

## **Review Article: “What you see is what you get”?**

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A Review of Michel Peillon and Eamonn Slater (eds.), 1998. *Encounters with Modern Ireland: a Sociological Chronicle, 1995-96*. x+183pp. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration. ISBN 1-872002-59-5 IR £12 (pbk).

### I INTRODUCTION

#### *The Story So Far*

Time was when Sociology took a pride in the difficulty of its subject, “society”, and book covers presented themselves accordingly. The cover of Breen *et al.* (1990) promises to focus “on the relationship between the policies pursued by the state and the class structure of Ireland” and to show that “the benefits of Ireland’s economic development have been very unevenly distributed, leading to a growing polarisation between social classes”. In case the bookshop browser should doubt the seriousness of these suggestions, the next paragraph warns that the book is the product of ten years of research, synthesising empirical and theoretical work, resulting in a comprehensive overview. The credentials of the authors — “Senior”, “Officer”, and “Professor” — are clearly stated. In short the book is written to be cited. It is an authoritative statement, to be read by researchers and other professionals, for whom it aspires to provide an objective record of significant social change.

The cover of Clancy *et al.*’s (1995) book is decorated in warm pastel shades, promises a book which is “up-to-date”, rich and diverse, and is offered as a book for the active reader to “explore”, rather than as delivering, to the passive reader, the authoritative results of the writers’ explorations. Nonetheless, its content is

described in terms which are abstract and technical: demography; economy; society; class; state; broadcasting; sectarianism; the environment. Most notably, however, the book promises to reveal transformations in Irish *sociology*, rather than in Irish society. This is a text-book clearly aimed at students whose task is to master the discipline in which their university teachers will examine them.

In the late 1990s, the book covers are even brighter. They focus on everyday issues in everyday terms, and they offer an “easy read”. Inglis (1998) is decorated in neon shades and shows a young woman in a rave scene. The blurb addresses sex in Ireland, and the end of the Catholic Church’s moral monopoly, before mentioning a new education programme which aims to help young people learn about what it is to be sexual. The bookshop browser might buy the book for any one of these interests, without reading further to discover that its actual focus is the deep divisions between the older and younger generation about these matters.

*Encounters with Modern Ireland* presents itself in the “non-technical and easy to read” genre. The cover seems to show a black tourist, besuited with walking-stick in hand, perusing colourful postcard scenes framed as pictures in a gallery. He is viewed from behind, in shadow, so the browser can readily identify with him, and can see just what he sees. The book itself is illustrated with black-and-white and colour photographs. The cover promises to take the reader on “a stroll through Irish society” to examine such phenomena as religion, pop music, sex, rugby, Temple Bar, and tourism, but also controversial topics including peace protests, divorce, sexual abuse, and drunk driving.

Academically, therefore, it offers a sociology of popular culture and ideology, in the tradition of Curtin *et al.* (1984). Presentationally, however, it is in a new era. Curtin’s volume had no cover blurb, but the introduction began by highlighting the “complex” nature of the issues and asserting “the capacity of the social sciences” to unravel these. An elaborate footnote on this first page warned the prospective reader that sociology approaches these issues in its own proper manner, in contrast to “pejorative”, “biased” and “distorted” connotations which are “common in everyday usage”. At this point the reader lacking sociological credentials surely felt quite intimidated.

*Encounter’s* stroller is not simply a cover-writer’s flight of fancy. Eamonn Slater’s introduction identifies this figure with the *flâneur*, an “icon of modernity” celebrated by Baudelaire in nineteenth century Paris, and hence appropriate for an informal introduction to modern Irish society. Stylistically *Encounters* locates itself in the genre of the literary pub-crawl: an analysis of popular culture which is itself popular. Is this a viable project in its own terms, and if successful what does it do to the science of sociology, which has striven so hard in recent decades to achieve serious academic recognition from its colleagues in economics, political science, and psychology?

## II ENCOUNTERS AS A TEXT

### 1. *Simplified Scholarship*

Let me identify five problems with this text, from the outset. First, the editors imposed draconian restrictions on the contributors' use of normal scholarly devices. No bibliography or index is provided. Footnotes are limited to six per chapter, and may include no more than a single citation each. This is done in an effort not to intimidate the ordinary reader. As indicated above, I consider this to be an admirable objective and much-needed corrective to the earlier sociological style. However, it is being done at a time when scholarly devices have become ever more widely utilised in the mass media, and attached to everyday cultural products.

Cinema films have, notoriously, expanded credit listings to an art-form in their own right: they now commonly include out-takes, tributes to deceased persons of influence, and advertisements for soundtrack CDs, often in several versions. Popular science programmes such as *Horizon* invite requests for a printed transcript with notes for further reading, following each broadcast. Pop CDs come with an inlay reprinting lyrics, and indicating the address of the fan club. It goes without saying that each of these also offer websites — every corn flakes packet today comes with a web site — and what is a website but a gateway into an infinite array of footnotes and bibliographical listings.<sup>1</sup>

None of this is available here: there is literally nowhere for the reader to go after reading one particular chapter of interest, or even the book as a whole. You would not know that Slater has written widely on Irish landscape, Peillon on interest groups in Irish society, Corcoran on migration, Cassidy on drink, Wickham on industrialisation, and so on. You would not hear about Breen's, or Curtin's books. You would not even learn that the IPA, publisher of this volume, are also responsible for other recent sociological publications, including contributions by these same authors, notably Clancy (1995).

### 2. *Pop Sociology?*

This brings me to the second point. If *Encounters* is intended to outsell *Irish Society: Sociological Perspectives*, then it has failed. The publishers are not dismayed by this. Clancy (1995), new edition of Clancy (1986), is an established entity, a commercially successful text book assigned to many third level sociology courses. The IPA is proud to publish *Encounters* as part of its non-commercial "mission". It supplies a "niche market". We do not know for certain who comprises this "niche". However, given the small numbers, it seems unlikely to comprise

1. Where archived newspaper articles are available on websites, the addresses are given in the bibliography below.

school-leavers, tourists or others who feel excluded from professional social science. It is much more likely that the niche comprises social scientists, media professionals, and policy makers. In other words, this text which represents itself as down-market and easily approachable, is in fact an élite product: you have to be one of the *cognoscenti*, to understand and appreciate it. The book is really an invitation to insiders to consider a new style (see above) and a new direction (see below), and thereby to relaunch their discipline in the public arena.

### 3. *Absence of Sociological Theory*

Third, the contributors are constrained to make minimal use of “technical” sociology. Most strikingly, *social class* and the role of the *state* — the core components of Ireland’s social structure according to Breen (1990) — are avoided wherever possible. “State” figures only in the pair, “Church/State”, where rival moral orientations to issues ranging from divorce to drink, are being discussed. Its economic role is not addressed even in James Wickham’s paper on education, whose focus is on improving links between education and industry. “Class” is avoided, even in Mary Corcoran’s discussions of “gentrification” of Temple Bar, and the “exclusion” from it of “deprived communities”.<sup>2</sup> Hence “social structure” itself cannot be discussed. Corcoran herself laments this in her chapter on emigration. Having reminded the reader of “Heroes of the Diaspora” from Tony O’Reilly to Liam Neeson and Frank McCourt, she deplores the “agency spin” (pun intended) whereby people are represented as “architects of their own destinies”, ignoring “structural factors” in shaping their experiences. Is this a tacit reference to Breen’s (1990) conclusion that high unemployment and large public debt represented a crisis facing the Irish State?

The very absence of technical sociology creates a vacuum which must be filled. The result is that technical terms from other disciplines are introduced, with citations. Thus Eamonn Slater’s intriguing visual sociology of a West Cork village utilises the notion of *trompe l’oeil* from aesthetics, Michel Peillon borrows *simulacrum* from Baudrillard to describe a phoney “Peace Protest”, while Tom Inglis utilises Foucault’s notion of rival *régimes* of sexuality. Some literary authors are well known enough not to need explicit citation, e.g., Baudelaire in Chapter 1, whereas an *inconnu* sociologist would waste a valuable footnote!

Where valuable footnotes are used to cite sociological literature, a clear pattern

2. Regarding late twentieth century emigration, Corcoran writes that “whereas once emigrants were drawn almost exclusively from the agricultural and labouring classes, nowadays emigration permeates the entire social class system” (p. 139). This is another way of formulating the absence of a class analysis of the present situation. In fact she is almost the only contributor to *Encounters* to mention “class” at all, whereas seven of the seventeen chapters (1, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17) refer explicitly to “community” and a further three (2, 3, 15) do so implicitly.

emerges. As with the literary citations, a French connection is apparent, from the French founder of modern Sociology, Emile Durkheim to his successors Guy Debord, Chantal Mouffe, and Alain Touraine. However the strong and sustained connection is with the group of "late modern" social theorists around the UK journal, *Theory, Culture and Society*. Anthony Giddens, John Urry, and Zygmunt Bauman are each cited by three or more authors in the book, for their notions of high modernity and its critique, intimacy and its transformations, the tourist gaze, genocide as a utopian modern project, and its opposite, an incurably ambivalent world. Above all, these writers share with the *Encounter* contributors a fascination (not always uncritical) with the ideal of reflexivity, reflexive individualisation, and reflexive trust, which has become the buzzword of the nineteen nineties in its supposedly caring, committed and all-inclusive rejoinder to the single-minded "go for it" egoism and exclusivism of the eighties.

Now of course Giddens has been cited by sociologists for the past two decades, not always for the same reasons. For Breen (1990, pp. 11-12), Giddens (1973) is a theorist of social class as a set of places to be filled, and mechanisms for filling them. The most significant change in Irish class structure was "from one based on family property to one based on educational credentials", achieved in the period 1950 to 1970 (p. 53). This change was an unintended consequence of State policies.

For Clancy (1986, p. 108ff), and for Clancy (1995, p. 304), "class structuration" (Giddens, 1982) is an active process of social differentiation achieved by occupational groups. Michel Peillon, in Clancy (1986, p. 112) sees this as achieving stable relations between three groups: farmers, working class, and urban middle-class.

However Shelagh Drudy, in Clancy (1995) sees intractable problems arising from the "very large grouping" who are excluded from employment. This group had been acknowledged by Giddens (1973) as an "underclass" — a term rejected by Drudy due to its later political associations — seen by Giddens at that time as a stable element in advanced capitalist society, in effect a fourth social class, based on its entitlement to social welfare maintenance.

In *Encounters*, Eamonn Slater takes Drudy's point further. He argues that the notion of "high modernity" (Giddens, 1990) links "reflexivity ... the fact that individuals, groups, and institutions proceed in a self-conscious way, that they reflect on their activity", with "institutionalised doubt", hence with complexity, diversity, and fragmentation, and thus with a "dark side", a limit to pluralism, whereby those who "are deemed to have little to offer modernity" — in effect, those deemed incapable of reflexivity by virtue of their lack of education, unemployability, attachment to traditional life-styles, or to abuse of substances or of people — "are rather ruthlessly marginalised and, if possible, eliminated". Slater identifies small farmers, while later chapters of the book identify deprived

inner-city communities, New Age Travellers, and plain old Irish Travellers as instances of these excluded groups in Ireland.

In the twists and turns of these social theories, we may seem to see reflected the global politics of the period concerned, from early 1970s welfare state optimism and stability, through 1970s and 1980s nationalist and class turmoil, to the 1990s, surprisingly benevolent for most of us until we stop to think of those still left out in the cold. Alternatively, we may simply see a timeless opposition, “consensual” models of stable social structure versus “conflictual” models of instability and chaos, between which the pendulum of popular opinion swings. The question is then whether sociological research sets these swings in motion, or slavishly follows these swings, or works independently to its own scientific agenda.<sup>3</sup>

A way to address this is to compare the writings of sociologists with those of journalists at the same time and place. This is hard to do with an integrated book-length study such as Breen (1990) which defines itself by its style and substance as a scientific and scholarly text. Clancy (1995) is something of a half-way house: certainly equivalents of some of its chapters, e.g., Cieran McCullagh’s identification of unpunished white collar crimes, (Clancy, *et al.*, 1995, pp. 410-431) could be found in newspaper columns. But the space and time allocated to production of such a chapter, comprising 7,000 words, considerably exceed that available to a typical newspaper column, say O’Toole (1999) — comprising 1,000 words — or even an extended magazine-style article, say O’Toole (1996) — comprising 3,500 words.

However the chapters in *Encounters*, averaging 3,500 words, are of just this length. Deliberately lacking scholarly apparatus, written where possible in informal language, and illustrated with black-and-white and colour photographs, their defences are down. They are directly comparable with magazine articles on the same or similar subjects. Meanwhile, the broadsheet newspapers’ weekend “colour supplement” magazines are becoming more sophisticated, and positively invite such comparison.

#### 4. *Sociology Versus Journalism*

Hence the fourth point, in setting the scene for this review, is that in style and substance *Encounters* places itself very close to quality journalism. It even contains some disparaging remarks — Barbara O’Connor refers to O’Toole (1996)

3. In the UK, Anthony Giddens has become closely associated with the political project of Prime Minister Tony Blair, elected to power in May 1997, see especially Giddens (1998), and assessment by Stephen Lukes (1998). For an Irish view, see John Waters (1998). Blair’s key tenet is “to balance individual rights with responsibilities”. “Responsibility”, in Blair’s popular politics, is a direct translation of “reflexivity” in the sophisticated social theory of Giddens.

as "critical discourse" but "journalistic" — which seem to acknowledge the appropriateness of the comparison. We will consider some such comparisons, below.

### 5. Quotations

*Encounters* distances itself from the style and substance of previous Irish sociological writing in more than one way. It is radical in its visual style. It is also radical in its literary style. Eamonn Slater's strolling *flâneur* is not confined to the cover or the introduction, but is intended to represent the reader throughout a large part of the book. We initially envisaged him as a tourist, an outsider visiting Ireland. But it has subsequently seemed that he is more likely to be an Irish or international academic, journalist, or administrator. This would account for the suit. The only thing missing is the glass of wine always to be had at an exhibition opening. Instead, his hand is occupied with his walking-stick. He will need it: he has a lot of walking to do.

The radical claim embodied in *Encounters* as a written text is, that Irish society can be made *visible* to the imagined reader, who is represented as walking, driving, flying around the country, occasionally stopping off at a pub, library, or Government Publications office. Whereas Breen (1990) contains more than 30 figures and tables in its 250 pages, while Clancy (1995) contains 60 tables, figures and maps in its 700 pages,<sup>4</sup> *Encounters*' 185 pages contains none of these devices. We might explain this by identifying the Breen and Clancy volumes as largely "quantitative" in method. Consider, then, the use of textual quotations, often regarded as a hallmark of the rival, "qualitative", method.

Breen (1990) contains more than 20 extended quotations, but these are all *expert judgements* with which the authors wholeheartedly agree. They are cited to add authority and credibility to the text. Clancy (1995) contains 45 such quotations, cited for similar purposes. However in two chapters, those by Mary Kelly and Bill Rolston on Broadcasting, and by Evelyn Mahon on the Women's Movement, a different rationale appears. BBC guidelines are quoted by Kelly and Rolston, and the Irish Constitution is quoted by Mahon, as *data* to be interrogated by the author, especially to reveal contrasts between rival ideological orientations. This of course is possible because the authors' own engagement with nationalist or feminist politics puts them at odds with "experts" in the fields concerned.

In *Encounters* this tendency is taken further. The book contains some 15 extended quotations, i.e., a similar proportion to Breen or Clancy. Of these

4. The Clancy volume also contains 20 formal lists, which are often used to explain numerical or other tabulated data, and thus fulfil a "quantitative" function.

11 are data subject to elaborate interrogation, reinterpretation, or rebuttal. The most extensive of these is a 300 word extract from an essay by Helen Lucy Burke (1995), quoted by Robbie McVeigh (Chapter 15), which utilises history, anthropology, and sociology to find fault with Irish Traveller lifestyles. Two of the four expert quotations are also by McVeigh, who cites the 1948 Genocide Convention of the United Nations General Assembly and the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman. His purpose is clear. These prestigious international experts fault the ways of Burke, whom McVeigh describes as a “restaurant critic”, inexpert in anything other than Irish middle class manners. He concludes with a rebuttal of Burke by two Traveller spokespersons, a plea to celebrate diversity. The experts endorse their plea.

McVeigh is an exception who proves the rule. Although, like Breen *et al.*, he quotes expert opinion to bolster his own correct view, he remains sufficiently interested in the erroneous view to quote it at length, in more than one version.<sup>5</sup> This enables the reader to make more of it than McVeigh does himself, and so contributes to debate. In Breen (1990), erroneous views have been eliminated prior to publication: no room for debate is acknowledged.<sup>6</sup>

Generally, in *Encounters*, quotations are data, to be analysed and interpreted. This applies even to expert testimonies themselves. The papers by Paddy O’Carroll on the contamination of donated blood, and by Michel Peillon on distrust of the Irish church and of Irish beef, following instances of child abuse and of food contamination, quote expert testimony (including the international social policy specialist Richard Titmuss, as well as Irish government boards)

5. James Wickham’s Chapter 7 is also in this mould. It cites international research reports to critique claims made by an Industrial Development Authority advertisement, regarding links between Irish education and the needs of high technology industry. But it also explores the image of Ireland as an “intelligent island”, to which the advertisement appeals.

6. Breen *et al.*’s (1990) value-free scientific sociology attempt to rise above disputation of the kind which McVeigh’s value-committed sociology engages in, to provide a definitive account of the emergence of the modern Irish state and class structure. Thus, among other results, they claim that “the revolution of 1958” is “one of the significant milestones in the evolution of Irish society and Irish nationalism”; and that the 1987 election, in which the Progressive Democrats emerged, was one in which the class basis of Irish politics became evident. However, they allow some options for the future. Their own expectation is that “the underlying [class] interests served by ... the State will ... become much more visible” (p. 221). But their alternative scenario is that Fianna Fail could restore cross-class support, rendering class issues invisible once again, to become “once again *the* ‘catchall’ party” (p. 220). Nearly a decade later, in the very different milieu of the “Celtic Tiger” (*Encounters*, p. 81), the latter scenario seems within sight of Fianna Fail’s achievement. For Breen *et al.*, “class” is an object of professional Irish sociological discourse. Irish society would discover a truth about itself if this discourse could become public. But apart from brief moments, it has not. From this standpoint, the *Encounters* text, being a work of Irish sociology which almost avoids mentioning social class, is part of the problem rather than part of the solution, the achievement of self-conscious reflection on itself by Irish society, i.e. “reflexivity” (*Encounters*, p. 5).

which has subsequently been discredited. Peillon reaches the striking conclusion that:

There is ... something reassuring about the disagreement of experts, for it leaves some room for our own judgement. More worrying are those situations in which experts agree (p. 124).

This of course can leave the reader puzzled as to what kind of "expertise" these sociologists themselves are claiming, and whether to expect them to agree or disagree. This very chapter cites Anthony Giddens's (1990) claim that, in an era of *high modernity*, "we are now responsible for the expertise we choose to trust" (p. 118). The message seems to be: you have it on the best authority that you are to trust your own judgement.

Thus it is in its verbal quotations, but also in its photographs (15 colour, 15 black-and-white), that the book stakes its claim to offer a distinctively visual sociology, in which one is invited to make sense of the evidence presented, immediately one "encounters" it, and trusting one's own judgement as one does so.

### III ENCOUNTERS AS A NARRATIVE

Having represented the reader as *flâneur*, initially strolling city streets, gazing at shop windows and at passers-by, Eamonn Slater's INTRODUCTION highlights what this stroller should look out for. *Commodification* is the process whereby all aspects of popular culture, social activities, lifestyles, and personal identities are offered for sale in the market place. The concept is Marxist, but Marx is not mentioned, as the few footnotes are all occupied by more modern writers. Essentially, then, the reader is to be a shopper, not necessarily buying, but examining what is on sale.

#### 1. *Images*

In Mary Corcoran's CHAPTER 1, our shopper is strolling in Temple Bar, a newly marketable area which was formerly "just another run-down street in a forgotten part of Dublin". Like other old cities, Dublin has generated a new identity for itself. Corcoran does not want to return to the bad old days — but she preferred a mid-point in the process to the brash commercialism which she now sees. Accidentally, in the 1980s, planning blight led to low rents, and a bohemian quarter of wholefood cafés, bicycle repair shops, second-hand record and clothing stores, emerged. In the 1990s planners invested £200 million to make a new Left Bank. The result is "gentrification", including elaborate Art and Photography centres, music venues, and theme restaurants. This was never a residential area, but it had traditional pubs and hotels. Now the buildings

have been “razed to the ground from within, their exteriors retaining the pretence that all is not changed”. The pubs have become “booze barns”, sanitised shells, a parody of their former selves. This re-enchantment, Corcoran tells us, proceeds alongside the “dis-enchantment” of near-by inner city communities, destroyed “by drugs, unemployment, and social deprivation”. Temple Bar is more like Eurodisney than the Left Bank.

Corcoran clearly reveals “commodification” to the *flâneur* whom she is guiding. The way old facias have been stuck onto new interiors can be recognised by the stroller, with a little effort. However, certain phenomena cannot be made visible in this way. Social exclusion is not visible, since by definition the stroller meets only those who are in the area. Sophisticated sociologists may recognise that “gentrification” indexes an upwardly-mobile middle class, and that “inner city communities” are in fact the working class. But these features are not visible, nor even verbal in her account.

In fact the essay is not a real ethnography: it does not recount a specific visit to the area.<sup>7</sup> We cannot locate a time of day. “After a facial ... retire to the Cyberia Cafe and surf the Internet” (p. 21) is marketing phraseology, not an account of an actual fieldtrip. But it so happens that a “journalistic” account of Temple Bar, based on a specific field visit, “on a bone-chillingly cold Friday night in mid-November”, 1998, has been published by Northern Irishman Henry MacDonald (1998). He may have read Mary Corcoran before setting out on his trip, for he suggests that Dublin’s would-be “Left Bank” has been “invaded by revellers from clubland”. Writing for the London *Observer*, of which he is Irish correspondent, MacDonald describes an “invasion by English lager louts” which is resented by the locals. “They don’t want us here simply because we’re English” said one lad. Thus *ethnicity*, omitted by Corcoran, is a feature in his account.

MacDonald mentions the property prices, demonstrating that residents are “musicians, journalists, academics, and painters”, thus “a professionalised middle class” in Corcoran’s phrase.<sup>8</sup> The peace and tranquility of their expensively purchased “pads” is nightly disturbed by a “yob culture”, deliberately promoted by “the get rich quick merchants with their plastic Paddy Whackery theme pubs”.

Both writers criticise what is taking place. Corcoran’s critique is on behalf of

7. Corcoran is a skilled ethnographer and has published detailed field research on an Irish community in New York City, with considerable attention to its commercial aspects, though it is not cited here. Cf. Corcoran (1993).

8. Corcoran does not tell us that this class actually exists: rather, this phrase is quoted as a marketing description of the “type of consumer” to which the new properties are aimed. Remarkably, the sociology of “commodification” — having abandoned class theory — rediscovers it as part of the professional ideology of the commodifiers, cf for instance Coleman (1983).

an imagined "deprived community" which hardly existed in Temple Bar in the first place. MacDonald notes (1) that "the traditional Dublin working class" are not there. His critique is in the name of (2) the middle class arts community which actually lives there now. What disturbs it is (3) British working class culture promoted by (4) Irish entrepreneurs. A final element in his class analysis is: (5) the underclass, junkies who "prowl Temple Bar's streets for drugs and money".

The comparison between these articles reveals the strengths and weaknesses of the visual approach to sociology. The *flâneur* does not need to actually talk to anybody. He or she can see "commodification" at work, and can make inferences. The real critical claim is that there used to be a community here, but now there is not. Unfortunately, visual evidence alone cannot support such a claim.

The alternative approach involves talking to people who actually live, work and consume in the place concerned, which entails some analytical identification with their point of view. Class analysis is one way in which such an identification can be placed in a wider context. Unlike the singular "community", which is supposed to occupy a particular space and time in a pure homogenous form (though it never actually does), "classes" are understood from the outset to be divided against one another by conflicting interests. Almost certainly, talking to those behind/in front of the bars and cafés, and buying/selling in the twenty-four hour convenience stores, would reveal members of the traditional working class, benefiting from opportunities which this "capitalist development" (p. 24) provides.

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Eamonn Slater's CHAPTER 2 provides another fine example of visual sociology, although now the *flâneur* is travelling by car on a trip to West Cork. Here, we are told, the landscape is "a desert of dull greyness", but the villages compete to paint themselves in "a peacock-like plumage" to attract tourists. In short, they "commodify" themselves. In CHAPTER 3, Emer Sheerin brings the same perspective to bear on Heritage Centres. These are a "commodification" of landscape, historic sites, or other tourist "products". They are also subject to the law of the *flâneur*: initially, "the visual is dominant over the verbal". But when the visitor reads the written caption, this becomes the dominant element. "The [verbal] narrative provides explanation and interpretation of what has been witnessed in the [visual] image" (p. 42).

Sheerin uses her argument to claim that Heritage Centres themselves impose an interpretation, and a damaging one, on their tourist "products". This is because, unlike the traditional museum with its scholarly orientation, the heritage centre "strive[s] towards providing the visitor with an enjoyable experience", (p. 47). Yet the heritage centre experience is produced by pro-

professionals in a position of authority. Therefore, their narrative may diverge significantly from the understandings of local historians and other community members, which may initially have been the source of the heritage centre's stories. The local community becomes a mere spectator of its own past.

This account is a classic Marxist analysis of the alienation of the producer from the product, resulting from the operation of the market. Unfortunately, as stated, it is entirely abstract. The local community are represented as passive consumers, having formerly been active producers. In a concrete case, the professionals may certainly deny that enjoyment is their main aim, whilst locals may value some aspects of their work.

For instance Bushe (1999) describes a "Woodhenge" structure at the Hill of Tara discovered by scientists "using a type of underground X-ray" which is featured prominently in the interpretive centre located in the former church on the hill. A Galway university archaeological research programme is conducted in conjunction with the interpretive centre. Local residents would be unaware of the structure since "not a single atom of [it] is visible on the surface". However, it is unclear why they should object to the research if only because the local community could benefit economically and culturally from this enhancement of what is already a significant tourist asset.

The moral evaluation in Sheerin's chapter, and in *Encounters* generally, stems from the assumption that production is active, therefore good, but consumption is passive, therefore bad. Rural or urban traditional Ireland is imagined as a productive community. Suburban modern Ireland is imagined as made up of consumers, no better than tourists passing through, hence not a community at all. Perhaps it is time to abandon the supposed "sociology of consumption" and admit that all uses of goods and services, including leisure and tourism, are for a productive purpose, an act of social construction which should be the only object of a scientific sociology.

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In CHAPTER 4, Barbara O'Connor demonstrates that *Riverdance* is a commodification of traditional Irish dance practices. In CHAPTER 5, Eamonn Slater documents the commodification of "the last great amateur sport in the world" (p. 63), namely Rugby Union. Again, a visual spectacle is what the consumers require. Irish Rugby is too small to be viable, so its players earn their bread-and-butter playing for UK clubs. In a classic Marxist analysis, Slater finds Ireland exporting its raw material to Britain, to be transformed into industrial commodities. In all, Part I of the book offers a clear and classic Marxist critique of many aspects of the commodification of cultural production in Ireland.

## 2. *Signs*

Tom Inglis in CHAPTER 6 introduces a Durkheimian analysis, according to which anything collective could be regarded as sacred, e.g. a crucifix or a Manchester United scarf, whereas anything individual is profane. Today, sport and pop music are thriving: unlike modern religion, they provide an "oceanic experience of otherness" (p. 75). But when a teenage girl dies at a rock gig, it is as if a strange religious sect had come to steal her heart, mind, soul and body. Unlike the writers in Part I above, Inglis is offering a *relativistic* perspective.

Michel Peillon's CHAPTER 8 uses Jean Baudrillard's notion of *simulacrum* to argue that Peace Protests in Ireland can sometimes be phoney, in that known paramilitary perpetrators of violence openly attend them, and "war is, after all, usually pursued in the name of peace" (p. 95). This is, again, relativism.<sup>9</sup>

Tom Inglis's CHAPTER 9, a preview of Inglis (1998), provides a fascinating autobiographical account of changes in the Irish sexual "régime" during his own lifetime. According to Giddens, contraception has permitted people to challenge both religion and medicine, and has allowed a new intimacy between men and women. But Inglis concludes by lamenting our reliance on therapists today, asking "Is confessing sins to Oprah Winfrey any more beneficial than it is to confess to a priest?" With the exception of Wickham's Chapter 7, Part II offers a relativistic position

## 3. *Reflexivity*

In CHAPTER 10, Paddy O'Carroll documents the breakdown of trust involved in the failure of the Blood Transfusion Board to protect patients from Hepatitis-C infection. He demonstrates the untenability of the stance adopted by Richard Titmuss in 1970, that a voluntary donation scheme was intrinsically more hygienic and better managed than a private enterprise market in blood. The community ethos led to a denial of problems. Trust in experts is now no longer enough: in "risk society", *reflexivity* must be exercised by all responsible citizens.

In CHAPTER 11, Michel Peillon argues that clerical child abuse cases, and the threat of BSE infection resulting from eating Irish beef, have dissolved the "glue" holding traditional Irish society together. "Modern" responses to these crises worsened these situations: the church called in therapists, who sent back paedophile priests uncured; Government Departments made pronouncements

9. This could be disputed if it could be argued that Baudrillard does in fact offer an alternative to the *simulacrum*. More worrying for *Encounters'* aspiration to be socially critical is Baudrillard's (1975) argument that the Marxist analysis of capitalist production is itself merely a *simulated* critique, which in fact replicates market economics. On this argument, both social classes — e.g., the "working class" — and communities — e.g., the community of "consumers" — are constituted by the market, and their mobilisation in social critique is no more radical than the mobilisation of the fans of soccer or of popular music by their respective clubs.

which turned out false. Now, parishioners and consumers must take responsibility for those to whom they turn for physical or spiritual sustenance.

Like O'Carroll and Peillon, Michele Dillon, writing on divorce in CHAPTER 12, documents the declining authority of religious and other élites . Whereas the USA — an *innovator* in individualistic personal relationships — is now retreating into sometimes extreme assertions of communalism, Ireland — by being “a cultural *laggard*” (p. 132) — can avoid either excess. Here as elsewhere in the book, it is fascinating to see sociologists embracing the terminology and the insights of Marketing. However Dillon's analysis, based solely on the texts of the divorce legislation, is incomplete. An interesting complement to it is provided by O'Toole (1999), who argues that because divorce was unavailable for so long, “the plain people of Ireland” — up to and including the present Taoiseach — came to accept “living with a partner other than your spouse” as an acceptable practice.

Finally in this section, Mary Corcoran's CHAPTER 13 shares with James Wickham's chapter the aim of debunking a marketing myth, in this case the representation of emigration as a success story by an exclusive focus on successful entrepreneurs, media men and women, and sports personalities. As in her first essay, she discovers a deprived community excluded by this treatment : ordinary young Irish emigrants in London and elsewhere. A range of reports document their ill health, unemployment, and their disproportionate appearance both as victims of and as alleged perpetrators of crime. Switching to a group of emigrants in New York — the object of study of her book (Corcoran, 1993) — she finds none of these problems, but a Thanksgiving Dinner of “rubber turkey and processed peas” in an inauthentic pub. The real hunger of these young people, she claims, was for home. “They seemed to be living to return so that they could return to living” (p. 143).

Corcoran wants to challenge the “agency” account of these people's plight, and instead identify “structural factors” in shaping their experience. Yet when the action is authentic in her eyes, she is willing to impute agency:

When Irish emigrants go abroad they ... set about creating ... ethnic communities [which] ... are powerhouses of activity—economic, political, and social (p. 142).

The author would like her moral evaluations to follow from her academic analysis, but in fact the reverse is the case. This section asserts a positive sociological ethic, following the negative critique of the first section, and the relativism of the second.

#### 4. *Limits*

Carmen Kuhling in CHAPTER 14 introduces a created community complementary to Corcoran's, namely "New Age Travellers", emigrants to Ireland, self-styled "refugees from Thatcher's Britain". They have not been made welcome. In CHAPTER 15, Robbie McVeigh examines Ireland's un-welcome to traditional Irish travellers. In a disturbing analysis, he finds an all-too-modern logic of genocide, otherwise known as "ethnic cleansing". In terms used elsewhere in the book, this is a "simple modern" logic approach, all too familiar from twentieth century experiences, when what is needed is elevation to a "high modern" attitude, a willingness to adopt and attribute reflexivity to both sides.

Tanya Cassidy's CHAPTER 16, on drink, echoes Carroll's chapter on blood, and Dillon's chapter on divorce in its comparison between US and Irish legislation for public morality. Irish communalism has inhibited social progress in all three domains. "The sociability of drinking is intimately linked to the Irish pub culture" (p. 173). According to Zygmunt Bauman, modernity strives to eliminate ambivalence. But ambivalence towards alcohol is found in almost all cultures. Now, "we have to learn how to live in an incurably ambivalent world".

Michel Peillon's concluding CHAPTER 17, boldly entitled "Rubbish", connects to the arguments of Kuhling and of McVeigh, as well as earlier chapters in the book. Modern Irish society produces vast quantities of rubbish, yet no community wants it dumped near to their homes. People who scavenge amongst it, including both New Age and Irish Travellers, are labelled as "Rubbish" themselves, and no community want them nearby either. Ireland, says Peillon, imagines itself as a community of communities: yet often the community is defined negatively, against what is seen as a common threat.

Unfortunately, whereas early modernity showed a society-wide unity of purpose ("wealth creation, progress, and freedom", p. 183), late modernity shows a fragmentation of purposes giving rise to "egoistic" communities based on narrow self-interest. The moral of this final section is consistently negative, a warning of the consequences if we do not evolve a common approach, despite the difficulties.

## IV CONCLUSION

### *What You See Is Not All You Get*

This innovative volume does achieve a common purpose, telling a coherent story. With its visual orientation, it would be suitable for conversion into a television programme, or series, accompanied by appropriate notes for further reading on provision of a Stamped Addressed Envelope.

The book succeeds in reaching parts that previous Irish sociology had not reached. Alcohol use, the Arts, Heritage, Sex, Sport, Tourism, Travellers, Urban

sociology have hardly been discussed before now.<sup>10</sup> Environment is addressed in Clancy (1995), and also here. The long-standing topics: Education, Family, Religion, are addressed. A curious absence is the Media, featured prominently in Curtin (1984), Clancy (1986), and Clancy (1995). Another is Crime, featured in the two Clancy collections. A topic that no Irish sociology text has yet addressed is Shopping.

The focus on *reflexivity* is fascinating, including views both for and against its use as a morally engaged would-be analytical tool. There is a clear need for theoretical clarification of this concept and its relation to traditional preoccupations in sociology. In Giddens and other writers cited here, “reflexivity” is intimately linked with class theory. Indeed, the Marxist dream of abolishing class difference through *reflexivity* is echoed in Tony Blair’s dream of achieving the universal middle class through *responsibility*.<sup>11</sup> It is curious that here “class” is so thoroughly displaced by “community”.

In many ways this book, with its photographs of towns and villages comprising more than half of the total, is a contribution to urban sociology, a topic whose under-development in Ireland is often lamented.<sup>12</sup> Yet Urban Studies, like Education, Health, Marketing, and many other applied disciplines such as Social Geography, Sociolinguistics and the like, is a field within which social class is a central explanatory variable. It is disturbing if the practitioners of those fields must look outside professional sociology for expertise or interest in this topic.

*Encounters* is torn between two styles. Old-style authoritarian Sociology laid down the law regarding Class, State, and Social Structure. This is the style of Breen (1990), which survives in McVeigh’s Chapter 15 of the present text, and whose loss haunts Corcoran’s Chapters 1 and 13. New-style easy-reading sociology panders to popular Irish ideology, especially in its deference to Community as concept and explanatory variable. The difficulty is that the old concepts, especially Class, are not simply visible to the passing stroller, any more than is the evidence of a Woodhenge at the Hill of Tara. Marx was, of course, well aware of this.

Let me put my own cards on the table: I have not produced a class analysis of modern Irish society, whereas Peillon has published a book-length study of this subject, not cited here. But I do advocate talking to people, eliciting their stories, and recognising that the entities they speak of are real for them in consequence of their speaking. The evidence from MacDonald, and other sources mentioned

10. However the last two topics are addressed in Curtin (1989), an “anthropological” study comprising ethnographic case-studies. The book focuses on “the complexities of social experience”, which do include some reference to *class* (Chapter 7) and the *state* (Chapter 15).

11. Cf. Footnote 3 above.

12. Cf. Curtin (1989, p. 128).

here, is that class looms large as an Irish social reality when we do this. What you see in bricks and mortar, paint and landscape, is not all you get in society. This text does not tell the whole story.

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