death among the cottier classes in rural Ireland. These land-workers did not own land, were largely living in severe poverty and had dietary dependence on the potato as an affordable staple food. Following the potato blight, there were widespread forced evictions and emigration. The population in the 1841 was estimated over 8 million (Campbell, 1994:15) and by 1851, the population was depleted

past. First performed at a time when Ireland was coping with the consequences of substantial emigration during the late 1980s and early 1990s, I want to emphasize that *Omós* also addresses a recent interest in the performance of art and questions the specificity often involved in en-visioning identity.

By contrast, over the last ten years of economic well being known as the Celtic Tiger², enactments of identity are addressed to a nation increasingly made up of immigrant groups. A nation of strangers has appeared.³ *How to Make a Refugee* is a video work that overtly explores a similar problem of visualizing identity distinctions. Though this work intervenes in a context outside of Ireland, I will explore the extent to which Collins' practice was informed by his residing in Belfast during the 1990s. Heightened awareness of how identity is routinely visualised or imaged - supposedly 'arrested' by the still image - is at the heart of both these works.

In this context, I am particularly interested in the presence of movement in both these works. Firstly, I will consider *Omós* and the historical circumstance it necessarily

by over 25 per cent (Kinealy, 2002:2) and it is estimated that over a million died, while one and half million emigrated during this period.

² The term, Celtic Tiger, was first coined in 1994 by Kevin Gardiner, a UK economist, who likened Ireland's economic boom in the 1990s to those of Asian tiger economies. The boom was fueled by large-scale foreign industrial investment, returning emigrants and coincided the increase of immigrant populations and an unprecedented growth in property markets, consumer spending and consequently rising inflation.

³ I am cautious with my use of the term 'appeared' as we have yet to witness in Ireland whether or not Julia Kristeva's 'paradoxical community' is reconciled to itself, as discussed by Delcan Kiberd. His text elaborates on ideas and shortcomings of theories of 'multiculturalism' in specific relation to Ireland's rapidly changing ethnic and cultural demographic of recent years and in the context of Kristeva's ideas on 'strangers' and 'nationalism' (Kiberd, 2001: 45-75).

addresses and the movements it announces. Secondly, and separately, I will look at how the making of *How to Make a Refugee* brings the problematic visualizing of more recent moments of social change and cultural alterity into focus, also by addressing the role of movement in the work. Also of relevance are the locations/situations from which both works were developed, as the artists' own movement and senses of transition inform the interdependence between the subjects and media of the works.

O'Kelly's central figure in *Omós*, a poverty-stricken indigenous girl of colonial Ireland from an Irish folk story, and Collins' Kosovar-Albanian family in the midst of press photography shoot at a refugee camp during the Kosovo conflict of May 1999 have in common their status as the unnamed. I am purposeful in my use of the possessive artist owning their chosen subjects as this position is implicit in the concerns listed above and in both works in their eventual figuring of what might be termed the familiar anonymous.

***Omós* (Respect) - The Invisible Subject**

In 1992 Alanna O'Kelly created an exhibition called 'The Country Blooms... A Garden and a Grave'⁴ at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin Ireland. This began a series of multi-media works on the theme of the Great Irish Famine and the related effect of emigration on Ireland subsequently. As part of this project, in 1995 O'Kelly created a sound work called *Omós*. *Omós* is the Irish Gaelic word for respect. The central sound is of a young girl running alongside a coach. She becomes increasingly breathless as she tries to keep up with the rolling coach wheels. The girl does not beg in words for aid: her aim is to let the occupants of the coach know of her presence. Eventually the listener can hear coins thrown in her direction.

⁴ The title is taken from the poem *The Deserted Village* by Oliver Goldsmith, an 18th century Irish poet.

This story is a well-known tale in Irish folklore: one that embodies a notion of national pride in a colonized country. The girl represents an oppressed and poverty-stricken people that feel compelled to encounter their oppressor who is here presented in the form of a coach and its occupants. Though she wants to make these wealthy travelers aware of her presence and of her impoverished and famished condition, her sense of self-respect denies her the will to beg directly for alms. Fragments of a children's poem which tell this story are whispered intermittently throughout the work:

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

There 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.⁵

Eventually, the sounds speed up. The carriage moves faster, the running feet patter ever more quickly, almost beyond physical capability. The child's breathlessness becomes louder, the whispered poem more urgent and eventually builds to a crescendo in the form of a wordless call, a caoine, similar to keening,⁶ and an ending of the work's presentation. Jean Fisher describes O'Kelly's use of the caoine:

A sonorous call, a rhythmic vocalization without words... a lament for the dead returns in *Omós* as a shout for life. It is, in a sense, an invocation of that earlier, primary voice of the mother, calling upon its nurturing role to re-empower the subject. In this way, the call breaks the spell of enforced muteness; it is an open-mouthed sound that figures the moment when the repressive space is transformed into that imaginative passage where what is infans many initiate its own narration. (Fisher, 1996: 4)

The effect of *Omós* is that of a part-witnessed event, a partial glimpse of a tragic situation that leaves questions unanswered: what happened to the girl? How did the travelers in the coach feel when faced with her persistent silence?

This work began its presence in the world as a performance. On a darkened stage, O'Kelly would act out the role of the girl running, with, at first, only her feet visible in a small pool of light. Gradually as her running and breathlessness gathered pace, O'Kelly would emerge out of

5 This text also appeared in printed form in O'Kelly's 1992 exhibition at the Irish Museum of Modern Art (National Irish Visual Arts Library).

6 Keening, caoine, is an Irish traditional form of wailing in mourning, practiced by women at a funeral wake, which may last for up to three days. It is similar in practice and sound to ululation made by women in some African and Arab cultures as forms of mourning and resistance. In Ireland a small group of women would perform keening at all wakes in a region. Caoine is also the Irish Gaelic word for crying, but, as Jeff Kelley describes it, in the context of keening, or caoineadh na marbh (lament of the dead), is understood as 'a crying beyond crying' (Kelley, 1997: 8).

the darkness.⁷ In her words: “[...] the magic rhythm of the whole body coming out of this darkness, out of our past (Deepwell, 2005: 144). This performance was recorded and a layering of sounds added, including voices of the girl’s family and ancestors calling to her and accompanying her on her journey. At one point the child’s mother whispers a love poem to her. The work followed a period during which O’Kelly had developed a number of sound performances based on the caoine and wordless sounds from other cultures, such as the Canadian Eskimos, sounds that she has described as timeless (Deepwell, 2005: 140). In choosing to develop a sound presentation O’Kelly simultaneously chose to avoid a direct visual representation of the story to which she referred. Further, as Fisher indicates, the child’s own wordlessness in the face of inequality gives way to a more primal call – a traditional lament for the dead evoked in Irish mourning practices, thereby calling upon, in this case, a shared cultural form of mourning.

O’Kelly’s decision to develop a series of work based on the Irish experience during the famine followed a period of traveling with her work. On returning to live in Ireland she was keen to address in her art ideas of contemporary Irishness. (Deepwell, 2005: 140). Fiona Barber emphasizes that O’Kelly’s time studying art in London added to her sensitivity toward Irish emigrant populations and the complexities of the British-Irish relations in particular (Barber, 2004: 9 -10). This context of being and feeling removed from her homeland provided her with a renewed interest in her identity and in the fracturing of Irish identity both at home and abroad.⁸ As Ireland experienced considerable emigration as a response to economic recession and widespread unemployment

⁷ The description here relates to a sound piece made from a performance for ‘Hors Limites’ at the Pompidou Centre (Deepwell, 2005:143).

⁸ O’Kelly discusses this in her “Winter Lecture” (Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2001).

throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s, many young Irish went to work in UK and elsewhere, some indefinitely. So the huge diaspora of Irish in the US, for example, that had been a direct result of the nineteenth century famine seemed to have a partial echo in the emigration patterns of 1980s. Adjunct to this inward looking reflection, O'Kelly cites watching the news on television during this time as an influence on the direction of the overall series, 'The Country Blooms...'. The images of contemporary famine appearing in her living room evoked the Irish Famine beyond its connection to contemporary Ireland, to an awareness of famine more generally. Her specific interest in the Irish famine was also informed by the reluctance she had experienced among those around her to discuss it – describing it as “a very dark place” (Deepwell, 2005: 141).

The story in *Omós* exists as a sort of historic anecdote: its veracity cannot be proven, but the tale is knowable. In her performance/sound piece O'Kelly called forth and reversed a historical device common in written accounts of nineteenth and early twentieth century rural Ireland, typically provided by personal journals or travel diaries of visitors to the country or those of the gentry class visiting their estates. Margaret Kelleher's research in this area highlights that these visitors were usually from Britain and some were from America (Kelleher, 1997: 16). These diarists often struggled with ideas of 'otherness' and the difference between them and the people they encountered, while at the same time constructing this 'native other' through their texts. The writer Maria Edgeworth fictionalized her diary in the form of early regional novels (*Castle Rackrent*, 1800 and *The Absentee*, 1812), which provide valuable critiques of the effects of social distinctions of the period made between the landowners and their estate tenants (cottiers). Sighle Bhreathnach-Lynch discusses fluctuating attitudes toward the Irish on the part of the visiting British and gives the example of Charles Kingsley who wrote that it would be easier to accept the otherness of the Irish were they

less similar-looking to the British, if, for example, they were black (Bhreathnach-Lynch, 1997: 245). Kelleher has discussed in detail “eyewitness” famine accounts through the William Carleton’s *The Black Prophet*, 1846, and Anthony Trollope’s *Castle Richmond*, 1860, (Kelleher, 1997: 16-63). The novelist Colm Tóibín evokes a historical sense of Ireland and class difference with a reference to a journey made by the protagonist, Henry James, in his book *The Master*, 2004. In an early section of the novel, as Henry sets out to travel in February 1895 from Dublin Castle to the Royal Hospital Kilmainham across the city, the narrator recounts:

He[Henry] had seen Ireland before, having traveled once from Queenstown in Cork to Dublin, and he had stayed also in Kingston briefly. He had liked Kingstown, the sea light and the sense of calm and order. But this journey now reminded him of traveling across the country, witnessing a squalor both abject and omnipresent. There were times during that journey when he was not sure whether a cabin had been partly razed to the ground or was fully inhabited. Everything seemed ruined or partly ruined. Smoke appeared from half-rotten chimneys, and no one, emerging from these cabins, could refrain from shouting after a carriage as it passed or moving malevolently towards one if it slowed down. There was no moment when he felt free of their hostile stares and dark accusing eyes. (Tóibín, 2004: 25-26)

As exemplified in Tóibín’s text even sympathetic gentry who journeyed through poor rural parts of post-famine Ireland were often looked upon as intruders to those regions. O’Kelly has utilized this sense of transition through unfamiliar territory in *Omós*, but has reversed the position of the teller. Instead of the usual account from the privileged position of the diarist or traveler she presents the silent recipient of that long-standing non-comprehending socially and politically constructed gaze. The chosen mediation is not through words, as a diarist might formulate them to conjure a visual

description, but rather through a series of sounds that coalesce to produce a sense of urgency.

O'Kelly's strategy of switching the role of the narrator unto the previously narrated figure, the unnamed girl, is also an insistence on moving beyond the literally visible in her presentation. Similarly, the duration it takes to listen to the work functions as a demand upon the listener to engage with art, in general, a little more slowly. By placing the listener in a situation where they must choose what sounds they identify with – the breathless girl, the coach wheels, the whispering voices – the evocation in this work queries assumptions of historic class identity and presents a new contemporary and socially inclined conundrum. The visual image/s in the listener's imagination may be born in the space created between a politics of personal identification, a more generalized sense of retrospective perspective and an outward comprehension of situations of poverty and disempowerment, more universally. As the work unfolds the girl's loss of speech is replaced by a cry beyond crying and the potential for the listener's tidy sense of history is assuredly obscured by the contemporary nature of listening to the piece. The invisible subject and final wordlessness of *Omós* transcends a loss of voice.

Commemorative exhibitions on the Irish Famine have often collapsed individual artworks into a collective

representation of the Famine⁹ and so struggled to reflect a meaningful relationship between artifact, art and history. In *Omós* the reclaimed position of the storyteller also functions as a metaphorical reclaiming of the individual artwork as a socially constructed experience, rather than merely a link in a wider chain of exhibited objects. O'Kelly did not simply rehearse the language of history, and thereby risk repeating its patterns of misrepresentation, rather she chose a different and multilayered language in a useful transgression of time to reconstitute coevalness between past and present, subject and listener, art and its places of exhibition.¹⁰ What occurs in *Omós* is a newer and historically differentiating form of imaginative truth that is created in and by the form of the work.

9 In 1946 the Exhibition of original paintings of Irish Historical Interest was organised in connection with the Centenary Commemoration of Thomas Davis and the Young Ireland Movement. (Thomas Davis was a poet and writer and a cofounder of the newspaper, *The Nation*, which was the main outlet for the Young Ireland Movement. This group Fintan Cullen has described as “concerned with defining Irish identity and propagating a form of cultural nationalism” [Cullen, 2000: 65]). In 1995, Teagasc and the Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry organised an exhibition, *Famine 150*, at the Royal Dublin Society in Ballsbridge in Dublin and this exhibition toured to Derry early the following year. Also in 1995 the George Moore Society in Claremorris, County Mayo, held an art exhibition simply called *Famine* as part of a wider commemoration of the famine in various cultural forms, which toured internationally in the subsequent two years. In 1998 the Irish Museum of Modern Art presented an exhibition entitled *Representations of the Famine*, which toured Ireland and Northern Ireland. Unlike the others listed here, this 1998 exhibition had the express intention of addressing concepts about art history, as well as about the Famine, by juxtaposing art from various periods (Marshall, Press Release, 1998).

10 My use of coevalness here refers to Johannes Fabian's discussion connecting the construction of otherness in cultural practices with the problematic situation of historical distance from a subject, and his suggestions of the possibilities of coevalness and the consequences of denying it to others (Fabian, 1983: 38-52).

How to Make a Refugee - The Moving Image

Here we are now, in this instance, the media, discussing the media, disavowing that we are the media. It's evidence of the tyranny of expression that we believe this straight reporting – the controlled zoom on the injured child – despite the instability of the document as a document. How irresistible the visual bleed into filmic discourse! The bereaved tell their story to a piano accompaniment. [...] These moments when you feel: why are they filming? Why are they not doing something useful? These are probably, in fact, the best moments for you too to take up your camera. (Robecchi & Gioni, 2002: 86).

The photo and video works of Phil Collins present a speculative practice in an era of evidently contentious reportage and commonplace subversive imaging. At a time when the naive notion that there might be an innocent photograph has well and truly been put to rest, Collins, as quoted above, is determined to provoke the (political) aesthetic of the lens by wielding the lens. His work further reflects an exigency to disclose the difficulty of distinctions: namely, the struggle between comprehending and distancing the other, in particular as it occurs in and through popular and news media. Even the titles of his projects and works reveal this chronic philosophical (and ultimately aesthetic) dilemma: 'Becoming More Like Us', 2002, *Bad Infinity*, 2002, *How to Make a Refugee*, 1999, 'Holiday in Someone Else's Misery', 2001, 'Young Serbs', 2001, 'Real Society', 2002, 'You're Not The Man You Never Were', 2000.

Collins intentionally mixes personal reference with communally political contexts to produce momentarily confusing re/presentations. In a number of projects he has exploited this potential considerably. For example, in 2002 as part of 'Frontline Compilations' in San Sebastian, Collins created a project called 'Real Society' where he extended an open invitation for people to come to a hotel room, strip and

have their photograph taken. This was greeted with popular response. The confessional mode within the structure of the work is typical of Collins's penchant for incorporating into his practice strategies that seem at first to obviate the final wider social and political account of his work and its aesthetic: the in-your-face personal and site-specific aspects belie the shared implications of his work

Born in England Collins lived and worked in Belfast for many years during the 1990s and regularly shows work in both the North and South of Ireland. Now based in Glasgow, he continues to regularly move out of where he lives in order to make work. He is drawn towards zones of current or recent political discord and civil unrest. The influence of Northern Ireland as a site of hyper-visualised identities,¹¹ both fixed and transitory and including, literally, parades of identity, on Collins' work is keenly evident in *How to Make a Refugee*, 2000. Previous to this he had developed a series called 'The Marches' (1998-2000) in which he filmed Orange Marches in Belfast and Portadown. Contrary to the images broadcast worldwide of the bowler-hatted marchers and what violent interaction might take place at a march, Collins interviewed those watching the marches. He subsequently layered low-level sound recordings of the parties around bonfires after the marches. In doing so, he obscured the neat media perception that is internationally relayed on Northern Ireland. For *How to Make a Refugee*, Collins again picked up his camera and pointed it at people who had in this moment become someone else's chosen subjects on their location. This time he joined a

¹¹ In Northern Ireland, notably in Belfast and Derry, the painting of symbolic colours, flags and motifs on pavements and gable ends of houses demarcate various zones of identity associations – for example nationalist or unionist iconography during 'The Troubles'. Liam Kelly discusses art relating to such visualizations (Kelly, 1996:58-73). The Northern Irish Arts Council has announced an initiative to paint over many of these gable-end murals, but in the meantime, in Belfast at least, there is a taxi service for tours to some of the remaining murals across the city.

camera crew on a photoshoot for a lifestyle magazine of a Kosovar-Albanian family in Chegrane on the Kosovan border.

In positioning himself alongside the camera crew, Collins acknowledges his participation in the voyeuristic visualisation of the family being photographed. Nonetheless, as in Belfast and Portadown, he is in conflict with the conventional apparatus of popular media and its preferred stories. In this instance he seems intent on disrupting the severity of the single portrait image. His video takes the visual vantage point of the camera crew but 'reveals' the elements of construction in their 'taking a photo' and the negotiations that lead to the final image. The viewer/listener can hear the debates among the crew: Will the boy look better with or without his baseball cap? Should the other boy remove his T-shirt and display the scars from bullet wounds on his torso? Occasionally a hand enters the frame to take a light reading. The family are arranged in a cluttered configuration in a corner of a room, against a window on one side. Those of the middle and older generations sit on the sofas, while the younger ones stand or are crouched on the floor and two are perched on the sofa back. Textures of a disintegrating blue wall, a net curtain and a creamy fur-like sofa cover are the only intended clues to the interior domestic location.

In analysing the media construction of an image that might 'move us' How to Make a Refugee insists that those who see it, or perhaps witness it by proxy via Collins, are made to reflect on the nature and resolve of news and magazine photography and image-making more generally. He is interested in what is not told in the presentation of the photograph, as much as in whatever may later become apparent. He is present at the moment in which a representation is constructed, one that will become part of the language of how this Kosovar-Albanian family become visually identified as 'refugees'. His participation in that moment is distinguished by the fact that though his hand-held

camera is mostly static, Collins' work is performed, both in its presentation and in its active interpretation. It functions as an example of art's potential to step in where the reporter's, and later the historian's, materialism can only fail, what Collins has termed the "instability of the document as document". Or, to appropriate Rancière's words from his thesis on the relation of art, politics and forms of knowledge more generally to fiction, Collins eloquently exposes the that "'the logic of stories' and the ability to act as historical agents go together" (Rancière, 2004: 39).

His wider art practice reiterates the conviction that we, as readers of the media, are not merely inactive spectators; far from it. Also in 2001, Collins developed work based firstly in Belfast and later in Tirana, Albania, called 'Holiday in Someone Else's Misery'. The first part of the project consisted of a line of T-shirts bearing the images of shootings or pipe-bombings in Northern Ireland, which he bartered for the opportunity to photograph the wearer. An uneasy comment on the fashion to move towards recent conflict sites as a sort of radical chic tourism – a temporary migration Collins describes as: "[t]he insatiable march of of fashion and news media to the illustrated exotic of the 'other'" (Robecchi & Gioni, 2002: 86). He has suggested that conventionally damage is considered more important than violence as a preferred point of entry for a set of critiques around national, cultural and personal identity. This he understands as contingent to the media's fascination with "the wound the centre, with action over inaction, the visible over the invisible" (Robecchi & Gioni, 2002: 84). As O'Kelly wanted to look at a 'dark place', Collins too seems keen to iterate Rancière's conception of artistic practices as "'ways of doing and making' that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility" (Rancière, 2004: 13). Collins and O'Kelly have directly brought us to hidden places and further actively made visible forms of representation. In this way these works

function as aesthetic practices as they point to delimitation of the visible and invisible.¹²

Imbedded in the distribution of time in this work is a self-conscious comprehension of the position of the speaker of the story or commentary. A complementary issue has been at heart of discussions on new historicism in art - a querying of the distinctions perceived between art history and art criticism that is compounded by the tricky presence of the author. Michael Ann Holly undermines the ease of such a distinction and develops her thesis on a 'critical history' where the object and viewer/interpreter are bound together in the production of meaning.¹³ As she outlines: "[...] critical history does not arise spontaneously: it is coupled with the objects about which it speaks" (Holly, 2005: 84). Kevin Whelan draws a parallel conclusion in speaking about Irish history when he implies that the teller and tale are sooner or later indistinguishable from each other (Whelan, 2003: 98). In *How to Make a Refugee* Collins clearly implicates not just himself as artist but also his viewer/listener as an author of the situation it presents. By presenting an account of the making of an image of difference, he forces us closer to his viewpoint, in a comment upon both the desire that news and popular media feeds and the cathartic distancing it casually offers and occurring in such visual representation.

¹² Rancière writes of aesthetic practices as: "forms of visibility that disclose artistic practices, the place they occupy, what they 'do' or 'make' from the standpoint of what is common to the community" (Rancière, 2004: 13). I am suggesting that O'Kelly and Collins formulate a disclosure of historical and media representations, respectively, in the art works discussed here.

¹³ She writes:

What the discussion about the gaze in works of art has taught us is that perception always involves a circulation of positions, a process of movement back and forth that will forever undermine the fixity of the two poles, inside and outside. Herein lies the source of an historian's critical artistry. The trick is making what forever will be a provisional metaphorical construction at least partially consonant with that made visible in the reigning artistic metaphors of the period. (Holly, 1995: 83)

Uneasy with the camera Collins has referred in interviews to its historic role as a diagnostic tool and has also spoken of the implicit violence in organising a video production. These acknowledgements clearly recall the legacy of the language commonly applied to lens-based activity and its endlessly evoked affinity to hunting. In Collins's hands the camera lens continues its acts of transgression: subtly invasive, apparently deceptive. In the means of producing and presenting *How to Make a Refugee*, as in his wider oeuvre, he transgresses not only the subjects' representation, but the systems of that representation. The formal concern of the moving and changing image is played out in the gallery by us, the viewer/listeners, in the completion of Collins's practice which seems to me to advocate a type of social vigilance that is rarely without purpose.

The Familiar Anonymous

The expectation of finality or of specific representation is defied as a strategy within *How to Make a Refugee* and *Omós*. Though profoundly different pieces, coming from alternate personal experiences, for both O'Kelly and Collins, their movement as artists is integral to the work they produce. It informed their identification of their initial subjects (for want of a better term), and the consequential art forms and means of dissemination of ideas they present. In *How to Make a Refugee* and *Omós* the overtly political aesthetic choices made by the artists revolve around a perceived difficulty with the reductive potential of visualising identity, or in the construction of apparent difference. An antagonism toward still images, otherwise readily employed by both the artists in other works, is here bound up with ideas of the ordinary or generalized subject.

In art's history and art's relationship to history, and in wider media representation's relationship to the present or recent past, the understanding of time and timeframe are essential components. The concept that history and historical

moments of the present are somehow progressively enduring phenomena external to art is blurred by the consideration of temporal distance, which also cogently raises uneasy questions about experiencing/engaging with contemporary art. Collins insists that his viewer/listener sustains concentration for the duration of taking a photograph: the image alone is not enough. O'Kelly desires her listener to actively imagine a scene of history in the present, in the gallery: here again a single image will not suffice. By presenting works that move beyond literal, physically specific representations to embrace the multiple potentialities of understanding, *How to Make a Refugee* and *Omós* make Fisher's 'imaginative passage' a possibility. They do this by forcing the viewer/listener to spend time with the work, and to actively formulate an understanding from an experience of the stories alluded to, their uncertainty and lack of resolve. We are uncomfortably implicated in both *Omós* and *How to Make a Refugee*. These ordinary 'subjects' will travel well, now their anonymity is recognizable, familiar even.

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