

**‘Leaving Dublin’: Photographic Portrayals of Post-Celtic Tiger Emigration – A
Sociological Analysis**

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Between 2010 and 2013, Dublin-based photographer, David Monahan, produced a series of 84 portraits of over 120 people who were about to emigrate entitled ‘Leaving Dublin’.¹ This photographic series became a point of evocation and provocation in relation to what has become known as post-Celtic Tiger emigration. Perhaps even more noteworthy is its circulation across contexts, including Monahan’s blog, exhibitions in Ireland and internationally,² an eponymous award winning book (Monahan 2014), reproduction in *The Irish Times* printed version and its on-line ‘Generation Emigration’ blog, as well as in international and diaspora press.³ These multiple contexts signal the rise of digitally-mediated social practices of photographic production, circulation and viewing and the increased flows of content across multiple media channels (Rose 2014, p. 37).

In the 1990s it was predicted that ‘documentary had surely had its day, perishing with the liberal politics that had nourished it; and along with it, naïve ideas about humanitarian reform and the ability of visual representation to capture reality’ (Stallabrass 2013, p. 12). Yet we are witnessing an early twenty-first century art world ‘dominated by documentary work, particularly in photography and video’ (2013, p. 12).⁴ Monahan’s work is testimony to this trend which Stallabrass associates with the economic globalisation of contemporary art, a media landscape transformed by technological affordances and the proliferation of political representation in the post-9/11 political climate of the ‘war on terror’ (2013, p. 15-6). One effect of these factors is the contemporary power of photography to ‘claim rights denied by states’ including that of citizenship (2013, p. 16).⁵

Although migration is primarily seen as a geo-political, policy and legislative matter, Mieke Bal (2015) argues that it is also about affect and aesthetics. To capture this, she poses the term ‘migratory aesthetics’, which simultaneously refers to those traces, including those of intercultural encounters, that *migratory* patterns leave within contemporary cultures and the *aesthetic* invocation of ‘a plural experience of sensate binding’, or felt connection produced by images of migration (2015, p. 132). She is particularly interested in the (in)congruities between relationality in the making of images and relationality within the society from which they emerge, as these (in)congruities create openings through which art can ‘enact small-scale resistances against the status quo’ (Bal and Hernández-Navarro 2011, p. 9). Like Bal and Hernández-Navarro, I am interested in how images of migration might ‘evoke, suggest and connote rather than transmit meaning’ in ways that escape those technologies of control that construct, fix and reproduce consensus about migration (2011, p. 11).

In a somewhat similar vein, Rancière (2004) sees aesthetics and politics meeting in that moment when what is visible, thinkable, audible and possible within the existing order of society can be destabilised. He is interested in how the sphere of aesthetics configures meanings that interrupt ‘the political distribution of the perceptible’ (Rancière 2011, p. 8). Because art can be singular and ‘free from any specific rule’, Rancière sees it as potentially questioning the political order and expressively recasting what can be seen or thought (2004, p. 23). Yet, in the very promise of its autonomy and its definition in relation to specific places, aesthetics has ‘a manner of “doing politics” otherwise than politics does’ (2011, p. 8). To what extent then might Monahan’s photographic aesthetic make visible ‘a new relationship between thought and the sensory world, between the bodies and their environment’ (2011, p. 9)?

The 'Leaving Dublin' series emerged during a period of high out-flow from Ireland. Net out-migration replaced 14 years of net in-migration in 2009 as the effects of the post 'Celtic Tiger' economic crash set in. Between 2008 and 2012 the numbers leaving more than tripled (Glynn et al. 2015, p. 5). Anglophone destinations dominated, with the UK remaining the top destination, followed by Australia, the US, New Zealand and Canada (Glynn et al. 2015). Although the ethnic, racial and citizenship status profile of those leaving was diverse, white Irish citizens were 'at the epicenter of most political and public debate surrounding emigration' (2015, p. 6).⁶ Moreover, discourses of emigration insistently masculinised mobility and constructed the homeland as a feminised space of stasis despite a gender ratio of 56:44 – men to women over the seven years from 2009 to 2015 (2015, p. 8). As such, the term emigration assumed white Irish migrants and boundaried the nation through particular renderings of race and gender.

Familiar tropes of loss and exile persisted in media and in opposition parties' calls for a government response (*The Journal* 2015). However, official discourses of national economic development rationalised emigration by turning global mobility and upskilling abroad into normal career sequences for the high-skilled at least (Moriarty et al. 2015; Ryan 2015).⁷ With over 70 percent of recent emigrants using Skype and telephone calls to regularly maintain contact with family and friends, and over 90 percent using Facebook and other social network sites (Glynn et al. 2015), ubiquitous connectivity further normalised global mobility. The focus of the 'Leaving Dublin' series is on mobility from the perspective of departure from Dublin.

This article investigates the extent to which the existing social order of groups, places and social relations of emigration are destabilised and made political by the 'Leaving Dublin' series. To this end, it examines the communicative work done by Monahan's photographs (Rose 2014); the (in)congruencies between relationality in the making of this series and

existing conventions of migrant relationality (Bal 2015, p.125); and the extent to which the series acts as a form of political interruption in the current migration order, and/or disrupts the dominant visual culture of emigration (Rancière 2011).

The article begins with a review of debates about the use of visual evidence in sociological research and how these shape the methodological approach adopted. The series itself and six selected photographs are introduced in the second section. Then, prompted by Monahan's 'shooting script', the third section addresses the tenacious gendering of home, homeland and mobility in configuring the migration order. The fourth section discusses viewer responses to one museum exhibition of the series while the final section addresses the question of the work done by these photographs to both reproduce and disrupt the existing order of (e)migration. The article concludes by arguing for the significance of this visual intervention in rethinking migration sociologically.

Images as evidence in sociological research – towards a framework for analysis

Early users of visual images in sociological research tended to see aesthetics as falling outside their domain (Born 2010). For example, US-based Howard Becker described his approach as 'social organizational, not aesthetic' (1982, p. xi in de la Fuente 2007, p. 411). This meant focusing on the circumstances giving rise to the photographic projects, for example, 'organizations, audiences, and peers that surround them as they do the work' (Becker 1995, p. 13). As such, Becker's empiricist approach privileges practices, conventions and divisions of labour in the collective construction of photographs (Born 2010). Because the 'organized social activity' of artist networks in enabling or constraining the production of art is privileged, imagination and creativity are elided (Eyerman and Ring 1998, p. 281). So, from this perspective, it is primarily contextual factors that make images useful in visual sociology.

Echoing Becker's approach, but emphasising the unequal classed distribution of and access to cultural capital, Pierre Bourdieu's (1984; Bourdieu and Darbel 1997) sociological studies of art and photography implicate the consumption of art in social reproduction and distinction. For him, aesthetic judgements are shaped by the socially embedded and competitive nature of the art field as artists compete for cultural legitimacy (Hanquinet et al. 2014). For example, Bourdieu's analysis of French bourgeoisie cultural taste shows the construction of aesthetics to be a social process that is 'implicated in relationships of domination and power' (2014, p. 113). Thus, the art object, its style, form and aesthetic qualities remain outside the domain of inquiry (Born 2010).

The Frankfurt and Cultural Studies approaches opened up further if contradictory analyses. In broadbrush strokes, the Frankfurt School saw the aesthetic in art as shaped by the ideology of the culture industry and its manufacture of meaning (Eyerman and Ring 1998). In a reversal of this position, Cultural Studies approaches (drawing on poststructural and semiotic theories) seek out resistance to cultural hegemony in popular cultural artefacts and images (Eyerman and Ring 1998). Cultural artefacts such as photographs, while seen to be working on multiple levels and inviting a range of interpretations, are viewed as texts within which relationships between power, representation and subjectivity can be identified and questioned (Wolff 2005).

From yet another perspective, Robert Witkin argues that specific social structures shape 'styles' of art and that 'aesthetic styles ... [are] integral to social formation' (Witkin 2005, p. 72 in de la Fuente 2007, p. 415). For him, the artwork itself aesthetically communicates 'transformations in social structure and relations' (Eyerman and Ring 1998, p. 282). Moreover, because art style is seen as producing reflective understanding in viewing publics, the art object can in itself act as an agent of social change. While acknowledging Witkin's engagement with aesthetics and style, Eyerman and Ring suggest that the meaning

sought in artwork may be predetermined by his reading of social change through grand narratives of tradition and modernity.

For Eyerman and Ring, the bringing together of a focus on the artwork itself and the work done by aesthetic factors heralds a ‘new sociology of art worlds’ (1998, p. 277; see also de la Fuente 2007). One way to recognise both the work done by aesthetic aspects of the artwork and the technological affordances of the contemporary media landscape is to view the artwork itself as an ‘actant’ in Latour’s terms; as ‘one of the actors in the drama of its own making’ (Becker et al. 2006, p. 6). Becker and his colleagues recently suggested that artworks have lives and careers, that they go ‘from here to there to somewhere else and that these movements in time and space affect what they are and what they can be made into’ (in de la Fuente 2007, p. 421). Taking this a step further, it is possible to see the digital camera, the photograph and multiplication of digital platforms as ‘materially implicated in the production and performance of contemporary sociality’ (Savage et al. 2010, p. 9).

As actants and inscription devices, i.e. items of apparatus ‘which can transform a material substance into a figure or diagram which is directly useable...’ (Latour and Woolgar 1979, p. 51), or visual devices that allow ‘for *converting relations from non-trace-like to trace-like form*’ (Law 2004, p. 29 in Rose 2014, p. 32; original emphasis), photographs are unstable (Rose 2014). By embedding the photographs in multiple performative and communicative interactions, Monahan makes the ‘Leaving Dublin’ series a form of ‘designed communication’ (Rose 2014, p. 32). The mediating role of the camera, photographer and researcher, as well as ‘what is done with images, in specific moments of interpretation and evocation’ shape the meanings produced (2014, p. 38). Moreover, the mobilisation of ‘visualizing devices’, from blogs and exhibitions and their on-line circulation actualise connections and relations which performatively (re)construct post-Celtic Tiger society. Therefore, ‘Leaving Dublin’ can be read as a kind of Latourian inscription that is the unstable

result of complex ‘sets of social and technical practices and relations’ (Savage et al. 2010, p. 7). This heterogeneous representational landscape of post- Celtic Tiger emigration is less about the teleological replacement of the old with the new than a complex process of digital (re)production and circulation of meanings that incorporates and reconfigures leaving in circuits of discourse, image and viewing encounters.

My analysis embraces the ‘hinterland’ of practices through which the ‘Leaving Dublin’ series (re)produces the social world of contemporary Irish emigration. This includes the work done by aesthetic aspects of the photographs and the ways that these arise in the conception, production, circulation and reception of this photographic archive. I am particularly interested in the political potentiality of the series’ ‘migratory aesthetics’ (Bal 2008) and, following Rancière, in identifying those points where the aesthetic and political meet to render visible and thinkable more politically capacious relations between (im)mobile bodies and their environment. Because the tracing of a complete set of practices, connections and relations is beyond the scope of this article, I focus on Monahan’s ‘shooting script’; i.e. the narrative describing his project and staging of the photographs; how migration is structured in a specific viewer response context; and my own reading of contradictory social distinctions through which the politics of (im)mobility are communicated via the series’ ‘migratory aesthetics’. The overall aim is to acknowledge the significance of ‘producing knowledge with and about images’, how Monahan uses the photographs as tools to communicate (Rose 2014, p. 32), and their potential to enact ‘small resistances’ or a ‘rupture in the order of things’ (Bal and Hernández-Navarro 2011, p. 9; Rancière 2003, p. 219).

‘Leaving Dublin’ – staging departure

Monahan suggests that his project is to give visibility to leaving, shape the visual culture of migration in Ireland and help move debate beyond de-humanised statistical representations:

I fully recognise the difference between this and previous waves of emigration and at the same time I acknowledge that the quest remains the same - the search for a better life... The work honours the courage behind the decision and the fact that moving to a different country can dramatically shape the future lives of those who leave and has huge impact on those left behind (Monahan nd).

By photographically dramatising the moment prior to leaving, he wants to highlight migration as ‘a powerful symbol for our times. In the past we were too quick to let leavers slip from our collective thought ... we have always been in denial that emigration robs us of something. Now is the time to have a thoughtful conversation on leaving!’ (Monahan 2014).

Monahan profiles those who participated as young graduates, unemployed tradesmen, [heterosexual] couples, families with children and emigrants in their 40s and 50s (some of the latter group emigrating for a second time). His blog includes photographs accompanied by brief summaries of reasons for leaving and short quotes from some sitters. He describes how he initiated the project as follows:

In February 2010, I used my blog to invite people of all nationalities, who had decided to leave Ireland for economic reasons, to take part. I told them I wanted to make portraits that were ... monumental, to show those depicted in a true heroic spirit ... they are making a huge jump into the void of uncertainty and this needs to be commemorated ... From there I got my first 3 sitters (nd.)

The photographs are deliberately theatrical, staged at night and spot-lit to highlight the Dublin location chosen by the subjects themselves as a place with a special meaning for them; ‘[b]y shooting at night, you are taking something that is quite ordinary and normal, a backdrop that we would all be familiar with ... and dissociating it from our usual conception

of the place' (Monahan in Kenny 2011). Six of the photographs, generally illustrative of the range of sitters (including couples) and settings, are presented below.

Figure 1

Leaving Dublin # 49, Glaucia,Torres Quintanilha, 22:57, 31 May, 2011. Grand canal Square, Dublin 4



Glaucia Torres Quintanilha spent three years in Dublin and is returning to Brazil:

I'm Glaucia Torres Quintanilha. I come from Rio de Janeiro [and]... decided to go back to Brazil because I felt ready to start a new life there. I went to Ireland to study English and to know a little bit about Europe. I worked as a child minder ... I really enjoyed my work and the families I worked with. I'll keep them in my heart forever. It was quite difficult saying good bye, but I'm feeling really excited about my return to my home town. It's almost the same feeling I had when I arrived in Dublin all the possibilities... (Monahan nd).

Figure 2

Leaving Dublin # 3, Julie Mitchel, 23:40, 18 April 2010. Smithfield Square, Dublin 7.



Julie Mitchell (30) left her job as a graphic designer in Dublin in 2009 to go on a round-the-world adventure with her friend. In an interview with *The Irish Times* she states: ‘Maz and I always had the intention of returning home and getting new jobs, but . . . we quickly found out it was not going to be as simple as that’ (Kenny 2011). Julie met a Canadian man in Peru and after four months back in Ireland decided to move to Vancouver, where she works in a design studio while waiting to get permanent residence status (ibid.). Reflecting on her decision, she notes:

I was torn, as I absolutely loved living and working in Dublin and have left my amazing friends behind, but leaving was something I had to do. I am really happy to have the photo, which was taken near my old home in Smithfield, as a memento.

Heterosexual romantic relationships often emerge as significant factors in the decision to move amongst Monahan’s sitters.

Figure 3

Leaving Dublin # 43, Filip Naum, Eliska Komarkova, 22:41, 7 May 2011. Gardiner Street Lower, Dublin 1.



Taken on the night before they move to Prague, Eliska's home town, this photograph is captioned by Monahan as follows:

Filip moved to Wexford from Dublin some years ago and made the trip once more by bus to pause with me before leaving for his new home. Filip says it's not easy to leave his home of six years. I am sure his love will make the transition to a new home all the easier. On the night it lashed rain and we found ourselves under a bridge pretty close to our original destination Busaras [the central bus station] (Monahan nd.).

Figure 4

Leaving Dublin # 41, Ara Lopez, Darragh Mc Munn, 22:18, 5 May, 2011. The Spire, O'Connell Street, Dublin 1.



Ara López, with her boyfriend, Daragh McMunn (who was to follow her a few months later when his work contract expired) before moving back to Mexico after two-and-a-half years in Dublin. The Spire, across from the General Post Office, is the place where they first kissed two years previously (Monahan nd.).

Figure 5

Leaving Dublin # 37, Antoneila Girassol, 22:24, 3 April, 2011. St. Stephens Green, Dublin 2.



Monahan captions this photograph as follows:

Antoiela Girassol from Santos, Sao Paulo, Brazil is returning after a year in Dublin...She arrived with ... a copy of her favourite play, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Antoniel, an actress and theatre teacher says it is her favourite work of her favourite writer and she wanted to be photographed with it beside one of her favourite places in Dublin. So here we are outside St Stephens Green (Monahan nd).⁸

Figure 6

Leaving Dublin # 39, Seán O'Dálaigh, Leia Ní Dhálaigh, 22:26, 9 April, 2011. Queens Road, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin



Seán Ó Dálaigh (31), a web designer, was made redundant three times and is moving to Rotterdam in the Netherlands with his American wife, Leia, who is pregnant. Monahan quotes from Seán in the caption below:

‘Our tale bounces between Bray; Portland, Oregon; a proposal up a skyscraper in Chicago; our wedding in Belfast; and our honeymoon in Malta’. Seán is moving to take up a job as a support services manager for an Irish electrical-engineering firm in Rotterdam, where he had spent four years as a child. He notes that ‘The shoot was quick and fun. We chose that spot as it was around the corner from our apartment in Dún Laoghaire. I cycled past it every day en-route to work. We were very happy

while living there. We're delighted with the portrait we have now on our wall. The photo is a reminder of what we did in order to take care of our family' (in Kenny 2011).

Gendered tropes in the visualisation of mobility and stasis

From Sean Keating's painting 'Economic Pressure' (1936 –Crawford Art Gallery, Cork) to TV images of airport goodbyes in the 1980s, emigration has been visualised primarily as a severing from an ordinary family and homeland. These tropes are evident in Monahan's account of how he came to the project:

My mother was one of five children and by the time she was seventeen all of her family had moved to England. She was left alone in Dublin, where she married my dad about two years later. Growing up there I had no family on my mother's side... I remember a sadness that my mother showed occasionally, especially around Christmas time. In the eighties things were very bad economically, so all of my own siblings left town. I was all of the nineties in Dublin without any of them. When the crash came I was saddened to see all the progress being washed away... I realized what awaited families in the future... It was then I made up my mind to give a face to those about to depart, and to celebrate them as people not mere statistics (Monahan 2014).

In a later blog:

As a young boy I had the realisation that my own mother was seriously affected by the loss of her entire family through emigration and this played a large part in the sadness and melancholic aura that I sensed from her as a child. This realisation is probably at the heart of my desire to humanise the experience of the current... emigration (2017).

Monahan frames the relationality of emigration through a personal but also nationally familiar narrative that gives agency (even if constrained) to mobility by constructing staying-put in feminised terms as passive. This feminised experience of loss was empirically identified by a recent large- scale survey of aging which found

a positive and significant effect of children's emigration on the loneliness scores for mothers but not for fathers ... Our analysis suggests that the mental health of mothers is affected by the emigration of their children... this result holds across our three measures of mental health ... (Mosca and Barrett 2014, p. 16)

Interestingly, the study indicated that loneliness resulting from children's emigration was lower for mothers who had themselves been emigrants previously and increased 'symptoms of loneliness' were evident only for fathers aged over 65 (2014, p. 17).

The established visual culture of emigration and powerful trope of the grieving mother is invoked in History Professor, Diarmaid Ferriter's response to this study in *The Irish Times*:

I was reminded of Seán Keating's 1936 painting *Economic Pressure* which depicts a stationary, gaunt, immobile man standing between two worlds; the barren Aran islands and the world of opportunity beyond, where a younger man embracing his female relative, probably his mother, is heading to... The report is a reminder that behind all the emigration statistics over the past 200 years, and despite the modern revolution in technology, *certain things remain constant and unchanging*. In 2010, Philip Lynch from Westmeath, who emigrated to Melbourne in the 1980s, offered this powerful and moving recollection in a contribution to this newspaper: 'On the June morning I left, I found my mother in an upstairs bedroom. She was already well past

the point of consolation . . . the surprise and shock of seeing my mother so upset that morning stayed with me for a long time' (Ferriter 2014; emphasis added).

In Keating's painting, it is the woman who is being left behind. Although another male figure is present, he is immobilised caught between leaving and staying. In the account of Philip Lynch's leaving, the abiding image is of the grieving mother. The established visual and discursive culture of leaving emphasises a gendered severing of ties. More recently characterised as 'the abiding Irish mammy', the figure of the Irish mother also serves as 'a symbol of national resilience' (O'Leary and Negra 2016, p. 134). Pointing to 'the seeming inability to visualize female emigration', Diane Negra suggests that this 'may be explained as a function of the corollary to the trope of male mobility – a counterpoint to female stasis' (2014, p. 50). Contemporary emigration is repeatedly represented as 'a form of compensatory agency and one consistently associated with male subjectivity' (2014, p. 50).

Although the voices of women as migrants and potential migrants received new public and academic attention in the 1980s and 1990s (see Walter 2013 for overview), the powerful trope of male mobility continues to stifle public accounts of women's migrancy and evacuate staying-put of agency or personal project (Gray 2004, 2009). The grieving mother is re-animated as a passive and static symbol of an ordinary home. This has the effect of eliding family lives transformed by the imperatives of local and global capitalist labour markets, the labour-market participation of Irish mothers, and the impact of state and supra-state economic, social and migration policies. The Irish mother, as the place holder of belonging, also requires a forgetting of the racialised motherhood invoked during the 2004 Citizenship Referendum which denied citizenship to the children of non-Irish parents (Lentin 2003) and the expulsion from the state of those seeking abortions until the 2018 Abortion Referendum which facilitated the legalisation of abortion in circumscribed circumstances. As a nostalgic reminder of the comfort of rootedness, the grieving mother works as the

unchanging 'outside' that enables a celebration of the mobile, individualised lifestyles of the dominant neoliberal economic order as activated and productive.

At the same time, this gendered posing of stasis and loss against mobility and potential is unsettled by Monahan's depictions of Dublin as a node in circuits of movement; a place of departure now, but arrival before and simultaneously a place of potential return; a place constructed through multiple modes of inhabitation and myriad migratory trajectories, all marked by a 'complex mix of desire, necessity and desperation' (Monahan nd). The photographs juxtapose the absence from Dublin of family and friends (part of a longer history of loss symbolised by the battered suitcase) with the opportunity and (im)possibilities that Dublin held for some immigrants, as well as their imagined lives on leaving and relocation (as they look out beyond the confines of the city scape).

As multi-ethnic and multi-racial depictions of labour migration, adventure, sojourn and mobility, the photographs suggest less a necessary link between heritage and a sundered project of national social reproduction (Gray 2011, 2013), than a moment in (mainly middle-class) mobile lives, work and place trajectories. They pose alternative ways of understanding Irish emigration in a world crosshatched by circuits of transnational capital, deepening geopolitical inequalities and associated migrations. Nonetheless, the territorially-tethered mother figure tenaciously haunts the series. She installs a tension between heteronormative, nationalist and racialised appeals to territorialised belonging and global capitalist routings of desired and autonomous mobility. This complex 'distribution of the sensible' does not preclude dissensus as the series poses questions of who can speak or appear as an emigrant from Ireland today (Rancièrè 2004, p. 13).

Viewers responses: Affective cosmopolitanism or reproducing hierarchical relationalities of migration?

In this section I turn to a visitor study conducted during the ‘Leaving Dublin’ exhibition at the Immigration Museum Melbourne between August and October 2013. I am interested in the kinds of responses evoked and what these can tell us about the problematisation of emigration staged by the series (Born 2010). One viewer, Julia, (born and raised in Australia), saw the series as

a ‘kind of symbol’ that hints at a potentially happy end to their stories: ‘What I liked about the photographs was the darkness, but in most of them there was light shining through at some point... which I guess relieved ... the pain of saying goodbye with this kind of symbol of something new, maybe in the distance but that was going to come to them. I hope it did for them’ (Schorch et al. 2017, p. 106).

She was also ‘impressed by the diversity of Irish people who decided to make the move. ... (in Schorch 2014, p. 92). Paul (migrated to Australia from Hungary after World War II) responded:

The individual stories were quite touching, bringing up all these things of fear and loss and leaving a community and realizing that to have a decent life... people need to somehow take roots in a new community which may be quite strange and forbidden even (in Schorch et al. 2017, p. 105).

Lisa (recent emigrant from Ireland with her boyfriend) commented:

Parts of the exhibition were related to Dublin, Ireland, which I found particularly enjoyable. It was good to hear the stories of fellow immigrants and see that we are not alone ... young people coming over for work and to start a family just because it's difficult to do at home in Ireland at the moment ... just to see that people had done that

before and it's the same emotions and missing family and the same kind of struggles (in Schorch et al. 2017, p. 106).

Anthropologist and heritage studies scholar, Philipp Schorch, suggests that, for these viewers, the series transforms ‘the abstract category “Irish” into concrete stories and faces’ (2014, p. 93). He sees it as procuring a ‘pluralist cosmopolitan space’ that enables ‘multiple identifications in a shared discursive terrain’ (2014, p. 93). For Schorch, ‘[t]he simultaneous presence of embodied narratives through faces and narrative embodiment through stories humanizes migration and entangles the “experiences” of self and other’ (2014, p. 93). The ‘diversity’ of the sitters prevents viewers from identifying the emigrant as ‘a particular type of person’ and puts ‘ambivalence, complexity, or contingency’ at the centre of migratory narratives (2014, p. 93). Thus ‘[t]he interpretive interplay between “picture” and “story”’ produces ‘empathetic and reflexive engagements’ that enable ‘affective cosmopolitanism’ through cross-cultural encounter (Schorch et al. 2017, p. 106-7).

Alongside evocations of ambivalence and contingency, it is also possible to read the above responses as reproducing the established relationality of a European- New World migratory order. There is something essentially familiar about the ‘Leaving Dublin’ portraits from these viewers’ perspectives. The responses reproduce teleological trajectories of migration from loss through potentially difficult journeys to relatively settled endings; from darkness to light. Routes of identification and empathy are forged through familiar tropes of migration as exile, but also as the livelihood strategy of the autonomous (neo)liberal subject. The order of migration relies on particular affective and identificatory points of connection, resonance and investment (Tyler 2010). While these Australian, Hungarian and Irish viewers recognise some aspects of their experience in the photographs, which (non) migrants viewers might not? What can these viewer identifications tell us about the ‘order of migration’

assumed and reproduced in these encounters with the series? This is an order of migration that separates out and disconnects these sitters from the conditions of movement of native Australians or of asylum-seekers, including forced dispersal, deportation, incarceration in reception centres and the construction of some migrants as burdensome dependents. The historically-structured classed, racialised and gendered conditions of past and present (im)mobility (as shaped by past colonial and settler mobilities and encounters) remain outside this frame. We are left then with further questions: What conditions of viewing might enable responses that would visualise and politicise these differentiated conditions of mobility – enable them to ‘appear’? What kinds of orderings are these images (re)producing through their form, circulatory trajectories and migratory aesthetics?

Migratory aesthetics: A visual rupture in the order of mobility

If emigration has been visualised in Ireland primarily as a severing from an originary family and homeland, then perhaps it is not surprising that some viewers express feelings of being distanced from, or being unmoved by the ‘Leaving Dublin’ photographs. Such reactions triggered my interest in exploring the work done by the series. While the responses to the Melbourne exhibition suggest a routing of readings through linear migration narratives and migration in common, perhaps the photographs open up different relationalities, imaginaries and (dis)identifications for non-migrants. As noted already, the highly stylised and unsentimental aesthetic of this series push it beyond the established visual culture of sentimental departure. Its ‘migratory aesthetics’ suggest forms of connectivity, relationality and leaving that undermine a purely national visualisation of leaving, or linear migratory trajectory and signal instead transnational and multicultural histories and politics, as well as complex circuits of migration.

Barthes (1981) argues that when we look at a photograph, the photograph itself becomes invisible as the subject of the photograph is rendered object. We relate to the photograph through the prescribed coded meanings that frame it; what he calls the *studium*. But photographs also include un-coded aspects that escape prescribed meaning and break the *studium* i.e. the *punctum*. The viewer's gaze is held as she unexpectedly recognizes something she is unable to express in language. The central presence of the sitter looking outwards away from Dublin and from the viewer leaves us without an immediate connection except to the artistic quality or 'punctum' – which destabilises the legibility of post-Celtic Tiger emigration. Moreover, the stillness of the scene contrasts starkly with the mobility that is its subject matter; cause for pause.

Who are these emigrants? To whom and to where do they belong? How might this city place that they are leaving and its location in the world be understood through their diverse relationships to it? As Mieke Bal notes, 'a city's look is hard to pin down' and is made all the more so by the instability of migratory culture in the city landscape (2008, p. 150). Monahan's series presents us, not with experiences, but multiple intersecting traces, moments and connections, that provide diverse kinds of sensory binding, or ways of apprehending emigration (2008, p. 156). As self-conscious works of art, adopting a lighting mood that invites contemplation, they perform their 'own politicizing form of abstraction' (2008, p.152).

Through abstraction, they occasion 'the looking' of a different kind of city and mobility into existence (Bal 2008, p.151). The obligation to remember signalled by the old cardboard suitcase (which belonged to Monahan's emigrant brother in England) is present, but the associated sentimentality is stifled. The existing 'perceptual field' (Rancière 2003, p. 226) of emigrant departure is ruptured as emigrant bodies appear that had no place or part in

the existing 'order of bodies' that defines the allocation of ways of doing emigration and ways of being emigrant (Rancière 1999, p. 29).

While '[y]ou cannot photograph capitalism', a series of photographs such as this can suggest something about its operation (Becker 2002, p. 5). The abstract workings of global capitalism and migration are given 'a real, flesh and blood life' (Becker 2002, p. 11). These sitters remind us that 'nobody exists beyond global forces' today (Mountz and Hyndman 2006, p. 457). In her commentary on the series, Valérie Morisson suggests that it depicts '[i]solated figures or families [who] seem to be stranded in a ghost city after the end of the Celtic Tiger show'; the spectre of global capitalism working through market forces moves people and clears out places (2011, p. 182). The sitters' chosen places in Dublin are like mooring points in a mobile personal and professional life trajectory; nodes in a globalised labour market and networks of connections rather than places of rooted, long-term settlement.

Like the photographs of migrants taken by Mohr, the 'Leaving Dublin' series performatively re-presents contemporary emigration in the bodies of real migrants – a kind of 'specified generalization' (Berger & Mohr 1975, p. 5 in Becker 2002, p. 158). It heroicises mobility but also visually evokes and connotes mobility as a politicised feature of contemporary Irish society. The images are not of emotional departures but of simultaneous connection and mobility; multiple temporalities and both empty and anticipated places. Migrancy is conveyed in relation to city locations rather than the nation-state, even as the city tends to stand in for the nation-state. The sitters communicate a relational affiliation to Dublin as mediated by employment opportunities, literature, time spent there, family connection and Irish citizenship. Their brief and fragmented comments suggest 'an affective imaginary' in which connectivity arises from experiences of Dublin and migration in

common (Conradson and McKay 2007). Dublin represents a node in these mobile life trajectories even as it is also haunted by the feminised national spectre of emigration as loss.

At the same time, this 'specified generalisation' of migration as a feature of life projects (career, lifestyle or family) and as a trace of loss or absence, is held in place by the invisibility of those migrant faces whose mobility is constrained, or of any connections between differently positioned migrants. Instead, migrants 'appear' as relatively autonomous mobile subjects rather than as immigrant subjects of intensified social and economic marginalisation following the financial crash (Gilmartin 2013). These migrants are not anticipating visa restriction, their movement is not linked to remittance commitments and detention is not a concern. Through these omissions and others a (re)enactment of particular social distinctions and the (re)production of specific social divisions takes place (Ball and Gilligan 2010). So, just as new trajectories, relationalities and stories 'appear' as constitutive of Dublin and contemporary mobility, other trajectories, relationalities, mobilities are disappeared in ways that keep an exclusionary topography and politics of mobility in place.

Insofar as this visualisation of contemporary migration reproduces unimpeded and autonomous mobility, it reenacts the political distribution of the perceptible by normalising contemporary capitalist mobility regimes (Rancière 2011, p. 8). In this way the logic of mobility as 'a new form of domination, one that is both spatial and social at the same time' is reinforced (Kaufmann et al. 2012). The brief comments by some sitters indicate their particular propensity for physical, social and economic mobility and suggest a relatively frictionless mobility through which cities such as Dublin are constructed and reconstructed. This appearance of agentic mobility elides the ways in which nationalist, statist and capitalist forces channel and regulate normalised and 'suspect' mobilities.

By bringing the battered suitcase (representing earlier generations of emigrants) into contiguity with contemporary city-based migrations, an ordering of continuity takes place in which viewers are reminded that the momentum towards social mobility through movement is not new. Migration was just as much an aspect of industrial society's reliance on 'the desire of individuals to improve their personal socio-economic circumstances' (Kaufmann et al. 2012) as it is of post-industrial global capitalism's reliance on the desires of individuals to accumulate globally recognised skills and cosmopolitan dispositions. This continuity with previous generations is echoed by Monahan's comment - 'the quest remains the same - the search for a better life...' (Monahan nd).

Despite representations of past emigration as exile, assumptions of individual freedom to move and an aspiration, if not a right to equality, despite one's origins, underpinned and continue to underpin migration as a livelihood strategy. The current valorisation of mobility 'is based on the same reasoning'; it 'insists that responsibility to realise potential rests with the individual, whilst denying the fact that social structures are also involved in the behaviours of mobilities' (Kaufmann et al. 2012). As such, this series does not fetishise the new but performatively re-presents rationalities and relationalities of migration that sometimes overlap and are sometimes separated, but all of which are mutually implicated.

As 'digital data', this photographic series does not simply occupy 'a "space of flows" or a virtual informationalized world [but] is itself a materiality that is "alive", embodied and mobile' (Ruppert et al. 2013, p. 28). The photographs work as 'surfaces of sensation' that bind viewers to the complex act of departure by connecting the 'there' of the night before leaving and the 'here' of the viewing context (Lury et al. 2012). As well as making the 'scene' of migration visible and sensate, the series itself is also 'part of the scene' in its multiple circularitory and replicable dimensions (Lury et al. 2012). At another level, the photographs, as material objects, are engaged in movement, transactions and interactions and

are potentially traceable across sites and activities and translated into multiple kinds of information and interventions (Savage et al. 2010, p. 10).

Conclusion

The ‘migratory aesthetics’ that mark the ‘Leaving Dublin’ series intervene in the contemporary politics of migration in Ireland through complex and simultaneous interweavings of established relationalities of migration and new relationalities that rupture the existing order. The series moves beyond documentary photography ‘as a distinct entity and tradition’ into a more hybrid aesthetic, political and media environment (Stallabrass 2013, p. 19-20). In line with contemporary visual culture, the series is designed, performative, affective and ‘saturated with reflexive talk’ (Rose 2014, p. 40). Monahan’s artistic expression, aesthetic decisions and active engagement with modes of visual communication and circulation are testimony to this. Meanings of twenty-first century migration from Dublin are evoked, suggested and connoted rather than simply transmitted (Bal and Hernández-Navarrao 2011). As part of a global environment and perhaps ‘a commons- of which art is increasingly a part’, this series is also subject to multiple searches, forms of indexing and constant recontextualisation (Stallabrass 2013, p. 20).

The ‘configuration of [the] problem’ of emigration is reframed by Monahan’s photographs (Rancière 2011, p. 2), which turn the moment of leaving into an unstable but politically potent ‘trace-like form’. Although the series re-presents contemporary global labour market imperatives and gendered national narratives of belonging, it also fundamentally alters how the act of emigration is visually configured. In these ways, the series simultaneously works with and against established migration relationality (Bal 2015). The political and aesthetic meet in the tensions between how the series both re-‘appears’ established global labour market relationalities of migration and ‘appears’ new mobility

trajectories and multi-ethnic/racial relationships to city places. At the same time, it opens up unanticipated relationalities insofar as its digital production, reproduction, circulation and display cross platforms and contexts potentially occasion interruptions to the existing distribution of the sensible, including its associated naming and counting of parts (Rancière 2004).

Even though digitisation can facilitate reflexive ways of communicating contemporary migration (Uprichard et al. 2008, p. 617), it also reinscribes structured disconnection and forgetting. For all the emphasis on circulation, lateral connection and assemblage, an insistent separation persists between Irish asylum-seeking/immigration and emigration-focused digital photographic projects.⁹ Despite, or perhaps as a result of the inter-networking of this series as a digital artefact embedded in software, algorithms, codes and network connectivity, as well as people's interaction with the series on various platforms, these disconnections persist. Nonetheless, Monahan's project enacts subtle revisionings that forge new connections and provoke less familiar viewing relationships to emigration from Ireland.

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Notes

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² Shows include Dublin, Castlebar, Donegal and Kerry and the Immigration Museum, Melbourne and projections in 13 locations worldwide.

³ See *Generation Emigration and Irish Abroad* *The Irish Times* (2011- 2017) Best printed book of 2015 Nicholson Bass.

⁴ Thank you to one reviewer for pointing me to this work.

⁵ Thank you to one reviewer for raising this point.

⁶ Of those leaving in the year to April 2009, nearly half were citizens of the twelve eastern and central European states and under a third were Irish nationals rising to nearly half of those emigrating between 2010 and 2015 (CSO 2015).

⁷ Most were either at work or a student before departing, with fewer than 1 in 7 being unemployed and more than half holding a third level degree or above (CSO 2015).

⁸ Antoiela Girassol is not quoted in the blog.

⁹ See Vukasin Nedeljkovic's multimedia '*Asylum Archive*' www.asylumarchive.com; Anthony Haughey's 'Citizen13', '*How to be a model citizen*', '*Postcards from Mosney*' <http://anthonyhaughey.com/projects/home/>; Rory O'Neill's '*€19.10 & Other Stories*' www.roryoneill.ie; Zoë O'Reilly's '*New Bridges*' www.new-bridges.tumblr.com; *The Irish Times*, *Generation Emigration* archive <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/abroad/generation-emigration>.