OF SONG & SUFFERING:

TALES FROM THE REALM OF THE ABJECT

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Of Song & Suffering;
Tales from the Realm of the Abject

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ASHLEIGH WILSON

Colophon

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Prologue

When telling a story it is usually best to start at the beginning. However, in this case, it is rather difficult to know which beginning to chose. For, this is a story from a place that has no history, or at least, not one single history and, thus, not one single beginning. When the past is contentious and shrouded in ambiguity it becomes difficult to ascertain what is true and what is not. What is this place and how did we get here? Can I trust you? Can you trust me? If there is no way to know what is true, then there can be no me and there can be no you and there can be no here.

And yet, here we are.

The beginning I have selected, and I am not completely confident in my choice, takes place in 17th Century Holland, a few years after the brutal mutilation of the brothers De Witt, in the centre of The Hague. Europe was in conflict with itself over power and religion. King William of Orange III, hell bent on religious domination, began to gather together an army of Protestants to put down the Catholic army in Ireland that was led by the disgraced King James II. In the end, he was successful, slaughtering as many Catholics as he could find. It would become known as The Battle of the Boyne or The Glorious Revolution. Of course, the glory was reserved only for some.

This distant ghost of proclaimed glory is revived every July right across the North of Ireland. The sweet nectar of the start of summer hovers on the evening air. The nights are long, far longer than on the mainland. The temperature is finally mild enough to sit outside until midnight, when the light finally falls away behind the distant hills. The perfect weather for celebrations to begin. Fires are set alight, cars are destroyed, houses are burnt and molotov cocktails are thrown. Of course, there is also music and marches and dancing. Mostly, however, the region comes to a standstill and just over half of the population do not dare to walk the streets at night.

So, this is glory…?

Please understand, however, if you were to ask the fire starters, the brick throwers or the marching flute players, a very different picture might emerge. But I did not start the fires or throw the bricks, nor can I play the flute. This glory is not mine. Northern Ireland was born in blood in the early 20th Century by the ruling powers in London. It was designed specifically so that Protestants would always outnumber Catholics, thus ensuring their control over local governments, housing and jobs. It was against this political landscape that the 30 year conflict broke out.

But, this is not a historical account, or a reportage. This is the contents of my stomach spilled across blank pages. And while not everything you might stumble across here will be rooted in fact, it is not necessarily untrue either. So, yes, you can trust me. As far as you trust yourself.

But, where to begin and when? Perhaps, with that sentence that I found in summer.

"*If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact, makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is abject, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses.*"

Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror, p. 2.

Abjection, on its own, is already quite an all encompassing subject and it can materialise in many disciplines. It is often visualised through bodily fluids, it is discussed in conjunction with psychoanalysis and imagined alongside the apocalypse. I am not here to talk about any of those things, but perhaps, in the end, I will talk about all of them.

The place where meaning collapses. This is my preferred definition of abjection, although there are multiple. Often it is thought of as a state of hopelessness, or as a feeling of disgust, but as you can see,

it goes beyond this. It is a fundamental state of lack into which most everything sinks. Kristeva develops her statement by clarifying that it is "not a lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system and order" (Kristeva, p. 4).

For me, this explanation speaks not only of abjection, but also to the condition of 'post'- conflict societies as well as the medium of photography itself. I would argue that the 'post'- conflict landscape is indeed the place where meaning collapses. Typically, these societies are framed and shaped by peace agreements; a written declaration of some form or another intended to absolve the wrongs of the past, dissolve the warring factions and create a space where new meaning can be salvaged from the ashes of the life that once was. This process is by no means straight forward. Signatures along a dotted line do not ensure peace. For violence lingers, persisting in different forms. Whether it lives on in the urban design of a city's neighbourhoods or through trauma and ideology, this lingering violence refuses to be destroyed, only transferred, much like energy. Scott Brewster opens his essay on abjection in Irish poetry by stating that, "It might be argued that Northern Ireland - a territorial and signifying space whose meanings and boundaries have been so violently contested, a body politic sustained and racked by anomalous and permeable partition - has been in a condition of abjection since its foundation" (p.21). The word abjection stems from the Latin 'ab' and 'jacere', meaning to throw away. To abject is to reject, and so to be abject is to be rejected, on an existential level. Throughout this thesis I will investigate how trauma, violence and photography relate to abjection as well as to each other. I will consider 'post'- conflict representations and attempt to formulate an artistic approach to this topic.

Time has no bearing here, amongst these pages. My research is interpolated with stories I've overheard, memories and half truths, each tale's truthfulness is as slippery to ascertain as the abject itself. The ancient is intertwined with the present, remembered as if it were yesterday. The spiralling narrative is situated yet not contained, stretching from the silent Irish valleys to the vast metropolis of Moscow. Each of my chapters is titled twice, once in English and

in Irish: the abject language of my land, the language that collapsed our government systems for over three years, the language that was forbidden to us. For this is an excavation of rejected knowledges and a challenge to official representations. Indeed, what is a 'post'-conflict landscape in truth? Is conflict ever truly resigned to the past? This thesis is an attempt to illustrate the lingering embers of conflict, and how to deal with them.

So let us begin.

CHAPTER ONE:

An Taiḃhse
(THE GHOST)

Abjection, Trauma and Photography

The Bog

The air has rain in it.

Glances of cool, even light dance about the tops of heathers as heavy clouds the colour of the mountain face break and tumble overhead.

The wind is sharp and unforgiving.
Quick breaths pierce your chest like daggers, making incisions on your ribs.

Before you stretches a sodden graveyard, the final resting place of ancient vegetation still decaying under your toes. And yet it appears alive; the reeds sigh, falling into one another. Froth bubbles up to the surface from the murky depths between the sedges as the water-logged ground shifts and settles.

This land harvests both life and death, for this mossy blanket breathes fire into hearths and cradles the corpses of the country's executions. Long forgotten fauna nestles against the gentle rise and fall of knees, stomachs and spines.

The cracked stone face of the mountain watches over the burial site, a lone witness to the dead.

{ LANDSCAPE AS NARRATIVE,

TRAUMA AS PERFORATION }

The later half of the twentieth and early twenty first century saw the sudden unearthing of a collection of bodies across Europe that had been impressively preserved in peat bogs. Many of them bore signs of brutal murder and sacrificial rituals. One such example is the Grauballe Man who was discovered in 1952 by peat-cutters just south of the small village of Grauballe in central Jutland, Denmark. A string of lacerations ran across his throat from ear to ear severing his gullet. The lack of seasonal fruits or greens found in the contents of his stomach indicated that he had died in the depths of winter, possibly around the time of the mid-winter celebrations. The practice of bloody human sacrifice in the name of the sacred goddess, Mother Nature, reached its peak during this time of year in the Iron Age[1].

"*but now he lies*
perfected in my memory,
down to the red horn
of his nails,

hung in the scales
with beauty and atrocity:
with the Dying Gaul
too strictly compassed

on his shield,
with the actual weight
of each hooded victim,
slashed and dumped."[2]

This is an excerpt from Irish poet Seamus Heaney's poem 'The Grauballe Man'. Heaney penned an assortment of poems about the bog bodies of Europe that were published in his collection 'North' in 1975. The early 70's were some of the bloodiest years of the conflict in Northern Ireland, so it is not surprising that these last brutal

words echo the fate of the thousands who were murdered during the conflict. This period was also marked by a series of disappearances. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) launched a campaign of disappearing people whom they determined to be colluding with the British Government. It is only in recent years that these bodies have began to return, emerging from their shallow bog graves much like their ancient counterparts. The 2000's have consisted of a spattering of investigatory digs in and around Irish bogland in an attempt to recover the elusive victims. In total, sixteen people were disappeared by the IRA, seven of whom were recovered from bogs. At the time of writing, there are three people who are still missing[3].

October 1972, Monaghan

A terrace house in Monaghan town, a phone call on a Friday. A family pack up their car and travel across the border, only to find that he's already gone. He was a new IRA recruit, but he had also been enlisted by British Army Intelligence. This was unforgivable. He was the second to disappear. He was seventeen years old. His body was recovered from a shallow grave in the bogland of County Meath forty three years after his disappearance.

November 1975, Dublin

In the winter the mist stretches out across the ragged landscape for miles; it's not hard to get lost. Another accused informer is shot and buried. His mother had just bought him new clothes for Christmas. He was seventeen years old. His body was never found.

March 1979, County Monaghan

The music still ringing in his ears, his head was light, his feet unsteady. He swayed down the country road under a lavender sky, waiting for headlights. The he saw them, shivering dots in the distance. He had also been branded as an informer and was taken by the IRA while hitchhiking home. His body was found in the Crossmaglen area in South Armagh thirty one years after his disappearance.

The preservation of these ancient and contemporary bodies probes at the idea of the landscape possessing its own memories and, by extension, its own trauma. But, maybe we must first define what we mean when we speak of landscape and of trauma. In the first instance, there is a wealth of research that interrogates the nature of landscape, how to define it and what significance it contains. The scale of this research is far too complex for us to fully delve into here, so allow me to outline my own brief musings of what I mean when I speak about landscapes.

The geographical landscape functions as the psychic space of collective narrative formation; it is the physical site onto which our understanding of history is projected but also the arena in which our narrative roles are played out. As recounted by Ken Taylor, modern landscape study began to shift in the late 20th Century and arrived at a place, "where landscape is not looked on as simply a pretty picture or as a static text: rather it was the expression of landscape as cultural process" (Taylor, p. 1). William John Thomas Mitchell builds on this idea in his book 'Landscape and Power'. In the introductory chapter he states his claim that "The aim of this book is to change 'landscape' from a noun to a verb. It asks that we think of landscape, not as an object to be seen or a text to be read, but as a process by which social and subjective identities are formed". (Mitchell, p.1).

It is clear, then, that the definition and study of landscape has evolved into something that is perceived to be far more active than previously imagined. In his text, Taylor goes on to specify that, "The connections, therefore, between landscape and identity and hence memory, thought, and comprehension are fundamental to understanding of landscape and human sense of place." (Taylor, p. 1). If we are to accept these assertions about the notion of landscape, then it could be fair to say that landscape is not necessarily a fixed entity of merely botanical significance, but also exists in the fluid space of collective imagination. This perspective of what a landscape signifies allows for a continuation of and elaboration on Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation state as "an imagined political community" (Anderson, p. 49).

Following this line of enquiry begs the question: if landscape can be considered a process of social and personal identity formation, thus functioning in the realm of the imagined, the psychic and the psychological, mustn't it also experience, harbour and suffer from trauma? Within the domain of pedological studies, It has already been established that the landscape retains memories in its soil. In the 19th century, V.V. Dokuchaev called soil "a mirror of the landscape". Targulian and Bronnikova state that, "the volume of factual materials accumulated to date about soils of the past and the history of the development of polygenetic surface soils is enormous" (Targulian and Bronnikova, p. 249). In light of this research, it does not seem ridiculous to suggest that the landscape also carries trauma. Let's assess this first by defining trauma for ourselves.

Cathy Caruth, a leading expert in the field of trauma studies, discusses trauma in terms of displacement, which she illustrates in her work, 'Trauma Explorations in Memory', by stating, "The trauma is the confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge" (Caruth p.153). The traumatic event is so jarring that it "cannot become, as Janet says, a 'narrative memory' that is integrated into a completed story of the past" (Caruth, p.153). In other words, it appears that trauma functions as an interruption, a perforation of individual narratives, puncturing any semblance of a sense of self. There is a dominant theory that exists within, and somewhere between, the spheres of Sociology and Psychology in regards to identity formation. 'Narrative Identity' as developed by Dan McAdams proposes that "identity itself takes the form of a story, complete with setting, scenes, character, plot and theme" (McAdams, p.101). So, if it can be said that identity formation is akin to narrative formation and landscape is itself a process of identity formation; landscape, then, must also be considered a process of narrative formation on both a social and individual level. The traumatised landscape is but an extension of its population and, when considered in conjunction with Caruth's assertion of trauma, becomes an unknowable, formless entity with no discernible history - "The history that a flashback tells … is therefore, a history that

literally has no place" (Caruth, p.153).

And so, this is how a place becomes a placeless void, suffering from a paradoxical concoction of both collective amnesia and an inescapable past. Indeed, Maria Tumarkin highlights this phenomenon in her book 'Traumascapes: The Power and Fate of Places Transformed by Tragedy' by suggesting that, "Traumatised people have to live with the past that refuses to go away. Similarly, at traumascapes… the past is never quite over" (Tumarkin, p.12). The ultimate difficulty with this state of affairs is that although the past is constantly present, it is also infuriatingly elusive, as Caruth articulates, "The phenomenon of trauma, as they suggest, both urgently demands historical awareness and yet denies our usual modes of access to it. How is it possible, they thus ask, to gain access to a traumatic history?" (Caruth, p.151).

{ PHOTOGRAPHY AS TRAUMA }

*T*his train of thought opens up possibilities to consider trauma in conjunction with photography. There appears to be an intrinsic connection between images and trauma, which can be seen even in hw they are discussed. Roland Barthes uses the term 'wound' to refer to images, stating that the chemical process through which a photograph is developed produces "an essence (of a wound), what cannot be transformed, only repeated" (Barthes, p.49). The word trauma in fact derives from the Greek meaning 'wound' which referred to a bodily injury, but when the term 'trauma' entered into psychiatry it came to mean "a wound {…} upon the mind" (Verstrynge p.3). When speaking of trauma, Caruth invokes images to describe its effects. She explicitly states that "in its repeated imposition as both image and amnesia, the trauma thus seems to evoke the difficult truth of a history that is constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence" (Caruth, p. 153). Indeed, Greenberg and van der Kolk also refer to "repetitive images of traumatic events" (Greenberg & van Der Kolk, p.191). Sigmund Freud made an explicit parallel between the internal experience and photography when he asserted that the psychic processing of experience "may be compared to the photograph" (Freud, p.199). This comparison continues as Freud evoked and developed the idea of latency in regard to trauma studies. The notion of latency is able to explain how trauma renders reality incomprehensible. Caruth asserts that it refers, not so much to the act of forgetting after a traumatic event has occurred, but rather pertains to the fact that during the event the victim was not entirely conscious. She states, "The experience of trauma, the fact of latency, would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself" (Verstrynge, p. 5).

Latency, here, not only refers to an 'othering' of reality but also implies a belatedness or delay. Jessica Lieberman highlights this when she says, "photography enlists a trauma - like delay - both spatial and temporal" (Lieberman, p.92). Like many other photography critics, Lieberman proposes that we consider a nonlinear model of photographic theory. One such critic who

also argues for this line of thinking is Ulrich Baer. He asserts that photographs contradict a linear conceptualisation of history and time (Liberman, p.91). Another prominent theorist who applies a similar mode of thinking is Walter Benjamin. He no only approaches photography from a nonlinear or ahistorical perspective, but he also applies this to his understanding and consideration of history itself. Kia Lindroos discusses Benjamin's position on this, she states that Benjamin's "idea of history is temporally infinite" (Lindroos, p.180). She goes on to explain how Benjamin arrives to this point of departure in his criticism by discussing the caesura, "the crossing point that opens up infinite possibilities to escape from linearity" (Lindroos, p. 180). Naturally, then, this perspective is also present in Benjamin's critique of photography, Lind Haverty Rugg highlights that, for Benjamin "the photograph interrupts time, spatialises time and makes time a-chronological" (Rugg, p.233). However Lieberman pushes the idea of latency even further by declaring that "there is no real property shared between an image and experience - just as there is an unbridgeable gap between a horrific event and a traumatic memory" (Lieberman, p. 73). For Lieberman, then, latency - both in terms of trauma and photography - is not merely a delay or inability to access an experience or memory. It signals a total separation of the image from reality and indexicality.

Building on this idea, Baer parallels not only the process of developing an image with trauma but also how the very act of taking an image relates to the way in which trauma functions. He proposes that the structure of the medium mimics the effects of trauma. The comparison can be found "in their mutual capture of unexperienced events" (Baer, p.8). He elaborates on this point by saying that "trauma blocks routine mental processes from converting an experience into memory". This, for him, also defines the mechanistic structure of photography. He goes on to state that photography "also traps an event during its occurrence while blocking its transformation into memory" (Baer, p.9). This separation from experience that Baer and Lieberman discuss is also a view that is shared by Rosalind Krauss. She affirms that photography is unable to integrate itself into really as she states that the medium is the

"indexical deposit of a real that it may mimic but of which it is never itself a part" (Butchen, p. 97). Lieberman expands on her analysis of photography's relationship, or lack thereof, with reality by extending her critique to digital as well as analogue photography. Her initial statement that "like traumatic experience, photographs are displaced from the 'reality' they reference" hardens significantly as she considers the rise of the digital image (Lieberman, p.87). In this instance, " the viewer may no longer expect any relationship between image subject and reality object at all" (Lieberman, p. 92). Allow me to momentarily revisit our idea of the traumatised (interrupted) landscape (narrative), and the soil that remembers. By drawing from the study of landscape and trauma, we can contemplate how soil is able to function as a latent image, by harbouring experiences, retaining them within its chemical compound. It seems that the very ground on which we tread is fraught with and haunted by the past as much as we are.

But how did we arrive at such a location?

The Photographs in the Post

A trickle of cool morning light seeps from the kitchen window, just enough to illuminate the gun metal sink and the clatter of cups and plates steeping in it. A thin layer of scum clings to the surface of the murky water. The rest of the room remains blanketed in shadow. The faucet spatters icy droplets into the basin, a monotone staccato. Tinny and hollow.

He leant tersely on the counter top, balancing a cigarette between two fingers, grime crusted under his nails. He stood there, holding the cigarette close to his lips, poised as if to take a drag but never did so. As the kettle reached a whistling crescendo on the stove behind him the ash from his unsmoked cigarette crumbled onto his bare stomach causing a sharp hiss to escape his gritted teeth. As he swiped the embers onto the tiles, a faint rattle drifted from the front of the flat as his letterbox swung shut. It was far too early for the postman.

He turned, flicking the cigarette butt into the sink and staggered down the dark hallway. A little white envelope lay face down on the doormat. He paused and stared at it for a moment. No one ever wrote him letters. He stooped, then straightened slowly, studying the handwriting scrawled across the front. Cursive. He frowned, ripping open the envelope and digging out the contents.

Photographs. A small stack of photographs. They were blurry and filled with grain. They were shot from above, that he could tell. A street dotted with figures. The back of a man's head. His street. His head. The last image was his face, full frame.

The photographs weren't in his hands anymore, but on the floor.

The British Army stationed themselves on top of the Divis Tower apartment block in Belfast during the conflict as it was the only available vantage point in the city. They would monitor and photograph local residents who they had reason to believe were involved with paramilitary organisations. They then proceeded to post the images to the individuals and their neighbours to act as a warning: 'we know who you are and we're watching you'.

Whether or not their intelligence was correct is another matter altogether.

{ THIRD SPACE AS ABJECT }

English interference in Ireland can be traced back to the 12th Century, however the total conquest and colonisation of the island was only consolidated by the end of the 17th Century. Subsequent rebellions to British rule spanned the course of the next 200 years before the Easter Rising of 1916 saw the realisation of an Irish Free State, which would go on to become the modern day Republic of Ireland. However, the deal for Irish freedom stipulated the sacrifice of 6 of the northern counties; Antrim, Armagh, Derry, Down, Fermanagh and Tyrone. These counties make up Northern Ireland, the last portion of the island that remains subject to British rule. Willingly, according to the British Government.

The Irish border, now made infamous across Europe thanks to the recurrent Brexit news-cycle, marks a lingering colonial wound on the landscape. During the conflict it became the focal point for a myriad of bloody attacks. The British Army attempted to cut off the blood supply with the Irish Republic by blowing up a series of so-called 'unapproved roads', vital veins for the surrounding rural communities. In defiance, and out of pure necessity, the local communities would search for miles to gather up the dislodged soil and fill in the craters with the very same material that was blown out of them. Of course, this was a dangerous task, not only did they risk stepping on a faulty landmine but they also risked repercussions from the British Army.

The border thus functions as a site of physical and psychic trauma, a geographical and psychological wound on the landscape and the people. The effects of this omnipotent colonial presence has been theorised to produce paranoia in the subject, "Lacan imagines the gaze not only as maleficent but as violent, a force that can arrest, even kill" according to Hal Foster (Foster, p.109). He goes on to list surveillance as a model of visuality that is tinged with paranoia and remarks that this paranoia produces "this paradoxical in/security of the subject" (Foster, p.109). This idea of an in/secure, or an unstable, subject directly relates to Julia Kristeva's theorisation of abjection. It is this instability that is the trademark of the abject, as discussed by Elizabeth Leane who proposes that Kristeva's theory provides a framework for exploring the unstable subject. She goes on to explain

that, "The abject disturbs the perceived division between subject and object, and correspondingly signals the instability of the subject's sense of unity" (Leane, p.58). Building upon our exploration of landscape as a process of identity formation and trauma as a force of displacement, let us begin to explore the lingering trace of colonial trauma.

The entire scope of post-colonial studies is, again, too rich in scale to outline here, however I would like to discuss the theory of Third Space as it pertains to the subsequent instability experienced by a traumatised landscape, a placeless place, a former colony. There is a certain irony in relating post-colonial theory to Northern Ireland, which cannot claim to be rid of colonial rule. But it is interesting to note that the ever unfolding, unending peace process that has defined the past 20 years combined with the reluctant participation of both the British and Irish governments has provided some space for the region to renegotiate its own sense of self; an endeavour that is only in its infancy. It is this process of renegotiation, with all the possibilities that it offers and all of the anxiety that it produces, that defines Third Space.

The concept of Third Space is often accredited to Homi K. Bhabha, who defined it as the site of cultural hybridity, which he states, "gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (Rutherford, p. 211). However, this initial iteration of the Third Space does not emphasise the anxiety that often accompanies the process of renegotiation. Robert Young's definition of Third Space which he discusses in terms of an instability of the internal experience, is more apt in capturing this dimension of the process. In his essay, 'The Void of Misgiving', he states "this third space is space that is both physical and psychic at once... the moment when you face the loss of subjectivity altogether to become an alien, displaced third person" (Young 2009, p. 91). Here, Young is referring to the public space as both a source of anxiety and of discourse in which subjects are constituted and dissolved. In order to further illustrate this, Young draws on Pascal's void which regularly opened beside him and which he feared would swallow him whole,

"turning being into nothingness" (Young, 2009, p. 91). It is worth noting the similarity that can be observed between Robert Young's imagining of a subject that is constantly constituted and dissolved and Kristeva's unstable, abject subject. Is it then possible to propose that the Third Space is also an abject space?

Rosalyn Deutsche echos Young's sentiment when discussing public space, which she refers to as the "phantom public sphere". Similarly to Young, she speaks of the uncertainty of public space, in which "meaning continuously appears and continuously fades" (Deutsche, 1996, p. 324). Notice also how Deutsche's postulations mirror Kristeva's definition of abjection as "the place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva, p.2). In addition to these iterations, Edward Soja, defines his own idea of Third Space as the site of collision between,

"*subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history*" (Soja, p. 57)

Soja approaches Third Space with the notion of 'both / and also' logic, meaning that there is opportunity for more than one possibility or outcome, denying the binary logic of 'either / or', he instead offers the option of multitudes (Gladwin, 2014). Third Space, for Soja, contains endless contradictions that are continuously negotiating around each other. This ghostly relationship between place, or placelessness, and abjection has not gone unnoticed. Klaus Ottmann explores how place relates to abjection in his dissertation, 'The Genius Decision: The Extraordinary and the Postmodern Condition', by referring to Barthes' assertion that the abject is a "non-site", before simply stating that, "Abjection is a condition of displacement, of deterritorialisation" (Ottmann, p.34). It should be noted that Ottmann's definition of abjection as a

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state of displacement echos Caruth's discussion of trauma as force that displaces. Indeed, it seems that trauma acts as the catalyst for abjection.

There appears to be a parallel between these varying iterations of Third Space - they all encompass and speak of a space in oscillation, constantly pulsating between a state of being and not being. The resultant outcome is that when the nature of a space, or place, is called into question, this has significant ramifications for those who populate that space. It is just as Deutsche writes, "man is deprived of the objectified, distanced, knowable world on whose existence he depends and is presented instead with unknowability, the proximity of otherness, and, consequently, uncertainty in the self". As such, it seems that we are in fact able to discern a relationship between the theories of abjection and Third Space, charted by their shared impulse to disturb meaning, reject certainty and draw the subject into question. It then appears fair to say that post-colonial, renegotiated and traumatised spaces, exist in a state of abjection; displaced by their own trauma. Despite the perceived lack of a physical colonial presence, there remains a palpable inner turmoil within the landscape and its people.

The Wall That Splits The Park in Two

When the sun is low in the sky, a long black shadow engulfs half of the park. Cast by the corrugated iron wall that slices through the centre from north to south, separating east from west. There is a door in the wall that opens during daylight hours and closes each night at dusk.

This wall is what is known as a 'Peace Wall'. There are ninety-seven of these structures severing neighbourhoods in two throughout the city of Belfast. We're told its for our own safety. But it's hard to recall any successful walls of division during any period of history.

Unlike the people, the ivy has a right of passage at any time of day. Long after the door is closed, the green tendrils edge slowly ever more over to the other side. Leaves outstretched, hoping for a hint of sunlight and room to grow.

To speak of trauma, is to speak of abjection, is to speak of photography.

ENDNOTES

1   Peter Glob, *The Bog People: Iron Age Man Preserved* (New York: Cornell University Press), 37-63.

2   Seamus Heaney, *North* (London: Faber & Faber), p.28

3   https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/fresh-appeal-for-information-to-find-final-three-disappeared-38524763.html (Acessed 20th October 2019).

Corp Marbh
(EXQUISITE CORPSE)

Abjection, Violence and Photography

The Virgin Suicides

No matter who you ask, no matter what school they went to, everyone has a different story about a kid that killed themselves, which is alarming for a town as small as mine.

It was a Monday morning when we heard. Whispers were flying around the halls, one of the year 9s found hanging in her bedroom. She was barely 13.

When the bell rang for assembly there was silence as all 700 pupils sat on the floor of the big hall. The dead girl's class came in last, collectively sniffling, holding each other. The principal stood on the stage and told us the news. The wails of 25 thirteen year olds filled the hall.
We had to sit in the cafeteria for the rest of the day. We were handed out teas and coffees while the school councillor came round and talked to each of us.

She was the second suicide at my school in five years. The previous girl had slit her wrists in the toilets beside the art rooms at lunch time. A teacher found her in a heap on the floor, her blood pooling in between the tiles. Everyone was sent home.

I don't remember these days. I only know how it happened from hearing other people talk about it. I was there, I know that I was there, but I don't remember these days when the dead girls were found.

{ PHOTOGRAPHY AS VIOLENCE,
VIOLENCE AS PHOTOGRAPHY }

In the first chapter we explored how trauma acts as a destabilising force; it interrupts narrative, displaces history and renders the identity of the subject unknowable even to themselves. In understanding these things we can safely say that trauma collapses traditional forms of meaning and thus, according to Kristeva's definition, renders those who suffer from trauma, be it an individual, a community or a social landscape, abject.

But from where does trauma stem? Events that are described as traumatic are often also considered violent; this is logical considering the effect of trauma. As we've already stated, trauma causes history to disintegrate by the very fact that the haunted images of an inescapable past force themselves into the present, demanding to be seen and felt over and over again. Violence, then, is implicit in the very structure of trauma. So, if we consider trauma a product of violent means, it can also be suggested that violence is responsible for the collapse of historical understanding and the instability of the subject. If we accept that a breakdown of meaning is perpetrated by acts of violence then this indicates that violence also produces abjection which, thus, becomes a form of violence in itself. This naturally poses a question about photography. We have already established the parallels between the structure of trauma and photography as a medium, but if trauma is the product of violent acts then mustn't the image also be implicated in this violence? In order to assess this, I will revisit a small essay of mine that highlights the sordid relationship forged between violence, photography and the nature of visibility.

Susan Sontag's On Photography discusses the various ways in which the medium reproduces reality. Sontag argues that photography not only creates its own version of reality but is in fact the site of production for reality as photographs "alter and enlarge our notions of what is worth looking at and what we have a right to observe. They are a grammar and, even more importantly, an ethics of seeing" (Sontag, p. 1). If photographs provide an ethics of seeing, it is concerning that Sontag goes on to assert that photography, as a medium, is inherently aggressive, stating that "there is an aggression implicit in every use of the camera" (Sontag, p.4). A photograph

symbolically rips the person photographed out of time and space, fixing their body, their image forever in the same position, unmoving. In this way, as Barthes has argued, "whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe". This understanding of images as the process of fixing a person is echoed by Sontag's assertion that, "To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge — and, therefore, like power" (Sontag, p.2). Sontag insists photography is an aggressive act which alienates us from direct experience and provides an illusion of knowledge. Disjunct, mute, the photograph cannot tell the truth. Victor Burgin in his essay 'Looking at Photographs' outlines his concerns about the medium of photography. He asserts that photographs are both producers and productions of ideology, stating, "the photograph is a place of work, a structured and structuring space within which the reader deploys, and is deployed by, what codes he or she is familiar with in order to make sense" (Burgin, p.153). Burgin critiques not only the medium of photography but the act of looking itself as, in a similar vein to Sontag, he argues that photographs make us complicit in what we consume by stating, "our conviction that we are free to choose what we make of a photograph hides the complicity to which we are recruited in the very act of looking" (Burgin, p.148). He proposes that photographs, and photographing, is a form of control exercised by the dominant ideology; photography is not neutral, the very material itself is implicated by the ideology of the society that created it. John Tagg also seeks the social and economic production modes that give rise to a photograph. Tagg, like Burgin, relates photography to the field of ideology, stating that, "photography as such has no identity"; its status "as technology varies with the power relations that invest it" – in this sense, its function as a "mode of cultural production… is tied to definite conditions of existence, and its products are meaningful and legible only within the particular currencies they have"(Tagg, p.63). According to Tagg, the ideological effectiveness of photography is rooted in its conception "as a direct, 'natural' copy of reality", a 'hallucinated' reality. In line

with the arguments presented by Sontag, Burgin and Foucault, Tagg asserts that photography is a mechanism of control that is imposed on society, stating that photography is "ultimately a function of the state" that is deeply implicated in the ruling class's "apparatus of ideological control" (Linfield, p.9).

Michel Foucault proposes his idea in Discipline and Punish, that modern discipline does not end with repression, but is also an institutional productivity and functionality model. He discusses photography in terms of the function of an archive, which he argues, similarly to Tagg, Burgin and Sontag, exercises control in so much so that it organises information and offers the possibility to order reality. According to Foucault, this is how power operates; through the orderly arrangement of bodies in space, he states that "Bodies are organised and controlled through the organisation and control of space… the body does not position space around itself. It is positioned in space. Furthermore, it does not render its space functional; rather, it is made functional by means of space." (Crossley, p.106). Additionally, Foucault states that, "Visibility is a trap" and maintains that sight allows control to be exercised on those who are visible. Foucault gives the example of the panoptic system that exists in prisons as a means to regulate the behaviour of inmates, however the underlying sentiment, that is that vision is power, is interesting to apply to photography. If a camera can facilitate vision then it can also wield power, specifically over those that it renders visible (Slatman 2010).

In his book 'Being and Nothingness', Sartre outlines his conceptualisation of the subject. For Sartre, the subject, what he calls the 'being for itself' or a being that is free, exists in relation to the object, the 'being in itself', a thing which is is not free. Sartre proposes that when a 'being for itself' encounters another 'being for itself' through the gaze there is always an aggression implied in this interaction. Both of the 'beings for itself' must subjugate the other, they must degrade the other into a 'being in itself' in order to retain their own freedom. Thus, Sartre asserts that all our interactions will be flawed as "to ensure our own freedom we will need to conceive of the other as an unfree thing". Sartre's conceptualisation of this

symbolically violent relationship which is facilitated by the gaze is interesting to consider in relation to photography. Sartre's position implies that the camera is also implicated in the aggressive quality that the gaze possesses as, in accordance with the ideas of Tagg and Foucault, the gaze of the camera asserts power over its subject and proceeds to subjugate them (Sartre, p.222-232).

Photography is steeped in associations with violence and perhaps this is also informed by the close ties the medium has to death. This fascination with mortality is visible in some of the earliest photographs ever made, the famed 'Portrait of a Drowned Man' is one that comes to mind. The writings of Barthes are consumed by this notion, but there is an entire strand of image theory that investigates these connections in almost forensic detail. If every image is a death and the act of photographing is also an act of subjugation there can be no disentanglement of the medium from an act of violence.

The Paramilitary Trap

A few years ago, I worked in a liquor store. It was located on the edge of a housing estate that was home to two warring paramilitary factions. One afternoon, a teenage boy walked into the store and tried to buy some cider. My co-worker turned him away as he had no identification. The boy started to yell across the store at the both of us and threatened that we better be careful when leaving work that night, he was going to get his guys on us. We both knew what that meant: he was involved with one of the paramilitary gangs and now we were their targets.

When he left the store, my co-worker rang the police and explained what had just happened. Officers were immediately dispatched to us. When they arrived, they took us into the back room of the store and asked us to describe the incident and the boy who threatened us. It so happened that my co-worker lived in the same housing estate and was pretty sure he could identify him. Because of this, he was sure that the boy's threat was very real. When we finished the police swiftly told us that there was nothing they could do.

-            *Someone has just threatened that an illegal terrorist group will attack us when we close the store tonight.*
-            *Probably nothing will happen.*

When the police left, my co-worker rang his father. He recognised the description of the boy immediately and assured us that the situation would be 'taken care of'. A few weeks later I asked my co-worker what had happened to the boy. He told me that his dad was a member of the rival paramilitary gang and had arranged for a few men to beat him up within an inch of his life. He was about seventeen. That was the day I lost my faith in the police.

{ A MOTHER BRINGS HER SON TO BE SHOT }

Mother Brings Her Son to be Shot' is a 2017 documentary from Sinead O'Shea that investigates the prolific phenomenon of paramilitary punishment shootings which function as part of a vigilante justice system that is often the only form of policing available in a spattering of local communities across Northern Ireland today. These shootings involve the paramilitary group informing the family of the accused that they are to be shot. Often, the duty falls on the mothers to take their own sons to these punishment appointments. If they do not obey orders, the shooting may escalate to a killing and the entire family will be put at risk.

The documentary focuses on one such community that is policed in this manner in the city of Derry, following one of the victims of this style of attack, Philly Junior O'Donnell, and his mother, Majella, who escorted him. The film considers the lasting effects an attack like this can have on a family and the wider community. It opens with the youngest child of the family, Kevin Barry, who is around eleven or twelve, proudly presenting his stash of weaponry and provides detailed descriptions of how to best use them to inflict maximum injury. His older brother, Philly Junior, has been the victim of a paramilitary punishment shooting. They accused him of selling drugs. Over the course of the film, Philly is exiled to Belfast but insists on returning to his home in Derry despite the rise of death threats levelled against him.

The family appear helpless in the face of the ever-present criminal gangs, with particular pressure falling on Majella, as throughout most of the film her husband, Philly Senior, is absent while serving time in prison. The documentary closes with the release of Philly Senior, and one last catch up with Philly Junior. He has settled down with his girlfriend and is expecting a baby. However, the final captions reveal that this apparent happy ending is not what it seems. They note that Philly Senior became a recipient of another punishment shooting a few weeks after filming ceased. The documentary ends, but there is no indication of when or how the violence will.

I saw 'A Mother Brings Her Son to be Shot' at an independent cinema in Belfast. It was April, the evening before my flight back to Amsterdam. I made the trip into the city centre to say goodbye to some friends. This visit to the cinema, however, was unlike any other I'd experienced. After the screening, an analysis of the film was conducted by three leading sociologists who work with post-conflict societies, all of whom were highly critical of the documentary. Much of the audience came from elsewhere in Europe or America. They were, understandably, shocked by what they had seen. The film painted a very different picture from the Northern Ireland that they had grown to know. That's the thing about the lingering embers of conflict. They lurk, they evade witness and any reports of them are suppressed in order to push a narrative of progress. This documentary was confronting for many in its endeavour to challenge the myth that conflicts remain firmly in the past.

It is probable that the timing of the event contributed to the tense atmosphere. The screening took place only a couple of days after the fatal shooting of a local journalist, Lyra McKee, in the same area of Derry where Philly and his family live. Those responsible for her murder were a part of the same organisation who shot Philly. Lyra's murder occurred during a night of rioting. Police had entered a residential area to conduct a weapons raid and the local community reacted furiously. Petrol bombs were thrown, barricades were formed and, at one point, gunshots rang out, which struck Lyra McKee in the head.

It was against this sequence of events that the three sociologists. Teresa Degenhardt, Siobhan McAllister and Liam Kennedy, welcomed questions from the audience during their panel discussion. One man took the opportunity to make the point that the documentary continued to stereotype and vilify working class communities, while side stepping the severity of state sanctioned violence and the extreme lack of mental health services. His

comment was received well by the rest of the audience but less so by Professor Kennedy. He responded to the man by denying that there is much validity to the evidence for state sponsored violence. This led to a heated discussion between the two men, with both of them eventually shouting at each other. The argument came to an uneasy conclusion as Professor Kennedy's composure slipped entirely, he lamented that the criminals in the documentary killed his friend, Lyra McKee, and compared these shootings to Sharia Law. The audience was quite shocked by his outburst.

I am not going to delve into the evidence concerning the British Government's policy of sponsoring criminal gangs to kill anyone, civilian or otherwise, who was inconvenient to the British Government's ambitions in Northern Ireland. I am, however, interested in how this controversial piece of information informs the criticism of this film.

So, let us consider the criticism waged against this documentary by the academics. One of their key points of concern was that O'Shea seemed to get swept away by the information she received from ex-paramilitary members, they argued that she allowed them to dominate the documentary's narrative and didn't interrogate their position. As the documentary continued, Philly and his family became less and less willing to talk to O'Shea as the level of her involvement with the ex-paramilitary members became more apparent to them. The attention seems to fall away from the victim's story as the veteran gang member's infiltrate the film's narrative.

{ THE ACT OF KILLING }

I t is interesting to note here that the criticism and discussion
around O'Shea's 'A Mother Brings Her Son to be Shot' echoes
some of the statements levelled towards 'The Act of Killing'
directed by Joshua Oppenheimer, who, coincidentally, was also an
executive producer of 'A Mother Brings Her Son to be Shot'.
'The Act of Killing' follows some members of the myriad of
vigilante groups that were responsible for the Indonesian mass
killings that spanned 1965-1966. These gangs carried out what is
estimated to be over a million murders of members of left wing
political parties and suspected communists. Oppenheimer, who
produced the film together with Werner Herzog, Errol Morris,
Andre Singer and Joram ten Brink, approached the men involved in
the killings to make a collaborative film and tell the story of their
history.

The men choose their favourite film genres, Western, Gangster and
Musical, through which to narrate their story. Through the men's
conversations between scenes we learn that they still control their
communities by forcing local businesses to pay protection money.
The people who live under the coercion and intimidation of these
men are not featured in the documentary and it is clear that it is not
safe for them to tell their stories.

If we are to take the title as an indication, this was not the goal
for O'Shea's film. Both the title, and the synopsis indicate that the
film's primary focus is on those affected by residual violence. As
things go from bad to worse for the O'Donnell family, O'Shea's
presence becomes an overbearing, problematic force in the family
home. As the O'Donnells continue to pull away from her, the ex-
paramilitary members become more and more interested in talking
to O'Shea; sharing their perspective on the surrounding community,
the role of paramilitaries and the O'Donnells in particular. O'Shea
effectively hands over the powers of narration to those implicated in
paramilitary violence, a criticism that has also been levelled against
Oppenheimer's film.

While it is true that 'The Act of Killing' does maintain the essence

of its title throughout, the question remains whether that should have been the focus in the first place, as Guardian film critic Nick Fraser has noted. In his article 'The Act of Killing: don't give an Oscar to this snuff movie', Fraser details his objections to the film's unconventional approach towards documentary story telling. A key point of his is similar to the criticism O'Shea has earned; he states that much of the scrutiny in 'The Act of Killing' is misplaced. Fraser cites an article from executive producer Errol Morris in which he compares Oppenheimer's approach to Hamlet's use of theatre to expose foul play within the Danish court. However, Fraser challenges this, instead proposing that, "a more apt analogy than Morris's might come from Shakespeare's darkest play, Macbeth. What would we think if Macbeth and his scheming wife were written out of the action, replaced by those low-level thugs paid to do bad business on their behalf? We might conclude that putting them centre stage, in the style of The Act of Killing, was indeed perverse and we'd be right."

This invocation of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth is in reference to the documentation of significant U.S. involvement in the mass murders of Indonesia. The U.S. government supplied the Indonesian military who facilitated the killings with financial aid to the sum of fifty million Rupiah as well as providing them with intelligence and a list with thousands of names of alleged left wing party leaders and suspected communists. This aspect of the story is not included in the documentary, which instead provides space for the perpetrators to reenact and romanticise their memories of the murders. They wedge themselves firmly under the spotlight, offered up to the viewer for both glory and condemnation. The full extent of U.S. involvement remains unknown to this day as many of the government documents that pertain to Indonesia are classified. It could be argued that perhaps an investigatory documentary that probes into the lingering secrecy clouding the U.S. would have been more beneficial than a cinematic spectacle that becomes as indulgent as it is expository. As Oppenheimer's unwavering gaze tightens around the necks of the killers, a blind eye is turned towards the scheming Macbeths on the other side of the world.

The same can be said of O'Shea's documentary. In addition to leaning on the views of ex-paramilitary men, the film takes some strange avenues to explore the impact of these shootings. There are moments when the questions that O'Shea puts to Philly's mother, Majella, are almost accusatory, as if she is to blame for the circumstances in which she and her family find themselves. The film, whether purposefully or not, appears to individualise Majella, personalise her handling of the issue and criticise her response. It seems as though O'Shea neglects to place Majella into a wider socio-political and economic context or consider that her family's situation is at the mercy of a volatile political environment and a vacuum in effective policing. Northern Ireland's gormless politicians, the policing board, an underfunded education system and a complete lack of infrastructure is what has failed Majella's children, not Majella.

However the documentary never leaves the small housing estate in which these personal conflicts play out. It remains close to home, never turning a critical eye towards the systems that are failing generation after generation. There is no mention throughout the documentary that the Northern Ireland executive has collapsed during filming. The gaze instead hovers incessantly around the O'Donnell family home, dissecting their movements and at times coercing them into conversations. A portion of the film obtains information from Philly while he is under the influence of drugs. This information was highly sensitive, the distribution of it may have jeopardised his safety in the community or incriminated him. This analysis has provided me with an interesting opening to the question of how to approach the portrayal of a society that is struggling to escape the supposed 'historical' conflict. For these communities, the conflict is still very much present. So, what, then, does an unofficial conflict actually look like? O'Shea's film goes to some length to answer this question, and it does indeed look like what is shown in the documentary. However, it also looks like something else that O'Shea seems to forget about halfway through her film, and that Oppenheimer never attempted to capture; the silent suffering of those indirectly affected by a culture that has submitted

to violence. It's the day to day struggle to try to maintain some semblance of order amidst a society in chaos. The noble effort to make sure everyone has clean clothes, that dinner is on the table and the heating bills are paid. These are the only ways a mother knows how to protect her children in a place that considers the shooting of teenagers in back alleyways to be an acceptable form of justice. Nick Fraser makes a curious note in the conclusion of his article. He cites a 1944 essay by Arthur Koestler called 'The Nightmare That is a Reality'. The piece ponders that, despite numerous efforts to sound the alarm, a majority of the American public did not believe in the Nazi concentration camps, did not believe in the atrocities, did not believe in the millions of deaths; it was just too inconceivable. Koestler paints an image of himself and other journalists as screamers whose warnings fall on deaf ears. The suggestion being that in the face of horror, all one can do is scream and hope to be heard.

Both of these documentary films certainly make you want to scream, but my question of how effective they are in portraying a society trapped in a cycle of perpetual violence remains. It somehow seems that in an attempt to pursue the 'thing itself' (the actual murderers in the case of 'The Act of Killing', the actual victims in the case of 'A Mother Brings Her Son to be Shot'), a more comprehensive and all encompassing truth, if there is such a thing, has eluded them. It makes me wonder if maybe the silent scream of Koestler is more honest, more truthful, than the spectacular noise that these documentaries generate. But what, then, are the implications for modes of representation? Surely, there must be an utterance?

The Funeral Home

As winter faded into memory, I watched the snow and tried to catch it.
All night I stood bathed in the glow of fiery streetlights
and the flickering light in the funeral home doorway.
The silence cupped the city like hands
clasped tightly around a baby bird.
As I reached into the darkness,
those heavenly flakes,
upon my touch,
died.

Ever since I can remember, a funeral home has lived on the other side
of the street. Every so often I would wake up to a procession outside
my bedroom window. Sometimes, I'd sit for a while and watch the
trembling clusters of black coats clutch at each other as they wept.

I remember once, a little boy fainted in the street as the coffin was
hauled through the throngs of mourners. He left in an ambulance
before the hearse crawled onto the road, his family trudging behind it.

At night I used to sit by my window and peer into the warm glow
that radiated from the modest little house. The curtains were always
drawn. I would watch as, one by one, the lights snapped off and
eventually an expressionless man would emerge, locking the door
behind him. The place would lie in darkness, all for the faulty light
above the doorway that flickered on and off until morning. I used to
wonder who was temporarily living across from me. It crossed my
mind from time to time that whoever was there was playing with the
light switch. But I never saw any bodies go in, I only ever saw them
leave in a shower of flowers and tears.

To speak of violence is to speak of trauma, is to speak of abjection, is to speak of photography.

CHAPTER THREE:

Rud Ar Bith A Rá
(SAY NOTHING)

Abjection, Meaning and Photography

Illegitimate

One evening, not so long ago, I was having dinner at a friend's house. There I met Jana, an artist from Russia, who upon finding out that I was from Northern Ireland proceeded to tell me a story about the time she had visited. She was having an exhibition in the city of Derry and had travelled over for the show. She explained that often when she travels her bank will block her card, which happened on this occasion but she had agreed with the gallery to receive her fee in cash. After the exhibition, she was travelling to Venice before returning to St. Petersburg, so she was relying on the cash to get her through the next week until she could go home. Once she arrived in Venice, she tried to exchange the British pounds to Euros but was told by the clerk that it was not possible as the Northern Irish bank notes she had were not legally recognised.

At this point, I started to laugh. How silly! How typical! I told Jana that was ridiculous, of course our bank notes are valid - we use them everyday!
No, she insisted, they definitely aren't.
Well, I conceded, we do have this difficulty in England, often they will reject our notes but how did you manage?
Well, Jana continued, when she returned to Russia, she was eventually able to find someone willing to exchange the illegitimate Northern Irish notes into Roubles, but for a terrible rate.

Jana's story made me think of all the times English stores had turned me away, all the arguments my uncle had had with waitresses in London who wouldn't accept Bank of Ireland pound notes. I always thought it was a misunderstanding, typical English ignorance, that sort of thing. But, European banks also refusing our notes? After a quick google search you can easily find a host of information about the legal status of Northern Irish bank notes, and it turns out they are in fact completely illegal everywhere in the world, including in Northern Ireland.

But, of course it's like this. Of course, even our money has been emptied of all significance, all meaning, all sense. Our existence is contingent.

{ THE PERILS OF UTTERANCE }

L et us, then, consider utterance in conjunction with abjection. While asking the question of how to represent the aftermath of extreme violence and the persistence of trauma, a famed quote from Theodore Adorno enters my mind. In his essay 'Cultural Criticism and Society', Adorno announces, "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric". Of course, this statement also triggers one to think of the story of Nero, the infamous Roman Empire who is said to have played the fiddle and watched as Rome burned. Seamus Heaney invokes the story of Nero's callousness in the beginning of his short essay 'The Interesting Case of Nero, Chekhov's Cognac and a Knocker'. He is reminded of this tale upon reminiscing about a night spent with his friend, David Hammond, who was a musician. On this evening, in 1972, Heaney and Hammond travelled into Belfast to record a few songs to send to their mutual friend in America. On their way, a series of bombs were detonated in the city and there was news of casualties. The wailing of sirens persisted throughout the night. Heaney remembers that, "the very notion of beginning to sing at that moment while others were beginning to suffer seemed like an offence against their suffering". Upon reflection, Heaney, later in his essay, goes on to pose the question, why should art "ever constitute an affront to life?"

Nicholas Chare highlights the dangers of representing in the aftermath of atrocity and describes the gulf that exists between the artwork and its subject matter. In his thesis, 'On Nothing: A Kristevan Reading of Trauma, Abjection and Representation' Chare states that all art "that endeavours to bear witness to atrocity does so at the risk of being beautiful. It threatens to cause the reader pleasure." All representations rely on meaning in order to communicate, but as Chare goes on to point out, there may be a rift between what is being said about a particular event and how that event might have felt; "Words also mean things, whereas what the words describe, the actual events; were, perhaps, felt to be beyond meaning." A tangible example of how traumatic events can be rendered utterly meaningless is put forward by Dori Laub who suggests that the Holocaust is an "event without witness." Because the violence was so total and all consuming, it resulted in

the complete break down of the subject: "the Holocaust created…
a world in which one could not bear witness to oneself". This
statement alone can serve as a definition for abjection. Elizabeth
Gross does exactly this by affirming that abjection is the "undoing
of identity". Indeed, a further expansion of this idea is echoed by
Derek Hook in his article on abjection, something he determines
to be that which "eats away at the familiar explanatory or 'holding
narratives' of a culture, threatening to swallow them". It is for this
reason that the abject is thought to have existed before the symbolic
and 9operate within the realm of the semiotic, it effectively pre-dates
representation itself.

So if abjection, and therefore horror, atrocity, violence, cannot be
entirely comprehended, and the abject eludes representation by
definition, how can we hope to represent it at all? In an effort to
solve this conundrum I am drawing from Chare's discussion of
Abjection. In his thesis he states that horror, and therefore abjection,
"can only be communicated through the non-communicative". I am
reminded once more of Koestler's aforementioned hollow scream:

"*There is a dream that keeps coming back to me at
almost regular intervals; it is dark and I am being
murdered in some kind of thicket or brushwood; there
is a busy road at no more than ten yards distance. I
scream for help but nobody hears me, the crowd walks
past chatting and laughing. I know a great deal of
people share, with individual variations, the same type
of dream. I have quarrelled about it with analysts and
I believe it to be an archetype in the Jungian sense; an
expression of the individual's ultimate loneliness when
faced with death and cosmic violence, and his inability
to communicate the unique horror of his experience.*"

This cry that has been emptied of all sound, all meaning, is an
interesting model to consider representing the incommunicable, the
abject. In fact, this image has been invoked to portray just this. The

1965 film, The Pawnbroker, is a portrait of a Holocaust survivor living in New York City, who is plagued by traumatic flashbacks of his not so distant past experiences in the Nazi Concentration Camps. Nazerman owns a pawn shop and navigates the hostile metropolis, a city that constantly looks but does not see. The film is punctured with glimpses of Nazerman's past which incurably disrupt his daily life. He has lost his family to the camps, and as such has very few people left in his life, except for the shop boy who helps him run the pawnshop. After a series of events, Nazerman witnesses the shop boy sacrifice his life to protect him, and is then left irrevocably alone. The lasting image of the film is of Nazerman crouched over the shop boy's lifeless body. He opens his mouth as if to scream but no sound escapes. This silent scream has become an emblem of the Holocaust survivor, as Annette Insdorf has noted in her essay on 'The Pawnbroker'. She describes those who perform this "mute scream" as "the witness of a horror so devastating that it cannot be told". Specifically of Nazerman, Insdorf highlights how this inaudible scream "expresses his essential isolation, as if acknowledging that a scream would not reach human ears anyway". At the core of the Pawnbroker is a fundamental absence, embodied by the mute Nazerman, his very body becoming a vacant, gaping hole. Meaning has vacated, pure lack is all that remains. Utterance has become impossible.

{ ABSENCE AND SILENCE }

Julie Bacon discusses absence and silence as strategy in her essay, 'Silence, Failure and Non-Participation: Art Beyond the Manifest'. She considers a particular piece of performance art staged by Zygmunt Piotrowski in which the artist arranged a public discussion, led by him, but declined to speak. Bacon suggests that this act of absence enables the unrepresentable to come to the fore and collapses the veil between our inner and outer worlds. She specifies the tension that exists between the abject's desire to be represented and the impossibility of fulfilling this compulsion. It is exactly this conflict that Piotrowski enacts in his silent absence.

I'd like to consider a further instance in which silence and absence have been able to manifest themselves in an artwork. The short 1989 television film, 'Elephant', directed by Alan Clarke and produced by Danny Boyle, is another example that does just this. Drawing from police reports during the period of conflict in Northern Ireland, known as the Troubles, Clarke's film observes the execution of eighteen murders in the city of Belfast. Minimalist and almost documentary in approach, the camera silently follows a series of individuals hurrying, strolling, pacing towards an unknown location. The viewer is never sure if they are watching the victim or the murderer until someone in the frame produces the weapon and carries out the fatal act. The camera hovers, witnessing the composed exit of the perpetrator before lingering over the body of the victim for longer than feels comfortable. And then then cycle begins again, we're following someone else and all we can do is wait to see if they will kill or be killed.

The film is interesting in this regard because it offers no explanation, no context and no relief from the incessant violence. There is almost no dialogue and no familiarity with any of the characters, the only certainty is the cycle of murder with no sign of slowing. It is this narrativeless, cyclical structure that empties the film of any sense of meaning; who are these people, why are they doing this, do they know each other, why is nothing being done about this, why is this accepted? None of it matters and we'll never know. This meaningless violence is, of course, the entire point. As the conflict in Northern Ireland dragged on into the 1980s and 1990s, the warring

terrorist groups became more and more desperate to claim victory over the other. Many civilians were shot for no reason other than having distant and tenuous links to people who the groups were opposed to. It was often the average citizen who paid the highest cost of the conflict. There was a growing feeling amongst society that the conflict was merely violence for the sake of violence, absent of any rhyme or reason. The killing was so frequent and felt so pointless. Another funeral every day and for what? What did it achieve in the end? It is exactly this sentiment that Clarke's film provokes.

In addition to an absence of meaning, silence is also invoked by Clarke. Not only is there next to no dialogue contained within the film itself, but the title also points towards a more fundamental silence that surrounded the actual violence at the time of making. 'Elephant' refers to the idea that the perpetual violence in Northern Irish society was the unspoken elephant in everyone's living room. In an effort to lead a normal life, people by and large declined to acknowledge the seriousness of the conflict, choosing instead to occupy themselves with other matters; anything to avoid thinking about the daily atrocities. This attitude still pervades today. Talk of the conflict is avoided at all costs. Silence is essentially a character in itself throughout the film. With every death an empty silence follows that speaks not only to the absolute sense of loss felt across all sections of society, but also to the complacency of society. With each murder, the killers are able to smoothly escape without disturbance or stirring the surrounding neighbourhoods. As a result, there appears to be an absence of a society at all, an absence of law and order, an absence of community - the only witness is the camera (and thus the viewer) who is powerless to stop the killing but is forced to watch it constantly unfold. If we cast our minds back to the incidents featured in Sinead O'Shea's 'A Mother Brings Her Son to be Shot', then it seems that, in many ways, not a lot has changed in the thirty years since the making of Clarke's 'Elephant'.

Although I feel that all four films, 'The Act of Killing', 'The Pawnbroker', 'A Mother Brings Her Son to be Shot', and 'Elephant', are very important and influential pieces of cinema, I also think that

there are some distracting flaws in the documentaries that are no present in the fictional renditions. Both 'A Mother Brings Her Son to be Shot' and 'The Act of Killing' seem to become tangled in the web of complexity that ensnares their subject matter, which is a potential pitfall of working with 'the thing itself', as previously mentioned. It seems that the strength of 'The Pawnbroker' and 'Elephant' are steeped in the simple fact that they are not bound to the constraints of reality and are thus able to reveal simple but fundamental truths about the subjects without it being clouded by the personal grievances of individuals. Both films cut through the potentially distracting statistics and specifics that surround the events, instead laying bare a recognisable and humble truth; that violence, and thus abjection, is all consuming, isolating and fundamentally renders the subject silent. All that remains in the aftermath is absence and silence.

It is interesting to formulate this distinction between documentary and fictitious films, especially if we consider Kristeva's thoughts on the relationship between fiction and abjection. Kristen writes that literature is in itself a perfect form of abjection as it is "rooted… on the fragile border… where identities (subject/object etc) do not exist or only barely so - doubly fuzzy, heterogenous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject" (p. 207). She concludes this thought by affirming that literature involves the ultimate "unveiling of the abject". Perhaps, then, it is no surprise that the pieces of film that are the most effective in portraying abjection are those whose very form is itself abject.

My Mother's Name

I remember the day I noticed that my father never said my mother's name. I was about seven or eight at the time. My mother very hesitantly revealed it to me, but made me swear that I would never tell anyone what it was. She insisted that she just didn't like her name. When I was much older, she finally admitted that, in order to stay with my father, she had to use a different name; one that my grandmother forced upon her, a name that sounded more English, a name that wasn't hers. The entire family had to go along with this charade. It eventually stopped when my grandmother died. The fake name disappeared but the family still can't bring themselves to utter her real name. Often, she goes without any name at all. To this day, I'm yet to hear my father say my mother's name.

{ *TOWARDS POST-INDEXICALITY* }

By refusing to signify, to represent, by turning instead to absence, silence, by emptying their images of signification these films appear to come closer to the nature of the issues they portray. So how might one apply this strategy? Let us define some parameters and explore what we might mean when we speak of silence and absence as a strategy.

Within semiotics there are various elements that together make up representation; one in particular is known as the index. The index is that which an image refers to, the referent if you will. It is often related to contingency, and images in general are thought to have a specific contingent relationship with reality. Contingency stems from the Latin con and tangere, meaning to touch together, it implies that there contains a physical trace or touch. So when we speak of photography as a contingent media, this infers a kind of privileged relationship that photography has with reality, that it is able to touch it directly in some way. Thus, in our discussion of indexicality, we will be primarily drawing on C.S. Pierce's definition of the indexical which he specifies as, "a mode of making meaning in relation to the world that is predicated on physical contiguity, on material relations, on the trace of touch" (Saltzman, p.12).

So if this is the index, what would it mean to work with post-indexicality? Peter Eiseman puts forward a concise reading of what post-indexicality constitutes. In his (essay, book) 'Rethinking Representations' he states that post-indexicality "concerns the possibility of frustrating a reading for information" and is "neither icon nor image" (p.19). Lisa Saltzman provides an example of this way of working when she analyses Ann Hamilton's weeping wall in her (book) 'Making Memory Matter: Strategies of Remembrance in Contemporary Art'. Saltzman states that the work is pure affect. The wall, pierced with teardrop sized holes, weeps continuously without any context or referent for the grief it exudes. This mode of (anti) representation, that can be identified as post-indexicality, is said to be the "hallmark of 21st Century Holocaust art" (p.182).

But why is this the case, why is post-indeixcality the method of choice when discussing topics that are ladened with trauma? It seems that the answer might lie in the question that Peter Weibel

poses, how to represent without re-traumatising? This brings us back to Chafe's assertion that the incommunicable can only be communicated through uncommunicative methods, so what better way than to imply a mode that purposefully frustrates the reading of information. An additional reason as to why rejecting the index has become a popular strategy to portray the abject, the horrific, is highlighted by Margaret Iverson's discussion of contingency. She states how the indexical nature of photography creates an "illusory sense of unmediated presence". Of course, for many, that is indeed the power of photography; the sense that one is really seeing a slice of the real, that the image is a trace of uncontested truth. Photographs are seductive in that sense, they can lull one into a false sense of security, promise a truth that is not there. For photographs are no less constructed than any other medium, they are the product of a series of decisions. However, Iverson expands on the danger of this illusion of truth in her discussion of post-Holocaust art, "to represent the Holocaust is to claim some privileged access while, at the same time, being immune to its devastating effects… to make any claim to represent trauma authentically is to risk being accused of moral insensitivity" (p.85).

So in order to achieve authenticity, but even more importantly, to not to fall prey to insensitivity towards topics that carry trauma with them, an argument arises for the partially effaced image, or what Georges Didi-Huberman has termed, the 'image-deschirure', the 'tear-image'. So that we can grasp the significance of the 'tear-image', we must first briefly delve into Lacanian psychoanalysis and the propagation of the image screen. Hal Foster succinctly summarises what can be understood by the image screen in his book 'Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency'. He defines the image screen as the "cultural reserve" that includes the "conventions of art history as well as the codes of visual culture" which ultimately "mediates the gaze of the world for us and, in doing so, protects us from it". Without the image screen, Foster maintains that regarding images would be impossible as "to see without the image screen would be to be blinded by the gaze or touched by the real" (p.14). Lacan himself described the screen as "the point of repression" or

as a veil of sorts. This is the point of departure for Huberman as he proposed that the partially effaced, or the tear-image, is the place "from which a fragment of the real escapes" (p.__).

Let us consider the image screen, then, in conjunction with what we have previously established in regards to abjection and how it pre-dates representation. The image screen stands for accepted visual conventions, or, in other words, the symbolic. Thus, the abject must be what lays beyond the image screen, it is what escapes from Huberman's tear-image. Mary Anne Doane builds on this idea in her essay on photographic contingency in which she states that "it is the defectiveness of the image… that constitute the confirmation of its contact with… the real, its collaboration with contingency" (p.91). There appears to be some unity in opinion that to probe beyond the image screen, to access the real, the abject, can only be achieved through the "non-iconic, non-figural, the opaque aspects of representations" (p.91). Jayne Wilkinson adds another dimension to this discussion of obscured images in her article criticising the politics of visibility in contemporary photography. Her argument centres around the simple fact that visibility itself is an "ideology, one powerfully tie to the contemporary global order". By rendering things visible we are effectively contributing to this order in which control is exercised over that which can be seen. For Wilkinson, then, it is only possible to critique this ideology "when artworks are considered beyond the formal, aesthetic frames of the image". Her solution to this is the presence of text, which transports the viewer to an imaginary realm outside of the image. Although perhaps a post-indexical strategy could be similarly effective in frustrating this ideology of visibility.

David Campany, however, disagrees. He rejects the notion that silent images harness any power. He argues that ultimately the silence will give over to aesthetics, to style and affect, especially for "those who gaze at it with a lack of social or political will to make sense of its circumstance". In answer to this I can only revisit the question posed by Peter Weibel on representation in the aftermath of the Holocaust where he queries, "how can we represent what is by its own definition, by its very nature, unrepresentable… without banalising

it, trivialising it, spectacularising it and finally repressing it for a second time". There is reason as to why art that tackles trauma often defers to absenting and silence, not only do they as strategies convey the "essential isolation" of the traumatised subject but also succinctly capture all that remains in the aftermath.

At the beginning of this chapter, I outlined a story from Irish poet Seamus Heaney in which him and his friend felt it impossible, in the face of suffering, to lift up their voices to sing, to turn to art. Heaney later wrote a poem dedicated to his friend about that particular night in question, encouraging him never to stop singing, even when met with horror.

"*People here used to believe*
that drowned souls lived in the seals.
At spring tides they might change shape.
They loved music and swam in for a singer

who might stand at the end of summer
in the mouth of a whitewashed turf-shed
his shoulder to the jamb, his song
a rowboat far out in evening.

When I came here first you were always singing,
a hint of the clip of the pick
in our winnowing climb and attack.
Raise it again, man. We still believe what we hear." (p.xxii)

❁

Perhaps, then, it can be said that, it is not so much a matter of whether to speak or not to speak, but rather a question of what can be said and what can be considered utterance.

The McDonald's in Moscow.

January 30th, 1990.

That morning the clouds were so heavy it appeared as though the stone buildings were the only thing holding up the sky. The country was very much in the throws of winter, one that had been particularly cold in the last few years. The supermarket shelves had lay empty with no promise of when they would be replenished. However, on this particular morning, a morning that would change all mornings irrefutably, the hum of promise was carried through the streets by heaving bodies bundled in gloves and scarves. A queue snaked around Pushkin Square as far as the eye could see while electric mumbles tumbled from every mouth. The first McDonald's was opening in Moscow.

Anticipation had rippled throughout the brittle city for the past two years - newspapers were already reporting on the opening a year before the construction began. What came to be was the largest restaurant in the world with 3 food halls and 900 seats. Not only was this sparkling beacon of capitalism carved right into the heart of a failing communist dream, it was accessible too. The meals were very affordable and the company accepted the local currency. It was a stark contrast to the food-less halls of the country's supermarkets. This, compounded with the Berlin Wall beginning to crumble only two months prior, spoke of a change in the times and fortunes of those residing in the Soviet Union.

It would take almost another two years before it was considered viable for McDonald's to open a restaurant in 'Troubles' stricken Northern Ireland.

To speak is to abject, is to render silent..

Epilogue

In November, a local journalist was invited to a political rally in the centre of Belfast. All other journalists and media bodies were banned from the event. In his article, he mostly quotes word for word the exchanges that were made throughout the course of the evening, especially as the rally came to a climatic conclusion. The evening consisted of a series of speeches from local politicians and community leaders to do with sovereignty and maintaining control of borders, all of which were met with a rapturous applause. However, it seems like the speeches didn't go far enough for the audience. As the event drew to a close, the attendees grew restless and proceeded to interrupt the conversations on stage.

One man announced that a United Ireland would be "over my dead body". Another bellowed, "peaceful protest is finished" before enquiring about the hope for military resistance to the prospect of further 'Irishness'. A third cried, "When politics fails support the people!"

The crowd then pledged that there were no lengths they would not go in order to protect their place within the United Kingdom, before the meeting closed with the British national anthem.

It seems as though some are preparing for war once more, but had it every truly stopped? I'm not so sure that it did, and it appears impossible to know when or if it ever will.

❀

Trauma and violence elicit abjection, as does photography. Attempting to capture this, the abject thing, is not possible, it evades representation entirely. John Goodby affirms this stating that abjection is solely "a force that defeats representation" (p.28). So it seems to be that the only way to somewhat represent the abject is to do away with representation altogether. Instead, we must embrace

absence, silence and post-indexicality. These strategies bring us closer to the nature of abjection, of trauma, of violence, for they are the trace of what is left behind in their wake. Chare describes trace as "that which must be present as an absence… The trace is the relation that exists as non-relation" (p.101).

I am, however, left to resolve one final conundrum. When do wars end? Do they end at all? If not, why not?
Obviously, these are a complex set of questions, but I would hope that parts of this thesis have gone to some length to illustrate the difficulties in identifying the end of a conflict. These difficulties include the perpetual trauma, the lingering 'unofficial' violence that is evidenced in documentaries like Sinead O'Shea's, and the vacuum of silence that persists long after the gunfire has quietened. Both Herfried Munkler and Benedetta Berti note the complexities of eradicating violence after a war. In his article in The German Times, 'Why modern wars never end', Munkler argues that ending a war with merely a peace treaty is impossible when "entire generations have grown up knowing nothing but smouldering war and having learned little more than how to use violence to survive" (Herfried Münkler, Why modern wars never end, The German Times, March 2019 - Accessed 17 November 2019). Berti, similarly, lists the reasons why modern warfare doesn't truly end as follows; "internal conflicts between communities often rip societies apart, creating long lasting divisions and… violence directed against a civilian population create a culture of violence… that's very hard to reverse" (Benedetta Berti, Why don't modern wars end?, Ted Fellows, November 2016 - Accessed 17 November 2019).
If the defining characteristics of a modern post-conflict landscape includes trauma, lingering violence, abject subjects, all of which disregard linear notions of time, how can we state that this traumatised, brutalised landscape exists in a state of post conflict, that it has reached a point of afterwards? Abjection, violence and trauma know no bounds. Their very presence indicates that there is no ending to conflict and searching for the source of the beginning is just as hopeless as speaking of conclusions.

To substantiate this, I'd like to refer to Raman Kupar's sociological study of 'post'- conflict Northern Ireland, in which he found considerable evidence to suggest that Northern Irish society is "frozen in a constant post-traumatic state". The symptoms of this include the region boasting the highest rate of local traffic accidents in Europe, the highest rate of heart attacks in the United Kingdom, the highest rates of child sexual abuse in the United Kingdom (Raman Kapur, Omagh the beginning of the reparative impulse pgs 316-319) and currently places alongside 14 other countries for the highest rates of suicide in the world (NYTimes, accessed 5 December 2019). Furthermore, the study found that this traumatic state is the result of trauma denial, a pervasive silence internally policed by communities, as evidenced by local phrases such as, "whatever you say, say nothing".

The silence is, literally, deafening.
Its painful, its repetitive and its horrific but if we are to truly achieve a state of post conflict then we must admit that this conflict is far from over; it has only moved into a new phase. We must confront ourselves again and again until there is nothing left. We must purge, expel, abject. We must scream until hoarse, and then some. We must excavate and abandon burial - our soil has seen enough.

OF SONG & SUFFERING:

TALES FROM THE REALM OF THE ABJECT

_____

ASHLEIGH WILSON

Of Song & Suffering: *Tales from the Realm of the Abject*

ASHLEIGH WILSON