

The Home of the Tiger: Economic Speculation and the Ethics of Habitation

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Abstract:

In Ireland, the “home” has a long tradition as a powerful spatial signifier, capable of expressing a range of social, aesthetic, and political interactions. Historically, home ownership in Ireland was not only a measure of working-and-middle-class respectability, but also a symbol of national independence that stood in opposition to a colonial history of dispossession. Throughout the Celtic Tiger, however, the ideas of what constituted the ‘home’ were transformed by a speculative form of capitalism that recreated domestic space as a fluctuating (and valuable) commodity. By centralizing the connection of urban space to capitalism, speculation opens the domestic spaces of the home to the processes of speculation and devaluation. Essentially, my argument analyzes how changing the economic parameters of domestic space creates a concomitant change in how homes are figured in the Irish cultural lexicon. This change represents a cognitive speculation where the speculative value of a home, as a commodity is what confers an authentic social status on the homeowner. Any ethical concerns related to domestic space, both its use and value, are superseded by its ability to generate capital via a speculative evaluation. Through the connection of spatial and cultural transformation, my paper furthers current discussions in Irish studies that analyze the dramatic impact, and aftermath, of the Tiger. The literary response to speculation, found in analyses of Deidre Madden and Anne Haverty, frame speculation as a parody of communal life that eliminates any real interpersonal relationships in a wave of postmodern alienation. Finally, my paper articulates how the lasting damage that followed the collapse of the Tiger altered the way the Irish understood the concepts and realities of the “home”.

Keywords: commodification, economics, home, literature, speculation

The Celtic Tiger – a period of roughly fifteen years – is one of the most important eras in Irish history. During the 1990s, the Tiger was thoroughly drenched in a discourse fascinated by ideas of total transformation that promised a complete metamorphosis of the country. Historian J.J. Lee, for

instance, described the Tiger as a driving force that changed Ireland from Europe's "carthorse" to Europe's "thoroughbred" (Lee 1996). Other prominent politicians pushed the importance of the Tiger beyond Lee's terms, describing Ireland's economic success as "a shining light and a beacon to the world" (Mac Sharry, White, O'Malley 2000, 360). Roy Foster claimed the "prosperity" of post-Tiger Irish life not only recognizes an economic transformation but also is paralleled by "metamorphoses in spheres of national life that transcend the economic sphere" (2008, 36).

At its core, the Tiger was born from a neoliberal emphasis on deregulated markets helped drive an influx of foreign investment that refashioned the economic and cultural landscape of Ireland; in addition, it also influenced a Tiger-era cultural identity that was attracted to risk and the idea of an unfettered global world¹. This debate over the proper relationship of risk and security is inextricably tied to a form of global capitalism centered on speculation². One of the key elements of this "culture of speculation" was a reorganization, both economically and socially, of the home and its relationship to communal space. In a country with a history that strongly connected wealth to property, it is not surprising that much of the cash created by the Tiger went into investments in land, development, and construction (White 2010, 36). This investment in property was also a cultural investment in how shared and familial spaces fit into the overall fabric of Irish life.

The home is a central location for the creation of a spatial politics as it is a key area in which individuals develop a relationship to wider cultural and social spheres. The question, "Where do you live?" figures amongst the essential questions that form our place within a grid of coordinates that plot social subjectivity" (Alcobia-Murphy 2004, 103). In Ireland, the "home" has a long tradition as a powerful spatial signifier capable of expressing a range of social, aesthetic, and political interactions. The home represents a psychological shell that contains both "past memory" and "future possibility", which enhances feelings of authenticity or, when lacking, feelings of rootlessness (Bertha 2006, 64). Throughout the Tiger, however, cultural formations of the home were transformed by a speculative capitalism that recreated domestic space into a fluctuating commodity. Speculation made the home mirror capital's rootless nature as a force that can move around the globe. Fundamentally, speculation restructures space, both urban and rural, to make it more accommodating to the flows of global capital. By centralizing the connection of communal and domestic spaces to capitalism, speculation opens the spaces of the home to processes of risk and devaluation.

What changed the national discourse on the home was the speculative nature of Tiger Ireland. The processes forming communal space became speculative endeavors; namely, they consisted of an overarching reliance on ideas of euphoria, collapse, and debt that commingled with the everyday rituals surrounding the home. My use of the term "speculative" does not merely posit the term as synonymous with a philosophic inquiry or an act of

spurious guessing, but draws on the economic understanding of the concept as manufactured risk. Speculation, in this sense, is an outlay of capital in an endeavor that guarantees neither a profit on the initial investment nor even the return of the initial capital. The speculative act subordinates any “qualitative and quantitative” grounds of inquiry in favor of taking a massive risk geared toward producing immediate returns (Graham, Dodd 2002, 64)³. Risk is the essential component of speculation.

Yet, speculative risk is different from normal conceptions of risk because “built into the situation is the eventual and inevitable fall [...] the speculative episode always ends not with a whimper but with a bang” (Galbraith 1990, 4). The eventual and inevitable fall of speculation is debt. The debt created by speculative endeavors – like the property bubble – leaves the individual (or nation) materially bankrupt and psychologically damaged (Graham, Dodd 2002, 687). Speculation, and its consequence of massive debt, is more than just a description of the reality of Irish economic policy during the Tiger as it also played an overarching part in a Tiger identity through which individuals related ideas about their home to their nationality.

I apply this analysis of speculation to the fictions of Deidre Madden and Anne Haverty. Both authors are intensely focused on how the rituals and symbols of the home develop and provide a sense of cultural authenticity. Yet for both authors there is a noticeable shift in the depiction of Irish cultural rituals in post-Tiger Ireland; essentially, the notions of collapse, openness, and debt threaten to dismantle the experiences of understanding the home as a shared communal space.

1. *Life in an Era of Boom and Bust: The Economic Division of Social Space*

Similar to many other parts of the world, during the 1990s and early 2000s, Ireland’s housing boom was a “local variant of a wider international phenomenon” (Fahey, Duffy 2007, 123). Throughout the majority of the Tiger, construction boomed at a staggering pace. Developers built homes and then used the initial payments to purchase more land and build even more homes (White 2010, 36). When the bubble started showing signs of slowing down, the government doubled-down on policies that maximized home building as a method to reduce the escalating prices that were endemic to the property bubble. However, these policies only exacerbated the boom and accelerated its ultimate collapse in 2008 (White 2010, 38). Along with these policies, the Irish banking sector followed the “international phenomenon” of the era and failed to curb imprudent lending, especially when it came mortgage lending (Bielenburg, Ryan 2012, 162).

As a result of Ireland’s boom/bust housing period, the cultural understanding of how a “house” relates to ideas of the “home” underwent a radical change. According to Shane Alcobia-Murphy, “negative equity and unaffordable housing prices brought a new dimension to spatial politics and the question

of plotting one's 'social subjectivity'" (2004, 105). The negative equity and unaffordable housing prices subverted an ethics of habitation – an ethics that focuses on how space should be shared – with an over reliance on property value as the defining element of what space means to a culture. This change represents a cognitive speculation – to borrow from Allen J. Scott's idea of cognitive gentrification – where the value of a home as a commodity is what confers an authentic social status on the homeowner. Any ethical concerns related to domestic space, both its use and non-material values, are superseded by its ability to generate (or lose) capital via a speculative evaluation.

As a critic of Irish culture, Madden is a writer whose texts are critical of how economics affect the individual contours of communal and domestic spaces. In *Remembering Light and Stone*, Aisling is a young Irish exile that has left Ireland in order to better realize her "true" personality⁴. Madden's book, despite brief forays into Paris and New York, focuses mainly on Aisling's experiences in Italy and, consequently, the country becomes a cipher for understanding Ireland. As Aisling states, "more than learning anything about Italy, I had found out more about my own country" (Madden 1992, 2). The position of the exile allows her to "forget all about home for a while, forget all about Ireland, and then remember it" (1992, 2). One of the central aspects of Italian life, which the text applies in its Ireland-Italy connection, is how economics separate the areas of the city into incommensurate zones designed to improve the circulation of capital at the expense of a coherent identity that connects ideas of the home to specific cultural spaces.

Aisling describes S. Giorgio, the Italian town that acts as the setting for the majority of the book, as a "deceptive village" for the tourists who "think they've seen S. Giorgio" (1992, 11)⁵. The village is deceptive because its spatial politics separate the town into three distinct manifestations. These manifestations all represent a particular relationship to an economic organization of space. The first S. Giorgio is "the pretty medieval hill town that people visit", and is a place where tourists can purchase "photographs" or "postcards" from various little shops (1992, 11). The second S. Giorgio is populated by "German and English people" who have purchased vacation homes in the Italian countryside and often live there only seasonally (1992, 12). And the final S. Giorgio is the "modern part", which is "the least considered" manifestation because "people don't want to see it" (1992, 12). The economic elements of the first two parts of S. Giorgio are fairly straightforward as they present the town as a visual commodity. As a result of this need to maintain this visual space, the real, lived existence of the locales in the modern part is obscured from both the tourists and the vacation home owners who don't want the "illusion of summer" to be destroyed.

In these S. Giorgios, the separation between economic activity (the act of tourism or the act of vacationing) and everyday existence (the lives of the locales) is purely visual. The tourists or vacation-home owners purchase a visual commodity, S. Giorgio as the "pretty medieval hill town", that they can take

back to their real homes in the form of photographs or postcards. The tourist and vacation S. Giorgios are objects of consumption that can never escape from a systematization of consumerism that creates a “discourse directed to oneself” – a ready-made town that speaks only to the tourists – providing them with the only vision they want to see (Baudrillard 1996, 111). From an economic perspective, the cultural history of S. Giorgio is abstracted into a commodity; namely, its ability to attract tourist money. This manipulation of signs is designed purely for the immediate visual consumption by the consumer, a visual overcoding of experience that is blank, lifeless, and manufactured.

The branding of S. Giorgio as a tourist area does not only affect the culture of the town, but also it affects the people who live in or visit the city. Aisling views the visitors as a “tide of passionless life [...] crowds of people looking through each other, bored and listless, gazing at the identical shop windows” (1992, 36). The bored and listless people are caught within the visual economy of tourism, a hyperreal consumer society where interpersonal communication is thwarted (the people look through, not at each other). Throughout the book, Aisling is concerned with how the economics of rapidly globalizing communities (like Ireland or Italy) disrupt the historical relationship to places. The moments of tourism represent the “easy nostalgia” of a hyperreal consumerism that attempts to hold on to notions of the past that are simple in order to maintain a streamlined consumerism. The problem with this type of easy nostalgia is that it leads to a delusion, which then leads to a form of intellectual and spiritual helplessness: “And the punishment is that you don’t have any life as an adult and you find out too late that you can’t hold on to your childhood either, and so you’re left with nothing” (1992, 103). Madden’s idea of being left with nothing references an imaginary system of signs that “is neither true nor false; it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate in reverse the fiction of the real” (1984, 25)⁶. For both Madden and Baudrillard, the concept “childhood” diminishes the agency or activity of the individual because consumerism relies on a failed form of adulthood. The deterrence found in Madden’s “bored” and “sterile” tourists is a communal kind (1992, 36). The people are deterred from having a relationship with each other in a communal space by the “infantile degeneration” found in the bland, visual commodity of a branded Italy that overcodes the meaning of the town (1984, 25). Throughout much of *Remembering*, Madden makes tourism symbolic of a visual economic commodity that transforms places into abstract images designed only for consumption.

Madden’s text does not just stay in this world of tourism. She extends her analysis of a decisive split between economics and reality into the third, “modern” part of S. Giorgio. The modern part of the town begins “outside the town walls” and is just “as brash and vulgar and unattractive as modern provincial towns anywhere in Europe” (1992, 11-12). The houses of the modern part are “generally blocks of apartments made of cement” and are surrounded by “‘big warehouses or factories’ and ‘a big wide autostrada’”

(1992, 12). Spatially, Madden demarcates the real part of S. Giorgio, the part where “most everyone” lives, with the part most associated with its “oldness” and culture (1992, 12). Not only does the visual consumption of the tourists obscure the reality of everyday Italian life, but also it obscures the spatial markers of capitalism that create physical boundaries between Italian citizens and Italian culture. In relation to the hyperreal space of the tourist, the modern, or real, Italy is a non-place, a place drained of its relational, historical, and even symbolic value. The non-place is an area “surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral” (Augé 2008, 63)⁷. Madden, quite literally, presents the medieval S. Giorgio and the modern non-place as two separate areas: the modern part is outside the town walls and blocked-off by warehouses, factories, and an automobile overpass. The houses of the community are constructed closest to the means of production, such as the warehouses and factories. By separating the shared space of the town, an ethics of habitation is subordinated to a system that maximizes the production of capital from both a manufacturing and tourist perspective. Madden’s text presents the houses of a globalizing community as forming a spatial partition between the place and the non-place, separating the local community from the historical attributes that define a home.

For Madden, the spatial divisions of S. Giorgio create alienation and anxiety. Aisling describes the lives of the inhabitants of the modern S. Giorgio as one of feckless motion: “Whatever they do, it’s done with a sense of restlessness, a lack of repose, wandering in and out of the bar or flicking the remote of the television from one channel to another” (1992, 14). The banality and sterility of the tourists is paralleled by a local ‘restlessness’ in which the citizens are in a constant state of motion that doesn’t provide any actual movement toward a destination. The townsfolk are caught in a cycle between work and consumption, a mindless activity separated from the town’s history and culture. The living conditions of the town are separated from any of the qualities of culture and history that help define a place as a secure home.

2. *Rural Gentrification: Exhaustion and Alienation in the Countryside*

Similar to Madden’s work, Anne Haverty’s 1997 novel *One Day as a Tiger* is both a nuanced piece of fiction and an aggressive critique of the Celtic Tiger. Haverty critiques what could be called a Tiger consciousness. Haverty’s critique of a Tiger consciousness is a reaction to the influence of globalization that makes the individual feel like an essential component in a miraculous moment of unexplainable prosperity while being trapped in an existential void of never being able to catch up with the benefits of that prosperity. Her text follows the life of Marty Hawkins who leaves his graduate program in history and returns to the family farm where he develops an infatuation with his brother’s wife, Etti. Haverty uses the trope of a family love triangle to stage

an investigation into the changed identities of her characters and the altered temporality of the country in which they live.

Haverty fashions the Tipperary countryside as caught between two conflicting desires: first, a desire for the validation (and the cash) promised by a globalized economic boom; the second is a desire for time (the good old days). At the local pub, for instance, the men of the village re-watch the same old hurling matches, reveling in historical victories and past accomplishments (Haverty 1997, 88, 126); yet, some of the small, independent farmers – the idylls of the agrarian component found in many historical conceptions of Irish identity – are modernizing their farms by buying genetically bred livestock or transforming their pastures into service-dependent B&Bs and guesthouses (1997, 155). Marty notes the flux and change of post-Tiger Ireland: “The Gillespies’ new bungalow, McCarthy’s neo-Edwardian monstrosity that’s the envy of the neighbors [...] It’s always changing, this place ... old landmarks have gone, new ones sprung up” (1997, 18). The very nature of what home means for both Marty and Tipperary is rapidly changing as old homes are becoming gentrified. The disjunct between Ireland’s changing rural landscape and its citizens’ desires for historical certainty makes Marty incredibly restless. Marty’s restlessness is not caused by a desire for a previous version of Irish identity like the townsfolk because, during his time as a history graduate student, Marty learned the importance of “the revisionists stuff” and that “an uncritical devotion to one’s forebears’ untutored beliefs is not [...] correct, historian-wise” (1997, 30). Yet Marty still retains a desire for some form of home, even though he rationally knows no such place exists. He cannot settle into either the new globalized consumer-service orientated Ireland, nor can he simply relent to a desire for a historical bubble that could protect him from the flux of globalization⁸.

This tension reflects a strain in contemporary Irish fiction about how the desire for locality – for a home – conflicts with a concomitant desire for economic freedom. During the Tiger, Michael Cronin argued that the conflation of global and local space created a type of detached and emotionless subjectivity where personal identity, as grounded in the home, is overtaken by a distanced subject position of global citizenship (2009, 12). As the Irish tried to balance these global and local identities, they encountered a global temporalization that distorted “our relationship to our physical and cultural environment by continually situating us at a distance, by abstracting and subtracting us from our local attachments and responsibilities” (2009, 12). An element of Marty’s restlessness with his home is produced by a growing separation from the landmarks that helped create his local identity. He sees the changes to rural Tipperary and feels its becoming “neither here nor there, with confusing landmarks [...] and little to feel safe by” (1997, 126). All the old landmarks are losing their coherency because Ireland is “all leisure activities now” (1997, 168). Marty’s inability to feel nostalgic about his childhood home is disrupted by the forces of capital that are changing the physical markers that have historically defined the rural community.

Marty's position between a globalized and localized subjectivity also inflects the love triangle at the center of the plot. Marty's restlessness makes his desire for Etti not only an example of a torrid assemblage of sexual and familial desires, but also a symptom of the need for an "escape", a need to transgress what he calls "borders which had urgently to be crossed" (1997, 229). As the love affair between Marty and Etti intensifies, they decide to escape and flee to France. Marty and Etti's official reason for leaving the village is to help Marty's sickly pet sheep, Missy, avoid being slaughtered by finding her a wildlife shelter. This official reason, however, is just a cover that allows them to escape Tipperary and culminate their growing desire for each other and something new. Their "escape" to France is a voyage that is coded in the language and experience of the Tiger, despite occurring on the continent. There are several clues in the text that allow the reader to see how Haverty frames Marty and Etti's escape as a metaphorical experience of life during the Tiger.

In a very Tigerish style, Marty and Etti's trip is funded by Marty's "pristine and unused" credit cards (1997, 221). An over reliance on personal credit was a hallmark of the Tiger⁹. Credit almost always relates to the idea of discounting the future evaluation of goods, services, and cash in order to acquire them in the present. Credit gives the individual an object or lifestyle immediately while displacing the cost onto some vague, future time. Credit use is a highly speculative form of consumption because the immediate purchasing power hides the risk of future debt (which is compounded by interest). And finally, Marty and Etti's trip is a voyage into a world of global consumerism, complete with "honking be vies of the latest BMWs. Over chic, over-brash and hysterically bourgeoisie, stuffy and glittering and pretentious" (1997, 238). For Marty, however, the crass consumerism of a boom-time Europe could be ignored if "you had money to throw around", which in his case he can purchase via his "assortment of relatively virginal credit cards" (1997, 238). Within this buoyant bubble of credit and consumerism, Marty and Etti's affair becomes "new", and Marty feels "admired" and "delirious with triumph" (1997, 248).

Another important element of Haverty's text – one it shares with Madden's – is her critical interest in the changing lifestyles of Ireland. For instance, Marty and Etti's escape relies on his denial that credit use produces consequences (debt). Marty feels that his affair with his brother's wife is protected from consequence, in part, due to the cocoon of credit that protects him from "the perils of knowledge and confrontation" (1997, 250). Marty's willful ignorance during his "day as a Tiger" represents a type of ignorance that was pervasive and led Ireland to become, in 2008, the nation with the highest average level of household debt in the developed world (Allen 2000, 67). Similar to the naïve understanding of credit, Marty believes both his material and familial transgressions will not have to be paid off in the future. This turns out not to be true on both accounts: Marty's brother dies in a car accident and both the lovers feel compelled to return to Tipperary, to return home.

As a result of his brother's car crash – an event that the text suggests was indirectly caused by Marty and Etti's affair – Marty must return to the family farm, accept full ownership of the property, and become more enmeshed in the very paradoxical tensions that caused him to want to “escape” in the first place. In Haverty's text, this return is bleak as Ireland is described as a nation covered by a “grey coat of wet fog” (1997, 263), and Marty's hands are thin and “wintry white” (1997, 262). In ending her narrative by having the emotional debt of the affair pushed to the foreground of Marty's home, Haverty critiques the mindset that believed a cocoon of credit and consumerism could protect Ireland from the consequences of Tiger-era gentrification and consumption¹⁰. In Haverty's text, the connection of debt, both financial and psychological, to Marty's ownership of his childhood home ends with a depiction of rural Ireland that is depleted by the pressures of a rapidly changing economic landscape.

Madden's and Haverty's texts are influenced by, and react against, the dominant mode of capitalism that defined Irish economic policy in the 1990s. The motivations of their characters, and the larger critiques of their texts, form a critical reaction to an abstract universalism that seeks to equate everything to its value as a commodity. Essentially, they critique how the material conditions of Tiger Ireland, created to conform to a speculative economic program, produce physical and psychological damages that make creating a stable home a problematic endeavor.

3. *A Speculative Economics of the Home*

Speculation is defined by its character of risk and collapse; namely, the trend toward speculation invites a collapse, a disaster of the markets in which the commodity (either goods or services) that drove the speculative boom becomes devalued and worthless. Two of the founders of the research on speculation, Benjamin Graham and David Dodd, note the danger inherent in speculation when they define the operation as a perverted form of investment: “An investment operation is one which, upon thorough analysis, promises safety of principal and satisfactory return. Operations not meeting these requirements are speculative” (2002, 106). For Graham and Dodd, an investment is not solely reliant on the commodity itself, but is an act of research and “diversification” that promises a successful “purchase and sale” of goods. This emphasis on investment as an operation is designed to dampen speculation by forcing the investor to always contextualize the commodity in the wider social range of wants and needs. Although Graham and Dodd recognize that any investment carries some aspect of risk, good investments offer “protection against loss under normal or reasonably likely conditions or variations” (2002, 107)¹¹. The rub, however, occurs when the notion of risk is obscured by the normal functioning of a market that purports to diminish risk but creates a system of exchange that actually increases it¹².

Peadar Kirby's analysis of globalized development in Ireland denotes that "on closer examination" the Tiger was a speculative phenomenon that turned "out not to be a model of successful development, but a model of capital accumulation" (Kirby 2004, 205). Although Ireland was considered "one of the great economic success cases of this more globalized era", Kirby believes the nation's neoliberal development raises "questions about the impact of this economic success on people's livelihoods" (2004, 217). If the Tiger was only a model of capital accumulation, then the boom becomes less a success story for globalization and more an incorporation of risk as a way of life.

The collapse of the Irish economy in 2008 has caused the debt obscured by the euphoric boom to become apparent as Ireland accrued, in no small part due the collapse of the housing bubble, €440 billion in bad debt (White 2010, 40). The dramatic gulf between spending and revenue lead many workers to feel betrayed by a political and economic system that created such a substantial amount of debt (O'Clery 2009)¹³. The collapse Ireland's speculative economy would be damaging to Ireland on both a material and psychological level, since it was considered one of the major elements of Ireland's success in a "more globalized era". But the economic collapse does not solely remain in the economic sphere. It is also present in the everyday rituals and experiences of contemporary Irish life.

Basically, "everyday life" is a site of active construction where ideologies take shape as constitutive forces of our day-to-day existence. Joe Moran identifies the everyday "as a category that brings together lived culture and representation in a way that makes sense of, but also obscures, the reality of cultural change and social difference" (2005, 13). The everyday is a center of ideology, a place where society enacts, codifies, and practices its identity. For Moran, especially, the everyday is a primary locale for the diffusion of political ideals. The persuasiveness of politics "relies not on a specific political agenda or even the sense of an imagined community but on the tacit acceptance of a certain notion of ordinary life" (2005, 21). Speculation, as an economic practice, gets replicated in Ireland's tacit ignorance of a total collapse hiding behind the material and cultural productions of ordinary life during the Tiger.

Anne Haverty's *The Free and Easy* continues her exploration of how the Tiger altered conceptions of the home and communal space. The story follows Tom Blessman through post-Tiger Ireland as he attempts to restore his wealthy uncle's spiritual connection to the homeland. While Tom tries to "get a handle on the place, culturally, politically, historically", he is told, by a Dubliner, that "the Ireland you came here probably hoping to find is obsolete [...] It's a fantasy" (2006, 111-112). The Ireland in which Tom finds himself is presented as a country completely changed after the speculative boom of the Tiger. "Ireland as we know it", he is told, "was born sometime around nineteen ninety-four. Or ninety-six" (2006, 112). This new Ireland is populated by wealthy financiers who are quickly going bankrupt, politicians who are facing legal tribunals for corruption, and exhausted Dubliners who are

ready “for this whole fucking property racket to collapse” (2006, 93). Similar to Marty’s return to a rural Ireland, Tom’s return to his ancestral homeland is marked by a restless wandering because he cannot find any connection to the local space of Dublin.

As Tom walks the streets of Dublin, his inner restlessness is mirrored by an architectural confusion. Underneath a “mesh of construction cranes”, he feels “a sense of lives lived up, passed away” as the older architecture of Dublin is being replaced by the “modern intent on looking like somewhere else or of some other time” (2006, 76-77). The physical memory of Ireland that should be encoded in its buildings is disseminated in a mish-mash of temporal and aesthetic styles. Tom quickly learns that Dublin’s transformation was driven by a boom in property development that promises “speculative returns” on the many new buildings populating Dublin’s skyline (2006, 58). Part of this property development has made Dublin a global city by “exporting” unique cultural buildings and replacing them with generic substitutes, like replacing Irish pubs with “tapas bars” (2006, 59). The exportation of Irish pubs – Tom is told there is a “good one” in Spain – reflects the privileging of capital as the key element in the spatial politics of Dublin. The city becomes a giant investment where aesthetics and the use-value of space are evaluated only by their ability to provide speculative returns.

The various strains of Haverty’s surreal and speculative Dublin all come together in an art installation developed by Tom’s friends, Frog and Aaron. The installation, called “Home”, recreates a working-class living room in an art museum. This artistic home consists of a “small shabby pea-green sofa”, a “small kitchen table”, and a constantly running TV (2006, 201). The two artists inhabit the space in a way that mirrors real life by being “oblivious” of their audience (2006, 201). The staging of a “home”, with all the lived-in details that make the space “profoundly homely”, presents a more authentic presentation of a livable space than all the expensive new buildings Tom notices during his walks around Dublin. The markers of a working-class lifestyle are important as they represent a literary tradition of symbols that were strongly connected to a post-World War II version of Irishness. The artists’ decision to present a version of the home that would not be out of place in a play by Brian Friel strongly outlines a different understanding of Irishness that conflicts with the postmodern and speculative architecture taking over Dublin.

Eventually, the art piece becomes a political statement as the artists refuse to leave the museum even though the exhibition concludes its run. Despite the artists continued silence toward the audience, a crowd develops around the piece to protest “home prices and the whole cabal” (2006, 226). As the furor around the piece grows, Tom begins to understand the installation as a critique of the entire speculative environment of Tiger Ireland: “Poverty and wealth, power and impotence, the homeless and the housed, the fusion of art and reality—miraculously ‘Home’ embodied them all” (2006, 231).

The importance of “Home” is its attempt to posit an authentic moment of domestic space that escapes the speculative property boom that is de-valuing, on both an economic and cultural level, the rest of Dublin. Since the installation piece is directly tied to the artists performing the rituals of the home, the piece cannot be sold to speculative art investors. Its mundane representation of a home rejects any attempt to evaluate it as a sellable commodity. The art installation draws attention to the qualities of domestic life that cannot be easily reduced to the value of a home as a piece of property.

The final moments of the text harken back to “Home” with another artistic performance that critiques the speculative property bubble. The last moments of the text recount Tom witnessing a famine recreation. The recreation takes place in “one of the recent developments of swish commercial and residential” buildings (2006, 279). The juxtaposition of the famine imagery with the new building developments underscores the inherent risk hidden, or ignored, during speculative property booms. The text codes the property boom as hiding another famine. These key moments of Haverty’s text directly represent the damage done by speculative property development: “Home” articulates the inability of a speculative value of space to provide a livable, domestic space and the famine recreation hints at the economic collapse that would severely damage the material condition of life in Dublin. These two artistic critiques of speculation force Haverty’s reader to think about how the economic restructuring of space to privilege “speculative returns” harms the effectiveness of the idea of a home to provide a coherent and stable local identity.

4. *Provisional Authenticity: Art as a Reclamation of Communal Space*

Madden’s *Authenticity* begins with a breakdown to once again show how a speculative ideology causes anxiety in individuals. William, a frustrated lawyer, “cracks up” in response to a lifetime surrounded by the “signifiers of a conformity against which he increasingly chafed” (2002, 13). Similar to Haverty’s Marty and Tom, William is suffering a speculative collapse where he has supposedly achieved everything desirable by the standards of his community, yet has a mental and physical collapse (he later does commit suicide [2002, 376]). William’s anxiety is not turned toward the objects that stand as markers of his success but is turned inward toward his sense of value. Despite his beautiful home and comfortable lifestyle, William feels he has no place in Irish society. The daily routines of his life don’t have, for him, any value because he sees them solely as extensions of his business career. He finds Dublin, and his life, as inauthentic.

The theme of authenticity is the core interest of Madden’s text and activates the desires of her main characters. *Authenticity*’s main characters are all in search of an authentic home that escapes the commoditization of a capital-driven society. The bulk of the text follows William’s post-breakdown

life and his relationship with a couple of Dublin painters, the young Julia (who finds William during his breakdown) and the famous Roderic, who is in a relationship with Julia. Although the narrative has a mostly linear plot that stretches from William's breakdown to his eventual suicide, Madden's text flows backward and forward through time, providing the reader glimpses of the past lives of the characters. For all the characters, the concept of being authentic is, as one reviewer puts it, "a moral as well as social concept". *Authenticity* is "about seeing, and grapples with questions of artistic and everyday integrity" (Craig 2002). For Madden, authenticity is not associated with purity or individualism but with a mode of ethics, of living with oneself and with others. In Madden's text, social authenticity responds to a spatial politics that delinks value from an economic sphere of production and consumption. This process of partial authenticity, which is similar to the abstract painting that Roderic practices, embraces, unlike speculation, loss as a constitutive and freeing notion. In Madden's text, the escape from totality is achieved by realizing that identity is always entropic – a realization that recodifies the notion of loss away from the total collapse of speculation. When one is partly authentic, one avoids the emotional collapse found in characters like William.

The anxiety William experiences is directly connected to a global environment in which the individual is stretched between the need to be adaptable to the demands of capital and the desire to remain a unique and localized individual. William is caught in this very bind that is endemic to the globalized world in which mass commodification "creates new forms of anxiety about the authenticity of things or persons...one no longer knows if they are 'authentic' or 'inauthentic,' spontaneous or re-engineered" (Boltanski, Chiapello 2005, 447). The anxiety stems from the individual's paradoxical need to be both totally incorporated into the changing forms of global capital and the need to think of themselves as a unique, culturally specific person. People and things are recuperated into a system of production by the process of "codification [that], element by element, makes it possible [...] to introduce variations in such a way as to obtain products that are relatively different, but of the same style" (445). Codification is directly tied to the universalization because it finds what, in a commodity, makes it a "truly authentic characteristic that accounts for its value, [then] select certain of its qualities – the most significant or the most transposable – and ignore others, deemed secondary" (*ibidem*). This codification was found in Haverly's postmodern and "swish" Dublin. In Madden (2002), however, this codification occurs at a personal level by creating alienation and anxiety.

After Julia "rescues" William from his breakdown, the two begin a tentative friendship. William's anxiety and depression stems from his desire to be a painter: "his real life was an illusion, all a thing in his head, and that he built himself an impregnable reality, which was not compatible with the fantasy" (Madden 2002, 60). The mutual exclusivity between William's reality and his

fantasy is a direct product of the disjunction between his feelings of individual worth and the adaptability of his life to make the most money. His desire to be a painter is not acceptable to the coded parts of his reality, the part of his identity that is reduced down to “a man in a suit” (61). His breakdown and desire to be an artist is an attempt to reclaim a “personality” that is unique in the face of his exchangeability and “flexibility” found in being a corporate “suit”.

William’s breakdown drives him to dedicate himself to art full time, taking a leave of absence from his job and building an art studio in his house (241). The change to William’s house is an attempt to alter the domestic space of his house to create a personal authentic space – a studio – that directly makes the building a more personal “home”. Yet despite his new studio, William still cannot shake the feeling of being inauthentic: “He stared at the blank sheet of paper [...] as a deep sense of anxiety unfolded within him, immobilising him and putting paid to whatever last few shreds of his self-belief remained” (257). What frustrates William, and drives his anxiety, is not his believed lack of artistry. In fact, the best of William’s pieces are described as “eloquent expression[s] of his current insecurity” (293). This expression of insecurity is not enough for William as his art must express his idea of himself as a unique individual. His inability to find, within the artist persona, a “combination of freedom and control” (257) makes it impossible for him to de-link from his adaptable persona as a suit. He thinks “it simply wasn’t in him to be what he wanted to be” (261). The sense of artistic authenticity – a field of being separated from what Madden, later in the text, calls “a straight-down-the-line middle-class existence” (288) – eludes William.

Yet for all his troubles, William’s quest for authenticity is not a sympathetic one because Madden makes it clear that he has not escaped an ideology of speculation. As William progresses further in his artist persona, it becomes apparent that his failings are not technical but ideological. He understands art like he understands economics; namely, good or bad art is defined only by its value as a social commodity that provides a return on an investment. When he eventually gives up his art and returns to his day job, he laments that his artistic failure did not allow him have “a reputation, critical attention, exhibitions and so on” (360). William’s idea of authenticity is a speculative investment in the artist as a commodity-persona capable of bringing returns in the form of critical and economic success. Even in his friendship with Julia, William equates their everyday interactions (having coffee, dinner, or discussing art) with a sense of investment, of seeking a substantial return on his time. His idea of value can only be expressed in economic terms on a scale of profit and expenditure. He thinks he “would have liked to be able to count Roderic Kennedy amongst his friends”, but feels knowing Julia has “no real cachet” (297). William’s value-driven worldview is the last thing the reader gets from the character before his off-the-page suicide. One of his final thoughts about Julia is how her value as an artist is directly connected to the economic

value of her house. Julia's flat strikes him "as merely the shabby, dusty flat of a young woman without a proper job and with no money. Knowing her had opened no doors for him" (364). William's economic coding of Julia rests solely on her economic value (her lack of prospects, connections, and money) and metaphorically codes her as "worthless" as her bohemian flat. He ignores the qualities of her character that make her a unique person in favor of the base economic value of her home, which then corresponds to her value as a person and artist. Everything of import for William is reduced to one value system: what can be translated into a commodity on the global market.

Nicholas Lezard has called William's failure to achieve a sense of personal authenticity indicative of how Madden views the value of art. Art cannot be justified in terms of economic value, but is an "internal gift" that makes a productive distinction "between art-as-self expression, not the real thing, and art detached from any ulterior concern" (Lezard 2003). Lezard is correct in noting that Madden's art is not a form of self expression, but his analysis misses Madden's critique of value in the era of late-capital globalization. Without the wider context of the Tiger, Madden's staging of the debate over what is authentic loses some of its potency as a diagnosis of Irish culture. In essence, Madden is critiquing the speculative boom of the Tiger as hiding an inner psychological collapse, an implosion of value that threatens to commoditize the entire artistic process. The risk of the authentic artist, like Julia and Roderic, confronts the economic risk of the Tiger by not being totally authentic, which keeps them somewhat detached from the realm of the market. William's foray into art, however, only repeats the speculative trajectory of his life; it has an investment that leads to a total collapse in his suicide. In this way his risk is similar to economic speculation because "the damage is hidden" beneath the veneer of his inauthentic artist persona (2002, 378). He has internalized the logic of speculation in all facets of his life, a total immersion in the speculative ethos of the Tiger.

Madden's text presents William's inevitable failure as an example of the insidious nature of a speculative ideology. Madden underlines William's speculative collapse, along with the struggles of other characters, as caused by the interpellation of a Tiger influenced ideology. To punctuate this connection, she stages direct examinations of the Tiger to link the characters and the Tiger together in the mind of the reader. Coming toward the end of the novel, a discussion occurs among Roderic, Julia, and Julia's father Dan about the realities of living in a globalized Ireland that has an omnipresent drive for global adaptability. It is almost as if Madden could not finish her novel without directly addressing the impact of the Tiger on the notion of the nation as a home.

Essentially, Madden's characters engage in a discussion of the Tiger and how it imposes a sense of sameness under the guise of false freedoms. Dan asserts: "They'd have us believe that we're all on the pig's back now. And they're always going on about choice [...] About freedom". Dan's comments about freedom are a direct confrontation with the mythos of the Tiger as Ireland's

coming-of-age into a new, freer existence. Yet Dan sees the realities of the Tiger through the living conditions of the individual people he encounters everyday – from a young man handing out promotional leaflets to Dublin’s immigrant class – who he believes “are having a hard time of it” (335)¹⁴.

Along with his critique of working conditions, Dan also brings up the idea of standardized time and the synchronization of clocks as exemplary of the looming presence of a global sameness. He opens “an encyclopedia of Irish history” to its section about the establishment of Greenwich Mean Time in Ireland: “‘Time,’ he read. ‘In Ireland, as elsewhere, the standardisation of time was primarily a response to the exigencies of the railway timetable. Before that nearly every community had its own time. Clocks in Cork were eleven minutes behind those in Dublin [...] It was not until Greenwich Mean Time was extended to the whole of Ireland, in 1916, that the Albert Clock stopped showing Belfast time’” (338-339). Dan’s anecdote is pertinent to Madden’s text as it represents a moment, similar to the Tiger, when Ireland was made more adaptable to a unified global system. The “exigency” for the adoption of standardized time is primarily economic; it makes a unified Ireland more acceptable to the speedy transfer of capital and goods. The impact of a global time represents an imposition of economic value on the nation; consequently, the relationship to the nation as a home gets transformed into economic terms.

Madden’s deft use of place names stresses the unification of Ireland into a global order, as the time differences between Cork, Dublin, and Belfast become unified in relation to a global temporal order, but not to a unified home. The date marker of 1916 makes this clear, as the moment when Belfast and Dublin are united temporally marks a key moment when they begin to split into different nations. Yet this marker of difference is only superficial as the populations of Dublin and Belfast, the ratio of Protestants to Catholics or Ulster to Irish, does not change on the dawning of 1916. This superficial difference reshapes the dates to focus on how each place – Cork, Dublin, Belfast – loses its sense of authenticity, its uniqueness as a temporal city, in the adoption of a commerce driven time clock.

Madden’s response to the global universalization of time is an aesthetic of abstraction. Similar to Haverty in *The Free and Easy*, Madden turns to art as a method to reclaim the spaces of the home from the economic ideology of the Tiger. Instead of abstracting the local particularity into a coded global commodity, Madden’s assertion of an aesthetic abstraction maintains the unique essence of the particular. For the artist, the abstraction of formal techniques makes each form distinct, and in doing so makes art resistant and opposed to the codification of it as a valuable art-commodity. Opposed to William’s desire to become a value-driven artist, Roderic’s and Julia’s artworks eschew not only economic value but also the idea of universality. They abstract the qualities of artistic composition to keep each element unique and authentic in a type of composition that is organized but not unified. They embrace an

element of loss in the artwork, a move that keeps the direction of the work open. Roderic describes this process when he rejects the popular notion of his work as abstract: “Well for a start, I would resist any discussion of my work that *begins* with a definition rather than working towards one [...] it isn’t a case of understanding something but of *experiencing* it” (287). This focus on “experiencing” directly refutes a speculative ideology where value is only transferred via buyable and sellable commodities.

Julia’s installation project focuses on “experiencing” space and mirrors Haverty’s reclamation of domestic space in the art project “Home”. She rejects the idea of a universal understanding and presents her art as always particular, always having a kernel of difference separated from the visual logic of the viewer. After completing her first exhibition, which focused on a series of objects suspended in clear glass boxes, Julia takes up an idea that she had let “lie fallow for some months”. She collects individual stories from random people along with a list of scents they associate with their memories. She hopes to recreate the person’s experience in a gallery setting, but questions the validity of such an approach: “She turned it over in her mind and decided it couldn’t be done, because people were too unlike. What to one person would be soothing or pleasurable [...] would be to another neutral or even unpleasant. Each experience would have to be geared to each person. *It was too particular*” (219; emphasis added). Although Julia rejects this project, the idea of particularness – of being too particular – becomes more important in her work as she merges the collected stories with another set of glass boxes (320). The particular qualities of each box are enhanced by the individuals’ stories, which are about them experiencing certain elements of their homes and personal spaces. Despite the risk of being too particular to be a piece of valuable, economically speaking, art, Julia’s focus on intimate moments, most of which resist complete translation into a wider cultural sphere, represents a strong critique of the Tiger’s drive toward a speculative adaptability. Through her art installation, Julia presents an intimate – though not totalized – picture of personal and domestic spaces that reject being abstracted into sellable items on a global market.

5. Conclusion: Misused Capital and a Disappearing Home

In *Ship of Fools: How Stupidity and Corruption Sunk the Celtic Tiger*, Fintan O’Toole acerbically attacks the managers and politicians who misused the capital of the boom. After attacking politicians (mainly Fianna Fáil), businessmen (mainly real estate speculators), and the Anglo-Irish Bank, O’Toole tries to think about how Ireland can survive in post-Tiger, post-collapse world. He distrusts the contemporary desire for small government, despite the fact that “cutting the wages of civil and public servants paid very high political dividends”. He rightly notes that this political maneuver is just an extension of the very neoliberal attitudes that caused the economic collapse. Smaller

government allows for less regulation and consents to the continued freedoms the wealth Irish elite “who corrupted politics and abased the state before the interests of a small minority”. For O’Toole, any continuance of Tiger attitudes only creates a “disengagement and disillusion” that fosters, in the Irish, a dangerous “sense of impotence” (2010, 239). In Haverty’s and Madden’s fictions, we see characters that represent O’Toole diagnosis that Ireland has become disengaged from ideas of home and nationality.

O’Toole ends his book with a call for a new fidelity to a post-Tiger Ireland. He asserts, “sooner or later, the Irish people themselves will have to reinvent politics, civic morality and the public realm. No one else is going to do that for them” (2010, 240). Writers of Tiger, like Madden and Haverty, reinscribe the many signifiers, images, and rituals of Irish culture in new ways that reject the speculative economy of the Tiger. Madden’s and Haverty’s critiques of a speculative economy point toward developing, however piecemeal, a new post-Tiger definition of home that relies on aesthetic interpretations that reject economic evaluations.

At their core, Haverty’s and Madden’s texts use aesthetic rejections of speculative investment that reassert private space as having a unique quality that defies commodification and abstraction. In Haverty’s “Home” and Madden’s abstract artists, the authors attempt to recode ideas of the home to focus on how the micro-actions of individuals create an everyday politics that argues for the home as a space for living. Art represents a way in which individuals and authors can reorganize shared communal spaces away from a dangerous association of property value as social value that typified the speculative culture of the Celtic Tiger.

Notes

¹ One of the main elements that expressed this “Irish turn” toward a global identity was the importance exports played in the success of the Tiger. Despite the economic downturn, Irish exports still play a strong role in the Irish economy (White 2010, 31).

² The intense contemporary debate about the validity of native and non-native cultural influences in Ireland is mirrored by the growing distrust (evident as early as the late 1990s) of the multinational corporations whose capital funded the Tiger (Edwards, Hourican 2005, 207).

³ For Graham and Dodd, the key difference between investment and speculation is the reliability and safety of returns on the initial outlay. As Thomas P. Au notes, it is characteristic of Graham and Dodd’s economic approach to stress “the safety or sustainability of the dividend” as much as “its size or any other consideration” (Au 2004, 119).

⁴ Aisling proclaims her desire to be an exile as stemming from her early childhood in which “she knew [she] wanted to leave, but [...] didn’t know where [she] would go” (Madden 1992, 59).

⁵ Tourism plays an important part in Madden’s Italy-Ireland connection as both countries have historically been very dependent on tourism as a pillar of their economies. It is not difficult to imagine many of the statements Aisling makes about the tourists’ perceptions of Italy referring to Ireland’s many tourist destinations.

⁶ In *Simulations*, Baudrillard reads Disneyland as a type of fantasy-world designed to be an imaginary system of signs presented “to make us believe that the rest is real, when in

fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but are of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation". By creating a fantasy-land designed for children, Disneyland creates a brand-imaginary space that makes "us believe that the adults are elsewhere, in the 'real' world, and to conceal the fact that real childishness is everywhere, particularly amongst those adults who go there to act the child in order to foster illusions as to their real childishness" (ed. 1983, 25, 25-26). The produced childishness, the product Disney sells with its massive system of branding, is a product of inactivity. Childishness is a realm of political inactivity in which the individual relinquishes a claim to civic action or political discourse.

⁷ Auge juxtaposes the non-place to the anthropological place, which is a site grounded in the historical and cultural relations of a community (2008, 8). The non-place, however, is drained of the everyday interactions found in the anthropological place.

⁸ Marty's restlessness is a physical and mental reaction to life in Tipperary. His mind wanders as he picks up one task after the other, such as painting his small bungalow, working the fields, drinking, and caring for a pet sheep. He takes up one of these tasks only to drop it before he can complete it.

⁹ The historical period that constitutes Haverly's text saw a dramatic rise in personal sector credit use in Ireland, rising from forty-two per cent in 1992 to seventy-one per cent in 2001 (Allen 2000, 67).

¹⁰ During and after the Tiger, rural areas were at the highest risk of poverty (Cawley 2005, 240).

¹¹ In Graham and Dodd's analysis, a good investment is "justified on both qualitative and quantitative grounds" (2002, 107).

¹² For example, pyramid scams or junk-bond investments portray themselves as legitimate investment opportunities, but in fact are speculative disasters waiting to happen.

¹³ Much of the anger surrounding the issue of social partnership concerns the wage reductions agreed on by Irish workers in order to lure foreign investment. When the Tiger-boom was in full force, this was not much of an issue (though some did argue against it) because it was believed that the influx of foreign cash would help balance the reduction in wages with new jobs. Yet after the crash, the budget deficit has led Ireland into a vicious circle of total risk in which fiscal austerity constrict the ability of political leaders to maintain social services because they are unable to borrow money.

¹⁴ Dan has his own version of authenticity in relation to work, which is comparable to the ideas of art expressed by Julia and Roderic. In Dan's perspective, jobs like "fixing a washing machine" or "rewir[ing] a house" allow for the individual to feel like they have accomplished "something" in a concrete and lasting manner. The individual can "point to it and [...] can say, I did that" (2002, 337).

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