Culture

Donald Taylor Black

DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198792376.003.0017

Abstract and Keywords

This chapter interrogates cultural changes during the Great Recession and partial recovery in Ireland. First, it considers the documentary film *Skin in the Game*, directed by the author, Donald Taylor Black, and then it follows the creative response of a number of artists to the crash, including Roddy Doyle, Seán Hillen, Brian Maguire, and Christy Moore. Next, the chapter examines other engaged Irish work. The chapter then explores funding of the arts during this time period, before continuing with an account of trends in audiences. Next, the chapter assesses some positive cultural experiences that arose as a result of the Great Recession, before concluding with examples of cultural concerns.

*Keywords*: artists, funding of the arts, film, Great Recession, trends in audiences, positive cultural experiences

Introduction

The author has been a documentary filmmaker for over thirty years, and a substantial number of his films have been about art and artists, whilst others have addressed socio-political themes. After the economic crash, he wanted to make a documentary focusing on the subject, but was only too aware
it was being constantly addressed by newspapers, by current
affairs journalists on radio and television, and discussed
online. As an independent filmmaker, the author was
convinced that a creative documentary should be the way to
interrogate what was happening, and considered that focusing
on artists who were making work about the crisis might be a
useful and illuminating method of doing this.

Skin in the Game: Artists and the Crisis
The feature-length film was made with finance from Bord
Scannán na hÉireann/The Irish Film Board (IFB) and initially
called Stuffing the Tiger (Black 2012). It began shooting on 25
February, the day of the 2011 general election, and was
intended to follow a number of artists from varied disciplines
and genres for twelve months, documenting ‘a year in the life
of the recession’ through their work and their voices.
Ultimately, it followed these artists over nineteen months. With
a new title, Skin in the Game (2012), it received its first public
screening at the 57th Cork Film Festival on 16 November
2012. The phrase ‘skin in the game’ was not well known in
Ireland then; it means that executives who own shares in the
companies for whom they work are less likely to make unwise
decisions because it would put their personal wealth at risk;
‘skin’ is a synecdoche for self or person involved and the
metaphorical meaning of ‘game’ is the gamble being
undertaken or the field of endeavour (p.312) involved. It has
been frequently alleged that it was originated by Warren
Buffett, but the late William Safire, best known for his
syndicated column in the New York Times Magazine (‘On
Language’) has disputed this (Safire 2006). The phrase
became more familiar when extracts of transcripts from the
so-called ‘Anglo Tapes’ were published in the Irish
Independent from June 2013, and broadcast on radio: senior
executives of Anglo Irish Bank were regularly heard using it.

The documentary examines the work of ten artists; it is
chronological in structure, using captions, with dates, to
remind the audience where we are in our timeline, as well as a
number of short animations by David Quin, plus brief pieces
contributed by writer Roddy Doyle, which act as punctuations
throughout the film. It is not merely a collection of artworks
with opinions from the makers, but also about the process of
making art and the nature of creative inspiration.
Skin in the Game opens with three captions, which very briefly contextualize the background to the crash, the bank bailout, and Ireland’s loss of economic sovereignty, with the arrival of the ‘Troika’. Then, under a montage of bank exteriors/signs and the main title, we hear Ian Monahan and Dermot O’Brien’s austerity song, ‘We Built This House...’, which uses the metaphor that Celtic Tiger prosperity was a house built without foundations.

It is polling day and we hear from a representative of the arts collective, UpStart, talking about their project of commissioned images which were printed on 500 election-sized posters, and attached to lampposts throughout Dublin (one says: ‘Due To Foreseen Circumstances, We Regret To Inform You That Ireland Has Been Cancelled’). Then we see Fergus O’Neill in his studio, discussing how his small graphic design business collapsed in 2009, and showing us posters that he now sells from his website. Based on the celebrated 1939 British propaganda image ‘Keep Calm and Carry On’, they say ‘Fuck It, Sure It’s Grand’.

Next we see David Quin producing his thirty-second-long satirical animations, Cutbacks, which he began in April 2009 (‘frustrated with Mr. Cowan’s government, the Lisbon Treaty and the second referendum’); he wanted to make his own ‘quick and effective’ statements ‘without joining a political party’. He uses the characters of the singing Jedward twins to make the political point that the newly elected coalition government is merely more of the same.

The film continues with choreographer/director Muirne Bloomer rehearsing community group, City Fusion, during their section of the 2011 Dublin St Patrick’s Day Parade, based on Brilliant, a specially commissioned short story for children by Roddy Doyle, about how the ‘Black Dog of Depression’ has taken away Dublin’s funny bone. For the first time, in the history of the parade, according to Bloomer:

there’s something so related to the state of the country.

(p.313) Then, we see a sequence of images, including a familiar one from the project by artist Maser and songwriter Damien Dempsey: ‘Greed is the knife and the scar runs deep.’

Painter Brian Maguire opens his section, with the words:
I'm not sure whether anger is the correct term, I just feel gobsmacked about the stupidity of it all.

Discussing his painting of the unfinished Anglo Irish Bank headquarters on the north bank of the Liffey, *Contemporary Ruin* (seen exhibited in the Kerlin Gallery), he says that, as a visual artist, he looks for an image, which is also a metaphor and in this case it is:

a sculptural monument to what they'd done...they'd created a dereliction.

Over shots of ‘ghost estates’ and abandoned developments, we hear the first of the specially written pieces by Roddy Doyle, this one a monologue about a man who has been made redundant but is too ashamed to tell his family. As we see footage of rural ghost estates, the voice of photographer Anthony Haughey explains his project ‘Settlement’, which he began in 2010; then, in the Gallery of Photography in Dublin, he discusses some finished images of uncompleted Celtic Tiger houses, simultaneously beautiful and unworldly.

When researching *Skin in the Game*, the author was determined not to produce a film filled with a procession of angry engaged artists, and poet Gerald Dawe (2011) is certainly not known for his political work. He introduces a poem, ‘Every Dog Has His Day’, by explaining that he wrote it, ‘basically out of rage as much as anything else’, after reading about a disgraced banker who had escaped to America and was ‘conducting himself as if nothing had happened’, lounging on his luxury boat berthed in a marina. However, Dawe makes the point that, by the time he began to write the poem using Audenesque irony, his anger had ‘distilled to an icy calm’.

Musician Christy Moore, on the other hand, has regularly written or sung about the injustices that he sees around him. However, he explains that, although he has tried to write about the recession, so far the attempts have foundered because they were too full of rage. Instead, he has found songs from other composers and often amends lyrics, or inserts particularly relevant references. Moore then gives an example, by performing ‘In Zurich’, a political song by American singer-songwriter Jim Page, which discusses a demonstration there,
where the Swiss police defend the banks with plastic bullets in their guns.

David Quin’s second animation features a speech allegedly made by Taoiseach Enda Kenny at the 2012 World Economic Forum in Davos, where he blames the global financial collapse on the Irish people, stating that it was:

nothing to do with Anglo, nothing to do with nutters in the property sector...nothing to do with the fact that our financial regulator was asleep for twelve years in his office.

(p.314) Then, the Kenny puppet reassures his Davos audience by emphasizing that:

we’re taking them in hand and we’re kicking their asses—they have twenty years of austerity ahead of them and they deserve every bit of it!

Not all the artists featured are well known in their particular fields. One is Frank Buckley, whose installation, The Billion Euro House, was built in the Glasshouse, a new but unlet office building in Smithfield. He obtained €1.4 billion worth of shredded banknotes in compressed briquette form from the Central Bank and constructed a house out of them, where he now lives and works. He is seen in the process of completing it, and we hear him saying that one of its major benefits is that it ‘creates debate’. We cut to a Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ) radio studio, where poet Rita Ann Higgins is about to read ‘The Builder’s Mess’, about ghost estates, from her latest collection, Ireland Is Changing Mother (Higgins 2013).

Next we see activist footage of the clearance of Occupy Dame Street in March 2012: a young male participant explains how the Gardaí came in the middle of the night. Then, by Skype from New York, in an editing suite in the (now closed) Factory in Barrow Street, Dublin, filmmaker Paul Rowley, describes how his film, Divestment, was compiled from business jargon, having spoken to a friend who had experience of a company in ‘lock down in a war-room situation’ when a crisis had engulfed the organization, while his co-director, Nicky Gogan, adds that a friend of hers, ‘a property portfolio manager from one of the...
banks’, also passed on a glossary of contemporary financial slang. This is illustrated by a clip:

We were allowed to sweat the assets—we had skin in the game.

The documentary’s second photographer, Seán Hillen, thinks that:

[T]he idea that we can be apolitical is a political position.

Here he makes work for his ‘Ghost Shops’ project, which he calls his ‘contemporary war photography’. The images play with layers and reflections, as his camera looks through windows at rubbish inside the door: unopened letters, cigarette butts, and old retail stock. It then cuts back to artist Robert Ballagh, who has designed inter alia Irish banknotes, opening Frank Buckley’s completed installation.

The next sequence deals with the (so-called) ‘Stability’ Treaty, initially lampooned in a spoof referendum broadcast, by David Quin’s puppets of Enda Kenny and Minister for Finance, Michael Noonan. Then, over a montage of posters, there is another Roddy Doyle-scripted monologue, which sounds slightly like a poem, or even a rap, as a woman considers which way she will vote.

David Monahan is a photographer who has been working on a series of portraits of those about to emigrate, called *Leaving Dublin*, later published as a (p.315) book (Monahan 2014); he explains first about how emigration used to make him sad, until recently when a government minister called it ‘a lifestyle choice’, which made him feel angry. This was Michael Noonan, who, in a speech, claimed young people ‘were not emigrating because of unemployment in Ireland’.

The film cuts to choreographer David Bolger, of CoisCéim Dance Theatre, describing the creative origins of his production, *Touch Me*, which began:

from hearing the background, the soundscape of marches down O’Connell Street, of a discontent of people...it was the sound of the marching that kept seeping into the [rehearsal] studio that made me feel
that what I was working on didn’t seem to connect at all with what was going on outside and I pretty much decided...I’d have to do this piece.

*Touch Me* was premiered at the Project Arts Centre in Dublin, and, as Bolger talks, we see extracts from it. Using original music by Kenneth Edge, the images relate to the collapse of the property market, including model ‘Monopoly’ houses; responses to the question ‘What makes you sad?’ include ‘what we’ve done to our country, what we’ve done to our beautiful country’.

In a final Roddy Doyle-scripted dialogue, two young men discuss possible cities to which they might emigrate, as we see a montage of aeroplanes and trains departing and shots of destination boards. The documentary closes with Barry McCormack performing his song, ‘Spring’, the lyrics of which focus on the aftermath of a political protest against those to blame for the damage caused by austerity; while the demonstrators have a drink before going home, they debate the state of the country.

After its Cork premiere, *Skin in the Game* was screened at the Irish Film Institute in Dublin, around the Access Cinema circuit, which consists primarily of screens within regional arts centres, and at conferences and film clubs. It was nominated for an Irish Film and Television Academy (IFTA) Award and was invited to a number of festivals, primarily in Ireland and the USA, winning Best Documentary at the Irish Film Festival in Boston. Up until the time of writing, *Skin in the Game* has not been transmitted by an Irish broadcaster.

**Other Artists and the Crisis**

Of course, a number of other artists were also involved in making art which engaged with the crisis, including photographer Mark Curran, with his multimedia show at the Limerick City Gallery of Art, *The Economy of Appearances*. It drew together previous related projects such as ‘Southern Cross’ (1999–2001) and ‘The Breathing Factory’ (2002–5), which critically surveyed globalization during the Celtic Tiger; Ausschnitte aus EDEN/Extracts from EDEN, which investigated a declining industrial mining region of the former East Germany; as well as ‘The Market’ (2010–). In addition, there was new work completed in Amsterdam, which included profiles of bankers and traders and documentation...
from Dublin, London, Frankfurt, and Addis Ababa, and a 3D representation of an algorithmically generated soundscape, which represented ‘contemporary financial capital functioning through the conduit of the financialised nation state’.

In *Power Plays* (2011), broadcast in RTÉ Television’s *Arts Lives* series, Fintan O’Toole, *Irish Times* columnist and former drama critic of the *New York Daily News*, lamented the fact that Irish theatre, at least since the mid-1990s, had failed to engage with contemporary national issues, particularly during the boom years. He urged playwrights and theatre companies to rise to the challenge of showing a society in crisis.

In 2012, the commercial theatre produced *Anglo: The Musical*. Written by Paul Howard, with music by Tony O’Sullivan and David McCune, it used puppets and included songs with titles such as ‘We All Partied’, ‘Put Another Nought on the End,... He’s a Friend’, and ‘I Hate to Say I Told You So, But I Did’, sung by a puppet of writer and economic commentator David McWilliams. There were also puppets of Brian Cowen, Bertie Ahern, and Enda Kenny, on a leash, held by Angela Merkel. During the previews there were problems, as Howard explained (Freyne 2014):

> The DPP were sending us letters saying they were concerned about it and Sean Fitzpatrick’s lawyers were sending us letters saying they wanted to see the script... By then the theatre was booked and there were buses around town with *Anglo: The Musical* on the side and we’d already sold tickets.

Although no Anglo employees were named, changes were made and two scenes were cut completely:

> Then on opening night there were all these people taking notes in yellow legal pads.

Colin Murphy’s play, *Guaranteed!* about the bank guarantee, was produced by Fishamble in May 2013 and toured the country. Characters included: The Regulator, The Governor of the Central Bank, The Taoiseach, and (Anglo Irish Bank CEO), David Drumm. When Murphy, a former deputy editor of *Magill*, was asked why the subject had not been previously tackled by
any of Ireland’s larger subsidized theatre companies, he replied (Hunt 2013):

> It is surprising that in a nation of writers and theatre that it hasn’t been done...But I don’t want to take credit for being the first person to come up with the idea.

He is perhaps referring to the fact that it was first staged as part of Fishamble’s ‘Tiny Plays for Ireland’ season, in a 600-word version in 2012. *Guaranteed!* (p.317) was later made into a low-budget feature film, as *The Guarantee* (2014), directed by Ian Power, with backing from TV3 and the IFB.

Murphy wrote a follow-up, *Bailed Out!* in September 2015.

Radio dramatists have addressed the political and economic situation probably more frequently than theatre writers, many broadcast in RTÉ’s *Drama on One* series (Brew 2015). Notable examples included two plays written and directed by filmmaker John Boorman: *The Hit List* (2011), starring Brendan Gleeson and Stephen Rea, where two white knights blackmail their bankrupt betters who had brought Ireland to its knees; and *2020* (2012), a satirical journey into a future Ireland: not only post-Tiger but also post-Euro. Novelist Belinda McKeon contributed *Dropping Slow* (2012), which focused on Maeve, who is now defiantly at peace in her new oasis, a ghost estate under the Arigna Mountains, while Pat McGrath’s *Small Plastic Wars* (2015) featured a central character who tries to cope with unemployment. In 2015, Conor Malone’s award-winning play, *The Fund*, was a fictional piece, based on the actual story of Grenadian-born economist, Davison Budhoo, and his 150-page letter of resignation from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1988.

In the field of ‘classical’ or ‘art’ music, Jenn Kirby reacted to the Irish political situation with her piece, ‘Economic Fluctuation’ (2010). Kirby (2015), co-director of the Dublin Laptop Orchestra, explains that:

> The pitches for the violins are generated from economic statistics, such as the rate of inflation, migration and the live register.

Tape sources include the anti-austerity protest in November 2010 and Dáil Éireann debates. She has stated that the aim of this composition:
is to highlight public frustration through the sonification of real data and statistics and also illustrate the divide in the perception of the Government and that of the public.

A later piece, also inspired by the crisis, ‘Big Scary Numbers’ (2012), begins with two voices reciting, without emotion, a new alphabet: ‘A is for Austerity, B is for Bailout’ then, after the letter ‘Z’, the speakers call out the ‘big scary numbers’, taken by the composer from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) website. The performers end with the final statement, ‘Due to cutbacks, we are unable to finish this piece’, and then leave the stage (Kirby 2015).

*The Spinning Heart* (2012) is perhaps the best-known novel about the recession, winning for its author the Irish Book of the Year in 2012 and the 2013 Guardian First Book Award. Set in a fictional village near Limerick, it is told through a chorus of twenty-one victims of the crash, by means of interlocking short stories, each attempting to tell their own kind of truth (Ryan 2012). Julian Gough’s satirical novella, *Crash! How I Lost a Hundred Billion and Found True Love* (2013), differs radically in tone and features his regular protagonist, Jude, who is the last person in ‘Squanderland’ to purchase property: a vastly expensive wooden henhouse with no roof.

With the country facing total ruin, Helen Dunkel, Chancellor of ‘Frugalia’, and Bertrand Plastique, President of the European Bank of Common Sense and Stability, take charge.

*The Mark and the Void*, a comic novel by Paul Murray (2015), is narrated by Claude, a French financial analyst who works for a fictional foreign investment bank, based in the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC), and features his thoughts on Ireland, from the position of an outsider in the country, and comments on international finance, as a participant: ‘In short, the whole world was massively in debt, but it didn’t seem to matter; then suddenly, almost overnight, it did. Someone, somewhere, realised that the global boom was in fact a pyramid scheme, a huge inflammable pyramid waiting to catch light.’ There is a bank with strong similarities to Anglo, called the ‘Royal Irish Bank’, the (anonymous) Minister for Finance is diagnosed with cancer, but the IMF is referred to by its real name.
The importance of culture in Ireland and its history is well documented, and, indeed, is one of the selling points used by state agencies to lure tourists to the country. As Lenny Abrahamson, director of acclaimed feature film Room recently commented, ‘Ireland’s presence globally is through its culture, that’s our strongest identifier’ (Keegan 2016). Its national, and indeed international, importance is therefore not to be underestimated. What the examples from Skin in the Game, and other artists highlighted, illustrate is that a number of practitioners from all genres, including photography, music, dance, literature, film, and theatre, as well as the visual arts, used their creative imaginations to depict the crisis and the impact it had on all walks of Irish life. Naturally, it is usually easier for individuals, such as poets, novelists, or visual artists, who can at least begin work without raising funding, as compared to groups or those working in theatre or film, who need to either access finance directly or persuade commissioners, or cultural producers, to make space in the schedules of their organizations. This was all against a backdrop of severe cuts in funding to the arts and a decline in income for the vast majority of artists, as the recession took hold around the country. Despite these constraints, Irish artists contributed significantly, both addressing the crisis (and its impact on the Irish people) and inspiring subsequent conversations, both in Ireland and further afield, about austerity.

Funding The Arts
In Skin in the Game, the author deliberately focused on artists making work about austerity and the recession and their attitude to what was happening to the community around them, rather than how the economic situation had reduced government spending on arts and culture, and its effect on the income (p.319) of artists. However, it is important to assert that this happened and discuss the effect that it has had. The 2009 Annual Report of the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaion highlights how challenging the year had been for the arts in Ireland. The report emphasizes that the council’s funding had been cut by €8.3 million, more than 10 per cent in one year; this, along with other factors such as decreases in the sales of artists’ work, in corporate philanthropy, and in sponsorship, were having a serious impact on artists and arts organizations. The Arts Council had to make significant adjustments to its strategies, as a result of the cuts, and by September 2011,
following four consecutive years of reduced funding, amounting to 21.5 per cent, the organization was ‘in crisis management’ (McBride 2015). The government reduced the budget of the Arts Council to €56,668,000 in 2014, a total loss of 31.7 per cent over the seven years since the highpoint in 2007. Consequently, it decided to commission a strategic review and this gave the organization the opportunity, according to its director, Orlaith McBride, to ‘renew its original vows’ and ‘reaffirm our remit in statute’. This ‘complete paradigm shift’ and ‘deliberate dismantling of policy’ meant that the Arts Council had to assess its ‘changing relationships’ with its clients and: ‘Be a development agency for the arts focussed on the public good’ (Arts Council 2014). In 2008/9, it funded approximately 340–50 organizations; this was radically reduced to around 235 in 2014. Nevertheless, the fact that there were 1,706 individual applications from artists for ‘bursaries, awards and schemes’ that year and only 375 were successful, and €2,969,112 was awarded from applications totalling €18.4 million, clearly demonstrates the inadequacy of state funding. The basic grant-in-aid for 2015 remained similar to 2014, but there was an extra €2 million for the 1916 commemorations, which brought the total to €58,593,000; and 2016 saw the first increase for nine years, when the government made available €60,120,000. However, during the recession, the Arts Council lost approximately one-third of its employees, and McBride is of the firm view that the worst thing about austerity has been the cuts coming:

*drip, drip in such an insidious way...people have been emasculated in a slower way.*

James Hickey, chief executive of the IFB, has commented that screen production fared quite differently during the crisis (Hickey 2015). The IFB, which received its highest ever funding from the government in 2008 (€23.19m) (IFB 2009), suffered cuts in funding of 40 per cent over six years (down to €14m in 2014), and the staff of the IFB decreased from eighteen to twelve. Notwithstanding this, the production of Irish-made cinema, television, and animation increased. Wildgust (2015) highlights substantial growth between 2012 and 2014, with a 37 per cent increase in independent production activity with the highest ever figures in 2014. That year, the IFB invested just under €10 million, generating production expenditure of more than €42 million from IFB-funded projects. Hickey says the reason is that ‘film crosses
over the zone from arts/culture to industrial activity’ and ‘...has been very successful at creating jobs’. In addition, the screen production sector benefits from foreign direct investment (FDI), principally owing to the benevolent tax regime, which stimulates incoming productions. This incentive, known as Section 481 (S481), has been both extended and developed, with the investor-based system being replaced in 2014 by the new S481 film credit. Ireland did well from the previous version for two main reasons, first, it applied to television and drama, as well as cinema films, which was not the case in the UK at that time, and, second, because the USA was, according to Hickey, ‘the first major industrial economy to recover from recession’.

Despite the consequent increase in employment, particularly from high-end television drama, financed by FDI and the S481 tax relief scheme, such as The Tudors (2007–10), Ripper Street (2012–16), Vikings (2013–), and Penny Dreadful (2014–16), Irish independent film and television production has not expanded across all budget levels and genres, because of the decrease in the IFB’s capital funding. Furthermore, the national public service broadcaster, RTÉ, has suffered severely owing to its system of financing by a combination of the licence fee and advertising revenue, which declined significantly during the recession. In this way, the ‘industrial activity’ has thrived while the cultural aspect of the sector has suffered, and this has meant there are less Irish-produced (and controlled) films and television being made, except for predominantly low-budget features; according to James Hickey, it is Irish writers who are suffering the most. The internationally financed television drama series are hardly ever written by Irish citizens or Irish-based writers, whereas actors and crew benefit, including ‘heads of department’ (such as cinematographers, production designers, costume designers, editors, and make-up designers), and even directors. The other problem is that, as Hickey explains, there is a ‘complicated eco-system for audio visual production in Ireland’.

Of course, RTÉ as a statutory corporation, a ‘semi-state’ body, is outside of the IFB’s sphere of influence. Nevertheless, because its spending on indigenous production has been reduced substantially from €324 million in 2008 to €211 million in 2014, it does have an effect on the ‘complicated eco-system’ in which it operates, particularly the cutting of the
commissioning budget (i.e. expenditure incurred on commissioning activities) of RTÉ’s Independent Production Unit, from €75 million in 2008 to €41 million in both 2013 and 2014 (RTÉ Independent Productions 2013).

RTÉ announced in September 2015 that its continuing ‘restructuring’ had led to break-even financial results for the second consecutive year (RTÉ 2015). Despite a €5 million reduction in funding in the 2014 national budget, with some growth in commercial revenue, RTÉ returned a small financial surplus, in line with 2013, notwithstanding director-general Noel Curran’s statement that ‘the overall media market continues to be highly competitive and fragmented’. This result followed a ‘major restructuring’ of all RTÉ’s operations, (p.321) with its operating cost base reduced by 30 per cent, compared to 2008; Moya Doherty, chair of RTÉ’s board, admitted that ‘cutbacks in production…have impacted on the creative economy at large’.

Trends in Arts Audiences
In 2006, the Arts Council commissioned research ‘to provide up-to-date information on the behaviour and attitudes of Irish people’ in terms of their opinions on, and participation in, the arts, including attendance at cultural events. It reported that Irish people generally had very positive views towards the arts, with 86 per cent of respondents believing that ‘the arts play an important and valuable role’, while almost 70 per cent agreed that ‘spending on the arts should be safeguarded in times of economic recession’. The comparable figure eight years later was 60 per cent, still a clear majority against cuts.

From 2009, the Target Group Index (TGI) surveys, *Arts Attendance in Ireland*, were published by Arts Audiences, an initiative of the Arts Council and the Temple Bar Cultural Trust (Carmody 2015). The evidence from the first edition stated that 1.8 million adults (or 51 per cent of the population) responded that they attended an arts event at least once during the year, and this excludes commercial cinema and rock or popular music concerts. In 2010, this declined to 1.5 million, or 42 per cent of the population. In 2011 and 2012, the overall figures remained almost the same. During the same period, cinema attendance remained stable, at approximately 1.8 million.
However, the most recent report, *The Arts in Irish Life 2014*, gives a figure of 65 per cent for ‘last-year’ attendance, up from 56 per cent in the previous year (Kantar Media 2015). It also states that levels of attendance have shown particular increases among lower-income groups most particularly, a rise of 11 per cent for those households with incomes of under €30,000. Despite this, in 2014, there was an increase in those who say that cost (or ‘can’t afford’) is a factor in not attending arts events, up to 29 per cent of the population, compared to 17 per cent in 2006.

Creative Fortune and Concerns during the Crisis
As demonstrated above, despite funding cutbacks, losses in income, sponsorship, and philanthropy, Irish artists created challenging work during the recession and subsequent partial recovery, including art which dealt with the crisis itself and other significant cultural production. Artists in Ireland, and in many other countries, are used to hard times because the higher amounts of state support that existed during the Celtic Tiger years were the exception rather than the rule, thus they have always needed to be flexible to adapt to prevailing conditions. This recent, and particularly harsh, economic period, however, has encouraged, particularly amongst young and emerging artists, a spirit of collectivism and cooperation that should be applauded. Furthermore, some positive initiatives or benefits developed as direct, or indirect, results of austerity.

One such benefit was the Abbey Theatre’s purchase of the adjacent property at 15–17 Eden Quay in 2012 (Abbey Theatre 2012). The acquisition of this building had been an aspiration for some time because it overlooks the Liffey and provides an opportunity, not only to expand the existing theatre, but also to realign it towards the river. Nevertheless, during the ‘boom’, it was always considered too expensive; ironically, however, the drawback now is that the capital cost of developing the site is currently beyond the theatre.

Another noteworthy initiative is the Gate Theatre’s introduction of Wednesday matinées for most of its productions from late 2014. This policy began after older audience members lobbied Gate director, Michael Colgan. There have been benefits for both parties, as these midweek performances now attract the second largest houses after
Saturday nights, and it has given additional income to the theatre, with minimal additional expenditure (Colgan 2016).

As far as private philanthropy is concerned, the largest publicly known instance has been the €7 million donation, in 2009, from rock band U2 and the Ireland Funds (€5m from U2) to establish Music Generation, the national music education programme for young people, although its origins pre-date the recession and can be dated to a government feasibility study as early as 2001; it also receives state money. Five years later, in 2015, U2 donated a further €2 million, along with €1 million from the Ireland Funds, for the expansion of the project. In 2011, the government had attempted to further encourage philanthropy, by making an additional €1 million available to the Arts Council to provide 50 per cent of the costs of a fundraiser in arts organizations; there has been some limited success, but this is very unlikely to make a substantial difference overall.

In 2011, Business to Arts, a not-for-profit organization, made the timely decision to establish Fund it, an all-island crowdfunding website for the cultural and creative industries. Over its first five years, €3.7 million has been pledged, with €3,416,000 raised from 60,244 pledges for 891 successful projects. The performance category had the highest number of projects, with the music category achieving the highest amount of funding (FitzGerald 2016).

The year 2016 has been a very successful one for Irish film. The Sundance Film Festival, the leading US showcase for independent cinema, selected and screened six feature films and one animated short, all with funding from the IFB. The previous week, nominations for the 88th Academy Awards included a record number of nine with Irish connections. Lenny Abrahamson’s Room received four and John Crowley’s Brooklyn was nominated three times: both were nominated for Best Picture. The IFB gave financial support to both films, which were international co-productions: Room was initiated in Ireland and Brooklyn, adapted from Colm Tóibín’s novel, in the UK. There were further nominations for two other Irishmen: Michael Fassbender (Best Actor for Steve Jobs) and Benjamin Cleary (Best Live Action Short for Stutterer). Although neither of these films received funding from the IFB, Fassbender and Cleary have been involved in previous productions which
received backing from the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (formerly the BCI), and the IFB. Ultimately, Benjamin Cleary and Brie Larson won Oscars.

The IFB has been at pains to stress that its current grant-in-aid is 40 per cent down since its pre-crash peak in 2008 and it has received the same amount from the government between 2014 and the present, with some extra administrative finance in 2016; consequently, it does not have sufficient resources to regularly produce international success and encourage vital new talent. As the chief executive stated (Clarke 2016b): ‘It needs that consistency of [adequate] support.’ This is not merely self-serving because the major talents behind Room and Brooklyn, such as Abrahamson, Guiney, and Crowley, have been supported by the IFB for a considerable time, since the IFB was restored in 1993 by the then Minster, Michael D. Higgins. This international success has come as a result of long-term investment. The director of the Irish Film Institute also emphasized that, in order for the arts in Ireland to continue these successes, the restoration of funding was required, otherwise ‘this recent awards-season success will be very short lived and unsustainable’ (Keane 2016). As film critic Donald Clarke (2016a) wrote:

> In the two decades since the reconstitution of the Irish Film Board…film-makers have steadily learned their trade, funders have tentatively dipped in toes and the public have become used to the idea that good films come from places other than southern California. Creating a suitable environment for filmmaking is akin to making a suitable environment for exotic wildlife. You need to plant the vegetation early.

The damage caused by the government’s cutting of arts funding has vastly outweighed any gains. The subsequent closure of many cultural organizations has taken away access to the arts from citizens. On the eve of the general election in February 2016, the National Campaign for the Arts (NCFA) stated that ‘the next and subsequent governments’ must take account of Article 27 (1) of the United Nations (UN)’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights:
Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits. (NCFA 2016)

(p.324) Perhaps the worst example of a cultural opportunity going to waste occurred when the Daniel Libeskind-designed Bord Gáis Energy Theatre, said to be ‘the best appointed performance space on the island’ (O’Toole 2014), was offered to commercial bidders by receivers appointed by the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA). Heather Humphreys, Minister for the Arts, was strongly criticized for not taking the opportunity to purchase it, on behalf of the state, at a bargain price.

In 2012, University College Dublin (UCD) historian, Professor Diarmaid Ferriter, resigned from the board of the National Library of Ireland, in protest at government policy on culture. He stated that the Irish Government paid ‘lip service’ to the importance of the library and other cultural institutions while ‘it seeks to emasculate these institutions’ (Carbery 2012). A number of commentators saw this (Duncan and Wall 2014), and a proposal to introduce entry charges to the National Museum of Ireland (since withdrawn) (journal.ie 2014), as further evidence that a substantial majority of politicians—not only within the then Fine Gael–Labour Government, but from all parties—for all their surface enthusiasm, have, at worst, disdain of, or, at best, a negligible commitment to arts and culture in Ireland. Roy Foster, Carroll Professor of Irish History at Oxford University, has been particularly critical:

the worlds of Irish politics and Irish culture exist in parallel universes. A series of philistine or distracted ministers for the arts...have made it embarrassingly clear that their interests lie elsewhere, while influential civil servants have over the last year or so [2013] reduced the powers and scope of organizations such as Culture Ireland, a semi-state body with a brilliant record of promoting creative new initiatives. (Foster 2013: 23–4)

Conclusion
Despite cuts in funding, income, and philanthropy, artists from all genres continued to make art during this difficult time period in Irish history, and a significant minority explored the crisis and its impact on the Irish people. The partial recovery
has seen a levelling off of cutbacks, and there were some successes for the arts in Ireland along the way. Although there were positives to come out of the recession, many of these benefits were due to factors such as FDI and tax incentives, such as the Section 481 scheme. However, it is clear that the future of the arts and culture in Ireland depends on long-term investment and the further reversal of cuts which occurred during the years of austerity. Without long-term planning and investment, the arts in Ireland will suffer as a consequence.

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