
IRISH FILM AND TELEVISION - 2010

The Year in Review

Tony Tracy (ed.)

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Introduction

Tony Tracy

In 2010 Ireland's reputation as a modern, progressive economy reached a nadir unimaginable even a year ago. Over the past twelve months, increasingly negative assessments of the country's political and economic acumen became commonplace in the

national and then international media.¹ At

1. The most recent example of which is the *Vanity Fair* (March 2011) article 'When Irish Eyes Are Crying' www.vanityfair.com/business/features/2011/03/michael-lewis-ireland-201103

official levels, Ireland's resilient cultural activity – often spurned or taken for granted in the years of the Celtic Tiger – emerged as a 'gold standard' of national identity and a key instrument in forging internal cohesion (in the absence of the Catholic Church which had another *annus horribilis*), creating jobs, and rehabilitating our international reputation. In January 2011, Culture Ireland launched *Imagine Ireland*, a year of Irish Arts in America (<http://www.imagineireland.ie>). Clearly an outcome of the Farmleigh Conference discussed in these pages last year, the initiative can be read as an attempt to 'monetizing culture' (as Dermot Desmond put it then), and while we might express reservations about the ideological underpinning of such exploitation, few would argue against a modest €4 million outlay that will give a variety of Irish artists international profile and employment and perhaps counterbalance the negative and regressive depictions of the Irish in American mainstream media.² One element of the programme is a modest series of (twelve) screenings at MoMA, New York that take as its point of departure *The Quiet Man* – a film concerning a returned emigrant, struggling to understand the ways of his native land. Ford's stage-Irish stereotypes continued to cause embarrassment into the 1990s until, coinciding with the first stirrings of economic emancipation, it was re-read as a 'saturnalian' (excessive, escapist – i.e. not realist) romance. As we embark on another era of apparently prolonged exile for thousands of Irish, the film moves unexpectedly towards another reading; a cyclical reminder of the loss of familial and communal ties for the (approx. 30,000) Irish emigrants who moved abroad in 2010. In a year of mind-boggling numbers, this is the year's defining statistic.

One such migrant is Irish Film Board CEO Simon Perry (interviewed for *Estudios Irlandeses* near the start of his tenure: <http://tinyurl.com/69tk76n>), who, after five years

2. Including, for instance, the portrait of Taoiseach Brian Cowan as a 'drunken moron' on the Jay Leno talk show: <http://www.broadsheet.ie/2010/09/27/videobrian-cowan-on-the-tonight-show-with-jay-leno>

in the job, did not have his contract renewed at the end of 2010. That his successor is James Hickey – an entertainment lawyer with no experience as a film creative (there is talk of the appointment of a 'Creative Director') – tells us something about the direction the board sees its work going in the next decade. A recent letter from the IFB to Irish production companies says as much:

... in the year ahead we anticipate a substantial increase in the focus on sectoral and industry development. We see this as essential if we are to ensure that filmmaking and the audiovisual production sector as a whole benefits from the emerging focus and support for Ireland's Creative Industries. We believe that Irish filmmaking and the broader production industry will continue to be at the heart of Government policies for growth and job creation for as long as the case is successfully made and measurable results can demonstrate the success of such policies.³

The key emphasis here is an understanding of film as part of 'Ireland's Creative Industries'. The rhetoric of earlier eras (from the formation of the first film board in 1987 onwards) sought state support in order that the Irish represent themselves to themselves in the first instance, and then to the world. That has given way to the concept of 'creative industry', a bedfellow of the vaunted 'smart economy'; buzzwords that follow the orthodoxies of transparency and accountability, providing 'added-value' in a globalised, digital era of monetized culture and intellectual copyright. The backdrop to the IFB letter we suspect is the last election in the UK which ushered in an era of 'austerity' in which such terminology is central; one of the first acts of the Conservative/Lib Dem coalition was to abolish the UK Film Council in July 2010.⁴ A similar move was proposed here in the 2009 McCarthy ('An Bord Snip Nua') Report.

As a producer whose career has been shaped by the subsidised paradigm of national cinema (in Ireland and earlier, the UK), Perry's departure

3. Released through Ted Sheehy's blog: www.irishfilmportal.blogspot.com

4. <http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/abolition>

departure marks the end of an era, as well as a tenure, during which he initiated a wide and varied range of initiatives that sought to imaginatively respond to the changing conditions within which Irish cinema operated at a time of unprecedented public funding. Looking back, it is probably fair to say that he did a good job of managing the complex (and often competing) demands of a local cinema in a global marketplace – even if Irish cinema seems less visible to most people than before – and made imaginative use of public funding that seems certain to be cut. 2010 is, then, a snapshot and indeed summation of Irish film and cultural policy at a crucial juncture.

One is struck by a number of features of this year's output. Firstly, by the sheer volume of productions. This is difficult to quantify given the fragmented pattern of distribution, but we can offer a general summation on the basis of film festival screenings. We counted eleven IFB funded (or part-funded) feature films at the Galway Film Fleadh this year: *My Brothers* (Paul Fraser), *Come On Eileen* (Finola Geraghty), *The Looking Glass* (Colin Downey), *Rewind* (PJ Dillon), *Snap* (Carmel Winters), *Sensation* (Tom Hall), *Outcast* (Colm McCarthy), *The Runway* (Ian Power), *Five Day Shelter* (Ger Leonard), *Between the Canals* (Mark O'Connor) and *All Good Children* (Alicia Duffy). Other titles were the made for TV film *Jack Taylor* (Stuart Orme), Fergus Tighe's long awaited second feature *Seaside Stories* (his first since *Clash of the Ash* in 1987) and the feature version of TG4 mini series *Na Cloigne* (Robert Quinn). There were also a number of documentary features including *The Pipe* (Risteard Ó Domhnaill), *Burma Soldier* (Nic Dunlop, Annie Sundberg, Ricki Stern), *Counting Sheep* (Dieter Auner) and *A Prayer for the Windhorse* (John Murray). The Dublin International Film Festival added to this tally with the horror film *Wake Wood* (David Keating), the Bosnian war-set *As If I Am Not There* (Juanita Wilson), and the creative documentary, *Connemara/An Ear to the Earth* (Pat Collins). Following a pattern established last year, we anticipate many of these receiving a general release this spring (*The Pipe* has already had a successful nation-wide release) and will therefore review them in our 2011 edition. In total we count an impressive roster of sixteen

fiction features and five documentary features. Added to these are several programmes of short films across categories of animation, fiction and documentary. Additionally there is considerable TV output, notably the RTE drama features *When Harvey Met Bob* (starring this year's rising Irish actor Donal Gleeson), the Edna O'Brien adaptation *Wild Decembers*, and the mini-series *Single Handed* (6 x 60 mins.) and *Love/Hate* (4 x 60 mins.). *Love/Hate* was a (disappointing) contribution to RTE's contemporary drama output that has produced the likes of *Bachelors Walk*, *Pure Mule* and *Prosperity* with a script by playwright Stuart Carolan and a 'star' cast of young Irish talent that included Aiden Gillen and Robert Sheehan. Finally, Ardmore studios took up where it left off with *The Tudors* in hosting the shooting of the first season of sexed-up period drama *Camelot* (using many of the same support and creative personnel), a ten-part TV series for US cable network Starz. All in all, the amount of activity in the sector in 2010 defied Ireland's dire economic predicament – though we must balance that observation by noting that development and production budgets would have predated the worst.

An associated feature of Irish audiovisual production this year is its growing diversity – from animation through feature fiction and documentary – with a growing sense of competence and confidence across all formats, and some productions competing at the very highest levels. Notable successes included five Oscar nominations in 2010, including a win for Juanita Wilson's short film *The Door* – <http://vimeo.com/9758104> – and a range of festival awards. *His and Hers* was the Irish box-office phenomenon of the year (earning over €300,000 – an Irish record) and enjoyed similar success on its subsequent DVD release; no mean feat for a creative documentary.⁵ The funding of feature documentary production and distribution was a Simon Perry initiative and while director Ken Wardrop is a singular talent, whose work might have emerged regardless, an exciting range of talent is evident in films like *The Pipe*

5. Interview with the director:
<http://vimeo.com/12461264>

(which proved to be something of a phenomenon itself), *Pyjama Girls*, *Colony* and *Off the Beaten Track* (aka *Counting Sheep*), all widely different in style and content.

The last of these, Dieter Auner's evocative *Off the Beaten Track* (a recent 'must see' from the Rotterdam Film Festival) follows a small family of shepherds in northern Romania over the course of a year, capturing practices and a community unchanged for hundreds of years, on the brink of tumultuous change. Its presence here points up a third feature of Irish film production in 2010 – its growing internationalization and the consequences of that reorientation for content and for a definition of national cinema. It was not unique. *Burma Soldier* tells the story of Myo Myint, a former soldier turned peace activist while *A Prayer for the Wind Horse* follows a family of Buddhist yak herders on a two-month odyssey through the Himalaya. The development of co-production relationships was another of Simon Perry's distinctive contributions to funding policy and its results have been varied and sometimes baffling. In certain instances it has extended ideas about Irish identity in films like *Come On Eileen* (a UK co-production) but many other projects are less driven by thematic connections. *As if I Am Not There* is set in a Bosnian rape-camp during the war, was shot entirely in Macedonia and justifies its Irish funding by the fact that it is written and directed by Irish director Juanita Wilson (and co-produced by an Irish company). A similar logic is at work in the Russian thriller *The Weather Station* directed by Johnny O'Reilly but made entirely on location in Russia with Russian talent. *Essential Killing*, a post Afgan war drama with no apparently Irish connection beyond an Irish co-producer, features an American actor and Polish director. Why is Irish money involved with these films? Simon Perry has argued that limiting funding to a small indigenous talent and audience base simply doesn't make sense in the current era; that the Irish audio visual industry needs to recognize, from the ground up, that it is operating in an international marketplace. The logic is that by retaining some rights from these films, which may or may not repay investment, Ireland positions itself in such an environment. Yet this argument is harder to sell as the basis for funding than the traditional one regarding self-

representation. While in animation for instance – largely ignored by academic or cultural commentators (unless there is an Oscar nomination) – this has always been the norm, when it comes to live-action drama we require a higher quotient of cultural integrity. In any case it will be interesting to see where this initiative goes. In a *Film Ireland* interview before he departed, Perry admitted that such deals required a great deal of personal contact and investment across international networks to come to fruition.

Similar questions, of course, might be asked of the €13million that the Irish taxpayer contributed – through section 481 and subsidies – to the production of *Leap Year* in 2009, a lamentable Hollywood romcom that re-cycled clichés of primitive Ireland and Irish whimsy that would have looked tired in 1960. Here, we might expect the argument that a sizable portion of that film's \$30 million budget was spent in Ireland. This is the case put by IBEC in its 2010 review of film and TV production which claims that last year was a record one in the total Irish expenditure of €25 million, of which half came from non-Irish sources.⁶ IBEC has been to the forefront of defending section 481 but with tax breaks in other sectors coming under intense scrutiny in the current economic climate, it will become harder to defend on its own terms. If it is to survive I expect it will be articulated as part of a wider strategy relating to the 'creative industries' mentioned above.

As a kind of watershed, 2010 shows us that when the next chapter of Irish film history comes to be written (following the work of Rockett, Gibbons, Hill, Barton et al), it will encounter an increased number and array of productions that complicate the earlier dichotomies of format (feature film/TV), genre (rural/urban; the 'Troubles'; adaptation; Irish history etc.) and the paradigmatic framework of national cinema as it has been so-far charted. Nevertheless, for all the growth in production, the fragmentation of distribution and the growing internationalization

6. [http://ibec.ie/IBEC/Press/PressPublicationsdoclib3.nsf/vPages/Newsroom~2010-set-to-be-record-year-for-tv-and-film-production-15-12-2010/\\$file/AF+Review+2010.pdf](http://ibec.ie/IBEC/Press/PressPublicationsdoclib3.nsf/vPages/Newsroom~2010-set-to-be-record-year-for-tv-and-film-production-15-12-2010/$file/AF+Review+2010.pdf)

of funding, Irish cinema, as it has been traditionally understood, is still pursued by many filmmakers. Productions like *The Pipe*, *Pyjama Girls*, *The Fading Light*, *Savage*, *Na Cloigne*, *Snap*, *Moore Street Masala* (all discussed here) and many more demonstrate a keen and ongoing

engagement with national identity – even as that concept is stretched and loosened – in various forms and tones.

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Savage (Brendan Muldowney, 2009)

Ruth Barton

In 1999 Paul Tickell directed the low-budget youth drama, *Crush Proof*, about a gang of disadvantaged kids whose identity is defined by their (literal) peripherality from the mainstream of urban, cosmopolitan Dublin. *Crush Proof* opens with the release from prison of Neal (Darren Healy) and his subsequent odyssey from the outskirts to the inner city, starting with his failed attempt to gain access to his child and continuing on through his reunion with his equally marginalised friends and his own descent into violent acts of criminality. If it weren't for its determined reliance on stereotyping, particularly of women, and its focus on Healy's intense performance, the film's kitchen sink realist aesthetic might have provided the viewer with a laudable insight into contemporary social problems and issues of class-based masculinity. Instead it demonstrated how John Hill's critique of British social realism of the 1960s – that it sidelined women and celebrated the singularity of its male protagonist – remains as applicable to Irish cinema today as it is to the works of Lindsay Anderson and his colleagues of fifty years ago.

The immediate link between *Crush Proof* and Brendan Muldowney's *Savage* is the return of Darren Healy, once again playing the lead. Healy is a compelling screen presence and his roles on film have drawn on his own real-life experience. He has long struggled with problems of addiction and a tendency towards acts of violence when under the influence of drugs. When he took the lead in *Savage*, for instance, he had recently completed a suspended prison sentence for assault. After his trial it was revealed that Healy already held eight previous convictions for public order offences.

It comes as some surprise, therefore, to find Healy taking the role of a press photographer,

Paul Graynor, who makes his living from pictures of crime scenes. With his fine dark hair falling over his face, over-sized glasses, and his slight physique, Graynor is marked out as 'arty', verging on effeminate. Thus, the opening sequence is filmed as a montage of violence, soon revealed to be two winos in a fight. The film cuts between them and Graynor as he first observes and then photographs the two men. Following this we see him snapping a convicted man leaving the courts in a paddy wagon, climbing onto the vehicle to gain a better shot. This impression of artiness is supported by interior shots of his apartment, a glossy, inner-city bachelor pad, something of a haven from the city streets that echo with sirens and drunken shouting. A series of exchanges establishes the film's ideological dynamic – much of the crime Paul witnesses goes under-reported and inadequately punished by the courts. No one really cares.

Coming home one evening from a date with the nurse, Michelle (Nora-Jane Noone), who cares for Graynor's permanently hospitalised father, the photographer is assaulted by a gang of youths; a tightly-edited, intense sequence that mirrors the opening montage with fragmented images of Graynor as he is pinned to the wall and threatened with a knife. The demented chorus of threats from the gang as they urge themselves on, together with Graynor's feeble protests, fuse together in an opera of violence that culminates in the victim's castration. The remainder of the film is part revenge narrative, part therapeutic journey as Graynor seeks to understand and respond to the feelings of impotence he experiences in the wake of the attack.

In interview, Muldowney has spoken of the influences on his film, notably reports of the

New York subway vigilante, Bernard Goetz, whose own experience of being mugged led him to ride the subway with a firearm looking for trouble, and also, closer to home, the case of the West of Ireland farmer who, after numerous incitements, eventually took a gun to trespassers on his land.¹ An artistic influence, not surprisingly, is Scorsese, and the look of Dublin, all dark, rain-soaked streets, is indebted to that director's work.²

What Muldowney lacked, in comparison even with early Scorsese, was a budget; the film was reputed to have been made for around €300,000. With such limited resources, the decision seems to have been taken to hang the film around Healy's performance. None of the other characters, from Graynor's girlfriend, Michelle (a thankless role for the talented Nora-Jane Noone), to his bedridden father (John O'Leary), a man who apparently has a sinister past (possibly the reason for his son's fear of violence?), to the concerned-but-useless psychiatrist, Dr Cusack (Cathy Belton) and the Polish body builder who supplies Graynor with steroids, amounts to anything more than a sketchy stereotype.

We follow Graynor as he embarks on a process of physical and psychological recuperation. The first stage is to purchase a personal alarm, then to shave his head, and then to proceed through self-defence lessons to full-on revenge. Throughout the process, Healy emerges from his chrysalis, transforming himself from his 'useless' effeminacy into an active, but demented alter-ego of savage masculinity; the film's chapter titles keep pace with his transformation, with 'ANGER' replacing 'FEAR'. The end of the film returns to a previously unexplained opening image of the naked, reborn man slathered in blood, which we

1. Mark Linehan, 'Interview with Savage director Brendan Muldowney', [entertainment.ie, http://entertainment.ie/Movie/feature/Interview-with-Savage-director-Brendan-Muldowney/2/863.htm](http://entertainment.ie/Movie/feature/Interview-with-Savage-director-Brendan-Muldowney/2/863.htm) [accessed: 10 February 2010].

2. For a detailed discussion of *Savage's* aesthetic, with a particular emphasis on the film's use of sound, see Maria O'Brien, 'Savage Sounds' in Tony Tracy (ed.), 'Irish Film and Television 2009: The Year in Review', *Estudios Irlandeses*, 5, (2009) 253-5.

now know is a consequence of his misplaced revenge on his attackers.

It's hard to critique *Savage* for its focus on male victimhood, a condition with which many will empathise. However, its outcome seems to me strangely at odds with what appears to be its intent. Having prevailed upon its audience to accept the argument that the media's, and by extension, society's response to male-on-male violence is inadequate, the film then presents a cross section of authority figures who offer Graynor the best of attention. The doctor (Peter Gaynor) may stumble over the word 'castration' when he is offering his patient guidance on hormone therapy but he is evidently greatly in sympathy with Graynor's plight; similarly, the police, the nursing staff, the martial arts coach and even the slightly dim therapist all evidently have Graynor's best care at heart. In a more conventional melodrama, the victim would be misunderstood, here Graynor doesn't lack for understanding. Despite the film's rhetoric, then, the problem doesn't lie with the hegemonic order. The young delinquents who carry out the attack are, in common with all the ancillary characters, pencil sketches. With their white hoodies and tracksuit bottoms, their belligerence is understood as part of the cityscape, as always already there, as unalterable. Between these two sides of the social order, then, comes Graynor. Throughout the course of the film, we only learn a few scattered facts about him: he is effeminate, his father was once a bad man, he is shy with women. That he should be effeminate was always central to the film's conception, as its director has noted:

In the original script Paul worked in a library ... He was like a 30yr old virgin who worked in a library and Nora-Jane's character was a much older woman. Over the years, with script editing, it changed, so as to make it more believable. The character now is still a bit of a hangover from the old script where Paul is a little bit shy at the start when he shouldn't have been. I should have straightened that out before we went into it, but thankfully it's not a huge problem.³

3. Aileen Moone, "Interview: Brendan Muldowney on

Actually, I think this is a huge problem. For a start, vicious assaults are not always carried out on effeminate men; oddly, hooligans prefer more obviously 'macho' types. Then, there is the suggestion that the 30 yr old virgin, now press photographer, might not be man enough to defend himself, an invidious association if there ever was one. Once Graynor commences his voyage into fully-fledged male, hysterical violence, is he then not working through the deficiencies suggested by his 'virgin' status? For instance, he can only finally make love to Michelle after he has replaced his effeminate look with a shaven head. Isn't he also being aligned with the position of (female) rape victim with which we are familiar from other cinematic narratives? He isn't raped, but his violation is comparable, and his ensuing actions can be seen as analogous to that of the rape-revenge drama. Finally, there is the casting of Darren Healy. Anyone with any familiarity either with his on-screen roles or his off-screen identity will know that beneath the performance of effeminacy lies a core of violence. When the real Darren Healy finally breaks forth, the film ties itself up in knots as it rushes to disassociate itself from the brutality it has unleashed. In keeping with the melodrama which this production essentially is, *Savage* ends in an outpouring of uncontainable excess. Just as, aesthetically, it veers between realism and expressionism, so narratively Muldowney's feature is torn between discussing the hegemonic order's unduly light treatment of acts of violent criminality and depicting this crime as the inevitable outcome of the chaotic city, where only those who can defend themselves survive. At the same time, it cannot bring itself to endorse the kind of vigilante justice that we might expect from a comparable Hollywood product.

The increasing ease of making low-budget cinema renders this a more accomplished film in certain ways than *Crush Proof*, but it is the casting of Healy that at once makes both watchable (if barely) and unworkable. Both films

reflect a worthy intention to explore issues of criminality and social breakdown. Neither manages to produce more than a character study. In each case, the actor's charismatic presence overwhelms the films' flimsily constructed storylines. The focus on Healy in each feature is facilitated by the carelessness with which the supporting roles are written so that his place within a network of relationships is never credible. Because of Healy's charisma, we become so caught up in his personal identity issues that the exploration of social concerns becomes irrelevant; here is someone who is evidently singular not representative. More than that, the camera in each case is so enamoured of its subject that the films drift close to a celebration of male physicality and violence, a situation from which they then rush to extricate themselves in their chaotic denouements. We may guess that Muldowney was familiar with *Crush Proof* and may even have intended this film to reference the earlier work. Over ten years have lapsed between the release of one film and the other but it is hard to argue that the technological evolution that facilitated the glossier look of *Savage* was matched by any similar evolution in ideological sophistication.

***Savage* (2009)**

Dir: Brendan Muldowney

Prod: Conor Barry

Cast: Darren Healy, Nora-Jane Noone

Work Cited:

Hill, John. 1986. *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956-1963*. London: British Film Institute.

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'Savage"', IFTN, 14 September 2010, <http://www.iftn.ie/news/?act1=record&aid=73&rid=4283356&tpl=archnews&only=1> [accessed: 7 February 2011]

Slow Fade to Black: *The Fading Light* (Ivan Kavanagh, 2010)

Denis Condon

The Fading Light ends with an image of a bank of leaden clouds slowly eclipsing a setting sun as somewhere in the distance, church bells toll, children raise their voices in play, and an unsettling musical note resembling whalesong sounds. We have just witnessed the destruction of a Dublin middle-class family as the three surviving adult children initially console each other but ultimately fail to provide each other with the necessary emotional and material support in the wake of their mother's lingering death. The film has been described as *Bergmanesque*; surprisingly, such comparisons neither are embarrassing nor do they diminish the film's individual achievement.¹ This is convincing *Kammerspiel* cinema, relying on the performances of a small cast and a restrained visual style to invest an often spartan *mise-en-scène* with meaning. A muted colour palette and the almost complete avoidance of nondiegetic music contribute to a sombre and intense drama fittingly punctuated by fades to black.

This is the latest film from writer, director and editor Ivan Kavanagh, who has now assembled a body of work that is impressive in both its quality and quantity, including four other features (*Francis*,² *The Solution*, *Tin Can Man*

and *Our Happy Home*) completed on extremely small budgets. In the course of making both the features and many shorts, he has evolved what seems like a stock company of collaborators and a singular way of working with actors. Although Kavanagh performs many of the creative roles behind the camera himself, he has left the cinematography of all of his features to Colin Downey – himself a director of considerable talent. Often choosing actors he has worked with before or performers who resemble the characters in a skeletal script, Kavanagh presents them not with the script itself but with a detailed biography from which to develop their character. While this process resembles the improvised performance methods used by Mike Leigh, unlike Leigh, Kavanagh only reveals to his actors the relevant parts of the plot on the day of shooting, and individual actors do not know what direction the other actors in the scene have been given.³ This method aims to capture as far as possible the spontaneity of performers responding in character to unfolding events.

Set at Christmas (but with little sense of the festival of the returning light here) and taking place principally in a comfortable but also gloomy and dated 1950s-era suburban house, the narrative proceeds largely chronologically as Cathy (Emma Eliza Regan) and Yvonne (Valene Kane) arrive back to their family home to say goodbye to their terminally ill mother (Bibi

1. Donald Clarke, "Fading Light on the Film Festival," *Irish Times*, 3 March 2010. In a Q&A session after the film's screening at the Dublin International Film Festival in February 2010, director Ivan Kavanagh revealed that Bergman's *Cries and Whispers* was an early influence on him.

2. Michael Patrick Gillespie offers a compelling reading of *Francis* in *The Myth of an Irish Cinema: Approaching Irish-Themed Films* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2008), 105–7.

3. A podcast interview with Kavanagh and several members of the cast of *The Fading Light* discussing the method of production is available from the *Film Ireland* website:

<http://www.filmireland.net/2010/04/01/interview-with-the-fading-light-writerdirector-ivan-kavanagh/>.

Larrson). Now bedridden by chronic pain, the mother can no longer care for her son, Peter (Patrick O'Donnell), who suffers from a mental disability. Receiving palliative care from a visiting nurse, the mother admits that she has neglected to tell Peter that she is going to die, and it becomes clear that the responsibility for informing him will devolve to her daughters and that this will be just the first stage in the greater responsibility of deciding on Peter's fate after their mother's death. At first, it seems that Yvonne will have to care for him because Cathy – although closer to Peter – is a struggling actress and waitress who has neither a large enough flat nor the likelihood of financial security to allow her to look after him. Married and with a well-paid professional job, Yvonne, by contrast, appears to be in a position to take Peter into the stylish London home she shares with her husband, Tim (Henry Garrett).

Although Patrick O'Donnell deservedly won the Dublin Film Critics Circle award for his performance as Peter,⁴ in many ways this is Yvonne's story, with particularly Kane as the adult Yvonne but also Jodie Boyle as the young Yvonne most often commanding our attention. It is most frequently her motivations that we must decide from the fragments of the narrative that are presented to us. Despite Yvonne's apparent success, all may not be as stable as it seems in her life. An unsettling pre-title sequence whose full significance is only revealed in the film's closing minutes suggest that she has problems that extend far beyond her upset at her mother's imminent death. Her arrival back to her family home immediately invokes black-and-white visions of the young Yvonne. These scenes, in which she interacts with a loving father (Cillian Roche) who appears to have predeceased her mother, evoke both an acute sense of loss – of the father, of the rapidly fading mother, and of the happy little girl – and foreboding of a traumatic revelation to come. Nevertheless, living seemingly carefree in a house full of light, these ghostly projections of

Yvonne's past seem at first to be enjoying sunnier times, in many senses, than Yvonne herself. Visiting her mother's dim bedroom on her return for the first of their emotional encounters, she says that they have once again become "one big happy family," a phrase that resonates hollowly between them.

Two further scenes in this bedroom between Yvonne and her mother complicate this initial image of the successful emigrant daughter guiltily returning to the mother left to care alone for a son with special needs. Before the first, we are shown the young Yvonne discovering the body of her father hanging from the hatch to the attic. In the bedroom, Yvonne touches the hand of her sleeping mother, who, waking and crying, asks if Yvonne remembers her father and his love for her, before apologizing for the fact that she was the one who found him. Affecting as the scene undoubtedly is, the outpouring of emotion has a cathartic effect, allowing Yvonne and her mother to come to some kind of resolution to the strain in their relationship caused by the father's suicide. The visions of young Yvonne become less frequent after this point, but the occurrence immediately after this scene of the other irruption into the otherwise linear narrative – the image of Yvonne from the pre-title sequence, standing leaning on her kitchen counter with her back to the camera – clearly signals that not everything is resolved. In their third encounter, the mother elicits a firm promise from Yvonne that she will look after Peter and not put him into care.

While these encounters occur, several scenes show the growing closeness between the three siblings but also Yvonne's emerging role as the surrogate mother. In a joyful scene following Yvonne's cathartic scene with her mother, Peter puts a record on the gramophone – an anachronism that seems to suggest that music and joy are a thing of the past – and he and his sisters dance in the living room and with the music continuing on the soundtrack, play outside in the snow. Such scenes offer a return to childhood intimacy, a temporary respite from the fact of their mother's pain and a vision of an alternative family. When they return to the house

4. The film itself won the best Irish film award: <http://dublinfilmcriticscircle.weebly.com/4/archives/03-2010/1.html>.

in high spirits, however, Yvonne tells Peter that their mother is dying. He becomes distressed, and while Yvonne successfully calms him by reassuring him that she and Cathy will look after him, an upset Cathy leaves the house and finds a doll on a muddy river bank. Parallel cuts show Yvonne holding one of her own dolls, and although this causes her to again think of her father, it also creates a link with Cathy that suggests that they can together reconnect with their youth, perhaps by coming to an arrangement to look after Peter.

Two disruptive events – one expected, the other not – alter the dynamic among the siblings. The first is the awaited death of the mother, which occurs after several further scenes, which although harrowing, show the siblings' intimacy in grief. What is remarkable in the context of an Irish death, however, is the lack of a funeral scene. The effect of this is to emphasize the isolation of the family from a supportive community, the only help they receive coming from such professional carers as nurses and doctors. Instead of the growing cohesion of the surviving family being nurtured by the comfort of neighbours and friends, Yvonne's husband, Tim, arrives to brutally force them apart. At the precise narrative point where an Irish audience would have expected to have seen a long shot of an assembly of mourners, a closeup of Tim's profile as he scornfully watches Peter signals the unlikelihood of any happy ending. Tim is played as a strident bully, who with very little resistance from the grieving Yvonne and Cathy, takes control of the family's affairs, selling the house and putting Patrick into care. The orderly who arrives to take Peter away has to spend much of his time calming Tim, who shouts at Peter, Yvonne and Cathy to make them comply with

his plan. "Are you ready to come on home now?" he asks Yvonne, crying in Cathy's arms. "Have you had enough?" Ominously, we see a vision of young Yvonne with her mother before she answers "yes."

The conclusion confirms that it is to Yvonne as much as her mother that the title refers. We return to the shot of Yvonne in her kitchen before she opens the gas on her cooker and gets back into bed with a sleeping Tim. The fates of Peter and Cathy are less certain. Peter leaves the hospital and walks away into the night. That we should fear for his safety is suggested when Cathy wakes in the family home where a phone is ringing. When she answers, there is nobody there. She dresses, packs, takes a last look at her mother's deathbed and leaves the house. A slow fade to black.

The Fading Light (Park Films and Bord Scannan na hÉireann/the Irish Film Board, 2010) Directed, written and edited by Ivan Kavanagh. Cinematography by Colin Downey. Produced by AnneMarie Naughton. Featuring Valene Kane, Bibi Larsson, Emma Eliza Regan, Patrick O'Donnell, Henry Garrett, Jodie Boyle and Cillian Roche.

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***Na Cloigne* (Robert Quinn 2010)**

Seán Crosson

Since the mid 1990s, and particularly from the early 2000s, Irish directors have increasingly turned to horror as a form through which to explore aspects of Irish society, culture, history and, indeed, their representation. Examples include Enda Hughes' *The Eliminator* (1996), Conor McMahon's *Dead Meat* (2004), Stephen Bradley's *Boy Eats Girl* (2005), Patrick Kenny's *Winter's End* (2005), Billy O'Brien's *Isolation* (2006), Paddy Breathnach's *Shrooms* (2007) and *Red Mist* (2008), Justin O'Brien's *Ghostwood* (2008), Eric Courtney's *Seer* (2008), Aisling Walsh's *The Daisy Chain* (2009), Conor McPherson's *The Eclipse* (2009) and David Keating's *The Wake Wood* (2010). Irish directors have found the genre a useful means of exploring Irish locales and stories through a form familiar to audiences throughout the world. Furthermore, the Armagh based production company Midnight Pictures have specialised in making low budget horror films since the mid 1990s including *Zombie Genocide* (1993) and *Don't Look in the Attic* (2005) while in 1997 the Horrorthon festival was founded by Michael Griffin and Ed King (producer of *Dead Meat*), to showcase new Irish and international horror cinema as well as offer rare screenings of acclaimed horror classics.¹ Apart from feature films, horror has also been a recurring aspect of short film work in this period with some of the most successful Irish shorts choosing this genre, including Emer Reynolds' *White* (2001), Tom Cosgrove's *All God's Children* (2002), Brendan Muldowney's *The Ten Steps* (2004), Tom

Cosgrave's *Rógairí* (2005), Ciaran Foy's *The Faeries Of Blackheath Woods* (2006), and Alan Brennan's *Shapes* (2008).² Unlike the pastoral idyll associated with Ireland in the cinema through films like John Ford's *The Quiet Man* (1952) and more recently *The Secret of Roan Inish* (John Sayles, 1994) and *The Matchmaker* (Mark Joffe 1997) (to name but a few) what is interesting in Irish horror film is how the comedic and idyllic aspects of such representations are subverted in dark and disturbing works set in often rural locales that feature little of the pastoral beauty of these films. Indeed rural Ireland is often depicted in contemporary Irish horror film as a place far removed from the welcoming and reassuring locale represented in tourist iconography often influenced by this pastoral tradition in Irish (-American) cinema. It is a space haunted by the hideous monsters of biological farming experiments (Billy O'Brien's *Isolation*), or a tortured girl's nightmares (Eric Courtney's *Seer*); populated by meat-eating zombies who appear without

1. For more on this festival see "Horrorthon Film Festival" at <http://www.melies.org/festival.asp?ID=33> and Niall Kitson, "A Horror Unto itself", *Film Ireland* [Web Exclusives] Saturday 14, 2009, <http://www.filmireland.net/exclusives/horrorthon2008.htm>. (Accessed December 10th 2010).

2. The horror genre of course is not an entirely new development in Irish culture. Indeed, Irish motifs, from the banshee to the leprechaun, have provided recurring figures of fear in international, and particularly American cinema. Arguably the most enduring figure of terror in film over the past 100 years, the vampire, owes its origins, in literature at least, to the late 19th century Irish author Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*. Irish narratives, locales, superstitions and the figures that occupy them therefore have been recurring features of horror cinema internationally.

warning, attack and devour (Conor McMahon's *Dead Meat*); tormented by the traumatised victims of clerical abuse who, it seems until the film's surprising climax, pick off their victims one by one (in Paddy Breatnach's *Shrooms*); and afflicted by an apparently demonic fairy changeling child adopted by an unsuspecting immigrant English couple (Aisling Walsh's *The Daisy Chain*). Interestingly, in both *Dead Meat* and *Shrooms*, it is tourists who constitute the central protagonists. In *Dead Meat*, Spanish tourist Helena (Marián Araújo), lost in the Leitrim countryside and assisted by the local gravedigger Desmond (David Muyliaert) and trainer of the local underage hurling team, Cathal Cheunt (Eoin Whelan), survives her ordeal of Leitrim's zombies only to be locked up in a truck, like an animal, at the film's close. In *Shrooms*, the American students who have come to rural Ireland to experiment with drugs, are all – bar one – horrifically killed by the narratives' close, hardly a story Fáilte Ireland – the Irish National Tourism Development Authority – would wish to promote.

Tourists also have their positive expectations of Ireland dashed in Robert Quinn's TV film *Na Cloigne* (The Heads) (2010), in the form of two French fishermen who are led by the local poacher Diarmaid Ó Máille (Joe Steve Ó Neachtain) to the discovery of the decapitated body of a young woman in a river in the haunted woods beside the fictional village of Cloigeann. *Na Cloigne* began as a three-part mini-series first broadcast in January 2010 before being edited into a 2 hour feature film, broadcast at Halloween on TG4. While sharing similarities with other Irish horror works, *Na Cloigne* is distinctive in that it is the first feature length Irish language horror film. The Irish language features in all of the international "pastoral idyll" features mentioned above, rarely however does it rise above providing local colour – indeed the language cannot function for most of its hoped-for audience, often in the United States, above this level as none of these films include subtitles and therefore the local Irish speaker and the language itself are effectively silenced. However, director Quinn and screenwriters Lauren MacKenzie and Darach Ó Scolaí use the language convincingly in *Na Cloigne* as a natural part of the landscape and culture in a drama set

entirely in the Connemara Gaeltacht and featuring some of the leading actors of Irish language theatre and television, several of whom will be familiar to Irish viewers from prominent roles in the popular Irish soap opera "Ros na Rún", including Macdara Ó Fatharta, Áine Ní Dthroighneáin and Joe Steve Ó Neachtain.

Na Cloigne is set on the edge of a haunted wood where local DJ Seán Ó Dónaill (Darach Ó Dúbháin) and artist Nuala Ní Dhireáin (Siobhán O'Kelly) are having relationship problems which come to a head when Seán brings back two girls from the local pub to their house one night. An understandably furious Nuala chases the girls out of the house and drives off herself. The following day the naked decapitated body of a woman is found in the woods and when Sean awakes with no memory of the night before but to find his T-shirt covered in blood and a bag containing a head left in his kitchen, he begins to suspect that he may have been responsible. The film then follows the attempts of the local Gardaí, led by Superintendent Ó Sé (Barry McGovern), to unravel the events that led to the death of this girl and another whose similarly decapitated body is found shortly after. Barry McGovern is excellent as Superintendent Ó Sé and brings his considerable experience to bear on a role that might have appeared hackneyed if played by a lesser actor. Ó Sé is an officer worthy of the X-files combining acute observational abilities with the capacity to sense supernatural voices and emotions from the 'other side'. When Nuala is discovered in her crashed car, unconscious and in a coma, shortly after the first body is found, Ó Sé senses that she is trapped on a threshold between this world and the next and that only Seán can bring her back.

Combining handheld camera work with impressive effects to create this 'other world' and the mysterious threatening hooded figures haunting the woods nearby, *Na Cloigne* undermines the romanticised vision of the West. Like Bob Quinn's *Póitín* it eschews the sweeping coastline and whimsical characters and is similarly set in a seemingly isolated village inland populated by troubled and sometimes unsavory characters, such as poacher Diarmaid Ó Máille, a figure reminiscent of Niall Toibín's *Póitín* seller Sleamhnán.

As Robin Wood (1985: 116) has noted of the

horror film,

full awareness stops at the level of plot, action and character, in which the most dangerous and subversive implications can disguise themselves and escape detection ... this is why seemingly innocuous genre movies can be far more radical and fundamentally undermining than works of conscious social criticism.

The West of Ireland, and Gaeltacht communities, have long been the subject of questionable representations – an issue that also partly inspired another film produced this year, Risteard Ó Domhnaill's excellent TG4 funded documentary *An Píopa /The Pipe* (2010).³ The unsettling observational camerawork in *Na Cloigne* focused from the woods on the village of Cloigeann itself and Seán and Nuala's home, while suggesting a community constantly being watched by threatening forces, could also be

3. This film, reviewed below by Eileen Leahy and Harvey O'Brien, documents the protest of the Gaeltacht community in Béal an Átha Buí, North Mayo against the development by Shell of an onshore gas processing facility in their locality. Ó Domhnaill has acknowledged in a visit to the Huston School of Film & Digital Media in November 2010 that a major concern in making the work was to address the serious misrepresentation of the local people and their protest in the national press and media, on occasion associating a community based protest with elements of the real IRA and indeed on one occasion, with a Polish anarchist. (For further on this see <http://www.shelltosea.com/content/correspondence-press-ombudsman-complaint-sunday-independent>)

interpreted as a community deeply uncomfortable with its construction from without. As noted by Zélie Asava with regard to the observational camerawork of *The Daisy Chain* in last year's edition of this review, such cinematography "obscures and constructs our view of this world, just as the picturesque view of the rural is itself a construction."⁴ *Na Cloigne* belies its limited TV budget to create a convincing and at a times deeply unsettling locale and is another significant step forward for drama in the Irish language.

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Na Cloigne (2010)

Dir. Robert Quinn

Sc. Lauren MacKenzie and Darach Ó Scolaí

Prod. Ciaran O' Coifigh

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4. Zélie Asava, "Myth and Murder in *The Daisy Chain* (Aisling Walsh, 2009)", *Estudios Irlandeses*, 5 (2010): 210.

Virtual Cinema Short Films

Conn Holohan

Much of the writing on contemporary cinema has grappled with the significance of the medium in an era of radical technological change. The question posed by the title of Andre Bazin's famous collection of essays has never seemed so apposite; namely, in an era defined by media convergence and the radical transformation of means of delivery, what is cinema? Is any attempt to police the borders of cinematic specificity merely an anachronism, the rearguard action of aging cinephiles and anxious academics railing against the erasure of boundaries which increasingly characterises media production and consumption? Do new media platforms imply new forms of content, and if so what relationship might these have to the traditional narrative fictions still found at the Cineplex? Is the distinction between the DIY production of online digital mash-ups and professionally produced films designed for 35mm projection one of kind or merely one of degree? Finally, and most pertinently for this article, how does the brave new world of online delivery impact upon the role of government subsidised film funding bodies, whose *raison d'être* has traditionally been to produce work capable of achieving a cinematic release?

The occasion for these musings is a review of the Irish Film Board's Virtual Cinema funding scheme, the output for which from 2010 is now available for viewing online [http://www.irish.filmboard.ie/funding_programmes/Virtual_Cinema/75]. The description of the scheme on the Film Board website is as follows:

Virtual Cinema is a new scheme for the making of high-quality short films that are suited to the new forms of digital video consumption... The scheme aims to encourage exploration of fresh filmmaking ground, with no creative holds barred. We are looking for creative ideas which will exploit interesting, new and traditional filmmaking techniques

but can hold the attention of the YouTube audience.

The funding provided for each film is set to a maximum of €2,000 and the duration of the films is to be no more than two minutes (although this is not always strictly adhered to in the films produced). The shorts can be originated on any digital format and must be delivered on a format suitable for digital distribution. The aim seems to be to break beyond traditional definitions of cinema and to tap into the creative potential of those working within an online platform, even those who would not self-identify as filmmakers in any traditional sense.

In a discussion with Fran Keaveney, the Film Board executive with responsibility for short film schemes, she asserted that the films were specifically not intended to be for cinematic exhibition due to their technical specifications. However, at the request of the filmmakers, the films have been screened each year at the Darklight Film Festival in Dublin. This short anecdote perhaps illustrates some of the tensions around the relationship between the cinematic institution as traditionally constituted and new media forms. For Keaveney, the ability to attract numerous hits to an online short is nowadays, she says, as much an indicator of filmmaking ability as film festival awards or other traditional markers of prestige. Indeed, the number of viewer hits achieved is clearly the defining measure of worth for most producers of online media. However, the fact that the scheme was funded by the Irish Film Board seems to position the Virtual Cinema productions within a more traditionally cinematic institutional framework, despite the intentions of the funders themselves. Indeed, Keaveney noted that there was a strong crossover between the personnel who applied for funding under the Virtual Cinema scheme and those who applied for other short film schemes supported by the Film Board. For these film-

makers, it seems, a presence on the cinema screen remains the ultimate indication of success.

Theorists such as Thomas Elsaesser and Lev Manovich have addressed the nature of cinema in the digital age in their attempts to answer the questions with which this article opened. They have discerned the impact of technology in film's changing relationship to narrative and the reconstituted relationship between the image and the real. Digital technology, by its very nature, challenges the boundaries through which we orientate ourselves to cinema and to the world. Previously inviolable distinctions such as animation/live action and imaginary/real have blurred to the point that they become indistinct. This blurring of boundaries is replicated at the level of access, as the ease of publishing video online has enabled home produced films to compete for online audiences with professional fare. However, whilst the Internet is predicated upon the concept of open access and content which can be freely navigated by the end-user, funding institutions such as the Film Board act as gate keepers who reduce access to end-users but ensure a guaranteed level of quality. Attempts to exploit online delivery such as the Virtual Cinema scheme thus entail a clash of paradigms at the level of production and distribution. The question remains as to whether the films produced remain within the aesthetics of traditional cinema or whether they have exploited the aesthetic possibilities of the digital age.

Of the nine films produced under the 2010 scheme, one could be classified as animation whilst a further three involve a combination of animation and live action footage. *Daylight Saving Time* (Jason Butler) uses the Trace Bitmap function in Flash to give an animated effect to its footage, in the manner of *Sin City* (R. Rodriguez 2005), whilst *Signs* (Vincent Gallagher) also uses Flash to animate its charming tale of road-safety signs which come to life. The latter film was nominated in the 'Best Use of Film or Animation' category at the 2011 Digital Media Awards. Interestingly, the winning entry in this category was a piece of promotional material produced by the company Design Partners for a series of gaming products. The fact that a Film Board short was competing with a piece of

commercially produced promotional material illustrates the need for film critics and academics to revisit our traditional means of categorising audio-visual output. On the other hand, many of the films produced under the Virtual Cinema scheme seem to quite comfortably belong within the traditional cinematic understanding of what constitutes a short film. They are narrative driven and frequently utilise a set-up and payoff structure, usually to comic effect. One of the most successful shorts produced under the scheme is the 2008 film *The Perils of Internet Dating* (Simon Eustace), which depicts a series of catastrophic blind dates and builds stylishly to its final comic twist. The piece is undoubtedly a success as a short film, but the question remains as to how it differs from the films which would be funded by other Film Board schemes.

The Virtual Cinema scheme is an innovative attempt by the Irish Film Board to respond to the changing landscape of cinema in the digital age. It has encouraged filmmakers to exploit the availability and affordability of digital technology and acknowledged the increasing importance of the Internet as a delivery platform. However, at the time of writing the scheme is not scheduled to run for 2011, a fact which seems to acknowledge that it has not entirely achieved its aims. Indeed Fran Keaveney, the originator of the scheme, suggests that the Board would like to continue to run it in some guise which encourages filmmakers to boldly engage with the possibilities of digital film production. Whilst the films produced under the scheme thus far are varied in tone, theme and mode of production, for the large part they remain within the paradigm of short narrative fiction. It is uncertain how they might respond to the aesthetic and formal possibilities of Internet exhibition, which replaces the linear with the viral as the defining mode of engagement, but what is clear from the very existence of this scheme is that the changing nature of cinema is something which must be grappled with by filmmakers and commentators alike.

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***Pyjama Girls* (Maya Derrington 2010)**

Jenny Knell

Pyjama Girls, the latest feature documentary from the Still Films collaborative, explores the provocative fashion of daytime pyjama-wearing which is commonplace amongst Dublin's working-class communities, particularly the inner city flats. Over the past decade, the so-called 'pyjama girls' (this trend is exclusively female) have become an increasingly visible cultural icon of the city's working classes, reinforcing, for many, stereotypes about social exclusion, unemployment and absent ambition in these already stigmatised areas. Although pyjamas may simply be considered a fashion choice for the young girls, they have become, in the wider cultural imaginary, an ideologically-charged uniform of class that constitutes part of a larger process of socio-spatial division within Dublin's urban landscape. In this sense, the film's attempt to document this class-specific subculture renders visible the "possibilities for how class can be spoken and known, both directly and indirectly, across a range of sites" (Skeggs 2004: 5). It is through this process of transference that *Pyjama Girls* articulates class. By using the symbolic figure of the 'pyjama girl' as the thematic hook, the film explores how social class, more broadly, frames the experiences and marginalised position of young, working-class women in Irish society.

The film's director, Maya Derrington, initially conceived the idea for a documentary on the 'pyjama girls' based upon her own fascination with the ubiquitous presence of nightwear on Dublin's inner city streets, combined with the increasingly impassioned reaction to this which was often publicly vented through various media outlets. Alongside the primary inspiration of the 'pyjama girls' themselves, Derrington synchronously imagined the project through a spatialised awareness of 'the flats' as ghettoised urban spaces that exist outside of society's line

of vision. According to Derrington, *Pyjama Girls* attempts to show the other side of the social class divide to "those living in Dublin today who have no idea of the parallel lives of the people living around them" (O'Connor 2010). As iconographic mainstays of Dublin's classed geography, 'the flats', like the 'pyjama girls', represent another form of class transference, whereby socio-economic difference is inscribed upon urban space through the same process of inscription that marks the working-class female body. The working-class landscapes of the city become knowable and are produced through these culturally-specific and readily visualised entry points.

Filming in the Basin Street flats, Derrington initially worked towards compiling interviews on the pyjama theme until, relatively late into the production process, she met Lauren Dempsey and Tara Salinger, two teenage girls who spoke frankly and honestly with the filmmaker about their life experiences. While maintaining the overarching 'pyjama girls' structure, Derrington shifted the film's orientation towards exploring the girls' relationship and their home lives, particularly Lauren's fractious relationship with her drug-addicted mother. As a result, *Pyjama Girls*, despite the implication of the title, is less about the fashion phenomenon and more resolved towards observing the 'microdramas' (as the filmmaker describes them) of teenage life and the enduring bonds of female friendship. Derrington builds her documentary around three main subjects: the girls, who provide the film's warmth and emotional core; the pyjamas, which maintain a consistent presence throughout the film on the level of narrative theme and visual motif; and the flats, which likewise reoccur throughout the film as another storyline.

Pyjama Girls is anchored emotionally in the girls, and the many scenes revolving around Tara

and Lauren and unraveling their life stories infuse the film with heart, and give the narrative meaning and substance. Derrington foregrounds friendship as the supportive and stabilising influence for the girls, particularly for Lauren, whose turbulent relationship with her mother is a source of massive upheaval in her young life. As the documentary unfolds, Lauren reveals the bittersweet and often harrowing details of her childhood: her mother's manic, drug-fuelled episodes which resulted in the fragmentation of the family unit and the infliction of physical violence on her eldest child. Lauren later reveals that she has enrolled in anger management therapy because, she only half jokes, "me ma's a gearhead" (i.e., addicted to heroin). Tara and Lauren's behaviour appears to be largely informed by such violence and aggression. Further, the girls' unselfconscious discussion of such topics as drugs and teenage pregnancy suggest that these types of social issues are everyday realities, and therefore normative, in a tough environment like the flats or Ballyfermot (where Lauren now lives with her grandmother). Through these insights into their everyday reality, the film implicitly shows how social class fundamentally shapes the girls' lives in the form of premature exposure to danger, violence and drugs.

Despite the absorbing drama created by the girls themselves, the film consistently turns back to the eponymous pyjama subject. Derrington foregrounds pyjamas in the film's opening (and bookend closing) scene, which shows Lauren and Tara shopping for pyjamas and discussing their affection for this relaxed type of clothing: Lauren declares, "They're comfy, gorgeous. I'd even get changed into them to go down the road." Throughout the film, Lauren, Tara and the majority of their friends wear their pyjamas in the flats, around Ballyfermot and even into town. Derrington directly addresses mainstream society's vexed reaction to the 'pyjama girls' by overlaying an audio recording of an Irish radio call-in show devoted to this topic, significantly, upon a montage of still images of the flats. While the DJ concludes that the fashion trend can be reduced to the attitude of "Society doesn't give a toss about us, so why should we give a toss about society?", the film, speaking through one of the 'pyjama girls', dismisses this politicised

interpretation. Lauren offers the film's definitive explanation for this phenomenon by explaining that the choice to wear pyjamas relates to the close-knit environment of the flats and the resulting perception of the community's extended space of home. The whole flat complex becomes like 'your house', and there is a familiarity engendered by everybody knowing each other. The wearing of pyjamas represents belonging and communal identity for girls, while also, more broadly, suggesting that the confined architecture of the flats has given rise to specific ways of inhabiting urban space for Dublin's working classes. Despite the film's attention to the pyjama question, Derrington conspicuously ignores certain areas of inquiry associated with Dublin's pyjama girls, such as the role that Penneys, in particular, has played in promoting this fashion trend. (Interestingly, Derrington indicated that she shot the required 'pyjama' scenes in Dunnes because Penneys declined to give the crew permission to film in their stores. It is unclear as to whether this was for logistical or ideological reasons.) As a result, film has a limited engagement with the broader context of the pyjama-wearing trend. The 'flat culture' theory unsatisfactorily (albeit with interesting implications for the film's rendering of urban space) consolidates the complexity of the issue into a singular view that fails to account for the widespread embrace of pyjamas outside the confines of the flats.

Space plays a central role in determining the experiences of the documentary's subjects, on the one hand, but also fundamentally informs the structure and aesthetics of the film. Although *Pyjama Girls* is mainly filmed in Ballyfermot, Derrington's interest hinges upon constructing the real and imagined spaces of the flats. The flats, for Derrington, in addition to their powerful signification of the urban working-class landscape, provide a visual counterpoint to the pyjamas:

There were two things in my mind as I began, one was the bright softness of the pyjamas as a metaphor for female teenage life and against that the harsh lines of the flats. I was really struck by the architecture of the area which combined brutality and community, so I wanted the place to be very present within the film ("Spotlight" 2010).

Derrington's conception of the flats is highly emotive and grounded in the physical texture and orientation of Dublin's working-class architecture. The film establishes the 'character' of the flats through Lauren's description of her experiences of the inner city complexes: "blocks and blocks of young ones with kids", Lauren remarks, and attributes the beginnings of her own teenage rebellion (i.e., dabbling in drugs) to the damaging influence of this environment. The flats assume a life of their own within the film, even generating their own storylines through several short scenes involving a group of young boys with seemingly directionless energy: they are shown breaking apart Styrofoam, drawing on concrete blocks and startling the locals by hiding in a flat screen television box. These events, insignificant in and of themselves, become highly evocative of place in terms of capturing the atmosphere of this environment. Perhaps Derrington's most original contribution to contemporary Irish cinema's rendering of Dublin's working-class spaces, however, is through the highly stylised montages of the flats and their surrounding environment, which, as the film establishes, constitutes the extended space of home. Stationary shots lingering upon the architectural detail of the flats are combined with similarly framed images of resonant environmental objects in the surrounding area. For instance, shots of the stairwells and balconies of the flats are edited together with images depicting satellite dishes, CCTV warning signs and telephone wires. This unique approach to cinematic landscape, which draws clear inspiration from the visual arts, effectively captures the grittiness of the inner city environment in all its visceral detail. By suturing together the architectural details of the flats from different perspectives, Derrington dynamically captures the physicality of these spaces and thus presents a challenge to the conventional representations of these iconic working-class environments.

Working-class females often remain voiceless in Irish society. In attempting to render this marginalised population visible, Derrington has the difficult task of negotiating the creative tension between trying to answer the central question of who the 'pyjama girls' are versus society's perception of them. In other words,

does the film give an authentic voice to its working-class subjects or simply appropriate their voices in order to challenge ways of thinking about Dublin's urban space and the divisions wrought by social class? While the documentary's observational style works towards producing an authentic representation of the girls' experiences, the film significantly alters their reality at the same time. According to the filmmakers, deliberate choices were made to not feature Lauren's mother in the documentary and, later in the editing process, to cut out all men from the film. On the thematic level, these omissions facilitated the film's portrayal of the three generations of Dublin women, the middle generation of which (represented by Lauren's mother) has been obliterated by drugs. Without a doubt, these editorial decisions powerfully underscore the impact of drugs upon Dublin's working-class communities, but they also distort the lived reality of the documentary's subjects and subordinate their individual experiences to the film's thematic coherence.

Ironically, the class struggle so present in the film became manifested through the 'need' to subtitle Tara and Lauren's working-class accents for the wider Dublin audience. When the film premiered at the IFFI's 'Stranger Than Fiction' Documentary Film Festival in April 2010, subtitles were intermittently applied throughout certain sections of the film. The implication that the working-class accents of the documentary's subjects could not be understood in their own city more saliently underscored the deeply entrenched nature of Dublin's socio-spatial divisions. Subsequently, in the hopes of international distribution, Still Films took the decision to fully subtitle the film with the result that much of the Dublin vernacular and syntax authentic to working-class identity was glossed into standard English. The subtitling of *Pyjama Girls* delegitimizes its subjects' working-class culture, quite literally through the appropriation of their voices, and accommodates their marginalised identities only through the process of bringing them closer to the mainstream. In this sense, Derrington's attempt to traverse Dublin's class boundaries through the filmmaking process unwittingly replicates the larger power structures fundamentally implicated in society's marginalisation of the 'pyjama girls'.

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Pyjama Girls (Irl, 2010)

Director: Maya Derrington
Producer: Nicky Gogan
Music: Dennis McNulty
Cinematographer: Suzie Lavelle
Editor: Paul Rowley
Associate Producer: Sinéad Ní Bhroin

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Filming Communities in Ireland: *The Pipe, Pyjama Girls* (2010)

Eileen Leahy

Two Irish documentary films of 2010 deal with community in contrasting ways. *Pyjama Girls* (Dir. Maya Derrington) is an observational documentary that explores the recent phenomenon of daytime, pyjama-wearing in public by young working class women. *The Pipe* (Dir. Risteard O'Dohmnaill) deals with a small rural community under threat from the planned construction of a gas pipeline by a large multinational corporation.

These films' distinct forms and visual styles display two very different approaches to community. *The Pipe* deploys a conventional style, with elements of a fly-on-the-wall mode and contemporary activist film, to build an argument in support of the Shell to Sea campaign. *Pyjama Girls*' formal inventiveness involves a combination of a poetic style, contemporary reality techniques and an interesting use of asynchronous sound to create a piece that is more experimental than expository.

Each constructs community in different ways, and each can be said to create community, both on-screen and in the social world itself, since community is largely created through culture. The idea that community resides in the boundaries between one group of people and another derives from Anthony P. Cohen's theory of symbolic community, in which he argues that community is based on the symbolic construction of boundaries (Cohen 1985: 12-15). Community, in this view, is a "cluster of symbolic and ideological map references with which the individual is socially oriented", and community is constructed by distinguishing one group of people from another (1985: 57). Gerard Delanty understands this view of community as pertaining to a "form of consciousness or awareness of reality" in which community "is a symbolically constructed reality" (Delanty 2003: 46) and this consciousness, it can be argued,

finds expression in film. The two films, discussed here, can be said to create community through constructing boundaries, either between us and the community in question, or between different communities in the film text. How these two films construct such boundaries is very relevant both to the understanding of community that each film interacts with and to the significance of community in Irish culture.

The opening landscape shots in *The Pipe* are aerial, sweeping shots, that suggest an ancient natural world and social order and create a timeless vision of what is at stake in the conflict that ensues. Landscape here situates and authenticates the narrative that unfolds, drawing on a cinematic language, in which landscape is both spectacle and metaphor (Lukinbeal 2005), and which allows the film to construct the boundary of this community as flowing into the surrounding countryside. These landscape shots lend this community a timeless natural legitimacy as well as suggesting contemporary eco-politics and its concomitant cultural associations.

In cinema, landscape can also signify freedom: the freedom of wide open spaces set against the confining boundaries of community. This signification can be found in the Hollywood western, for example, where community is seen as a precursor to the rigid constraints of modern society. *The Pipe* draws heavily on these classic cinematic traditions of landscape. Landscape in this film also suggests the romantic and tourist images of a west of Ireland landscape, in which the west of Ireland is constructed as pre-modern and offered as an escape from modernity. By linking these connotations with the local Rosspoint community, the film engages a popular understanding of community as a pre-modern arcadia, destroyed by modernity, but which we all strive to regain (Joseph 2001: 1). *The*

Pipe thus poses community as a natural order opposed to the rigid, hierarchical, externally imposed order of society, a view that can also be found to underpin discourses of community (Delanty 2003: 15, 16, 25). It is noteworthy, therefore, that the representatives of the community are shown, in this film, mostly outdoors in an unspoiled landscape. They are constructed as a fundamental element of the natural world and in a symbiotic relationship to nature. One is reminded of iconic images of the west of Ireland such as those in *Man of Aran* (Robert J. Flaherty, 1934) for example, but instead of battling nature, the local community in *The Pipe* is constructed as at one with nature. Normal life for this community is framed as a daily life out in the open air, working on the land or the sea. We see them confined when there is conflict, when they are in the midst of a crowd of protesters, or in the village hall at a meeting, so that the global capitalist forces behind the proposed pipeline are seen to force these individuals away from their natural lifestyle.

Pyjama Girls also draws on a discourse of community opposed to society, for example, its main contributor Lauren says: "Society doesn't give a toss about us so why should we give a toss about society?" But where *The Pipe* implicates us in community *Pyjama Girls* differentiates between 'us', as society, and 'them' as community. It does this by constructing a boundary around the community it depicts.

This film deploys a distinctive poetic realism that draws heavily on the Free Cinema aesthetic of 1950s British Social Realism, even including a fairground scene. The contemplative shots of buildings that punctuate the film are particularly reminiscent of this poetic documentary style. These shots of buildings are formal, from a fixed and static camera, and suggest the objective observer, with the camera as a window onto a distinct world and the viewer holding a privileged voyeuristic position. This voyeuristic stance is reinforced by repeated shots of windows. Whilst we are drawn in to Lauren's story as it develops, we are also repeatedly reminded of our 'outside observer' status through these very formal shots. This is a strategy that emphasises our difference from this community and their 'otherness'. It serves to

construct a distinct boundary between us and them, and in doing so, it can be argued, creates a community of us as viewers. These formal shots of buildings and windows provide reflective moments, the reflection being a cue that we are outside of the action, and outside of the community depicted. They also suggest confinement, a separating confinement that tells us that this world is ultimately inaccessible, across a divide that cannot be bridged. By appearing separately from footage of the girls who are not linked to them in any way, they suggest an objective view of the world that is being observed, and reinforce the separateness of this world from ours by their inclusion in the film. The English subtitling further separates us from the girls observed by the film, signalling our inability to understand them without this mediation.

The urban community that the pyjama-girls inhabit is constructed in *Pyjama Girls* as physically bounded, confined within flat complexes and housing estates that are only amenable via public transport, which can, as the sequence of the girls on the bus testifies, be fraught with its own danger. In the film, the city is not an open space but a series of distinct and separate bounded spaces. Like Conn Holohan's argument about cinematic portrayals of Dublin, *Pyjama Girls* displays "a certain disregard for the realities of spatial relations within the city" (Holohan 2010: 107), by conflating Ballyfermot with a number of other 'disadvantaged' areas of Dublin. For example the social housing apartments or 'flats' where we see the girls, and which feature in many of the reflective shots discussed above, are actually within the city itself, but in the film the impression is given that they are in the peripheral suburb of Ballyfermot. This conflation allows Ballyfermot to be presented as a physically bounded, closed off space, rather than as the suburban sprawl it actually is. Thus a distinct boundary is constructed around the community of pyjama-wearing girls it depicts, when in fact pyjama-wearing among girls is a city-wide, even a country-wide, phenomenon.¹

1. See for example Claire McNeilly. "Tesco Bans Shopping in Pyjamas." *Belfast Telegraph* [Online]. Friday 29 January 2010.

Thus *Pyjama Girls* separates us from the community observed, and makes a distinction between us and them. We get the impression of a barrier that cannot be crossed and that the filmmaker has given us a privileged, once-in-a-lifetime, opportunity to see over that barrier. *The Pipe*, on the other hand, suggests that the boundary between us and the community can be crossed. It intimates that the viewer too has access to this community and its natural heritage, and that such access might also be under threat from the same capitalist forces that threaten both countryside and community.

As Cohen (1985: 58) remarks, the constructed boundaries between communities “are *relational* rather than absolute; that is, they mark the community *in relation* to other communities.” Violence is an important element in the construction of such boundaries (Delanty 2003: 47-48) and conflict and violence is at the heart of both films discussed here. Where *The Pipe* shows the conflict of community against state, or society, and the internal conflicts that this has given rise to, *Pyjama Girls* defines a community of pyjama-wearing girls in opposition to another community of girls they call “Babos”, with violence involved in this boundary construction. *The Pipe*’s scene of a group of hired-in security guards lined up against the local community, constructs a stark contrast between ‘locals’ and outsiders. A contrast which emphasises Shell’s global capitalist ethic. The Gardai, on the other hand are shown as being from the local community. This construction of the police force as made up of local individuals pitted against those locals opposed to the pipeline, serves to reinforce an opposition between community and society in the film and constructs society as a threat to community.

As we have seen, these films create community in different ways through their construction of boundaries. This can be found to correspond with the urban/rural divide that is said to inflect Irish national cinema (McLoone 2000: 18-20). It can, alternatively, be related to the two films’ very different production contexts.

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Pyjama Girls is informed by an experimental and artist cinema aesthetic. Its production company Still Films, known for experimental work, has associations with the Darklight Festival, an important contribution to artist and experimental film in Ireland. Indeed, *Pyjama Girls* director, Maya Derrington, sees herself as outside of the community she observes:

I used to walk past Charlemont Street flats and wonder about the contrast between me walking to work in TV and these snippets of life that I would catch. I wanted to step over this boundary that frightened me. I wanted them to think of me as a person also (Clarke 2010).

The Pipe has a very different background. Director, Risteard O’Dohmnaill, has family connections to this community and was living locally when he happened across the protests, began filming them and over six years built up footage of the anti-pipeline movement.² His documentary weds exposition and observation, building up an argument that supports resistance to the pipeline without a narrative voiceover. During the conflicts, the camera gets right inside the action, showing us what is happening from a point of view within the community through its shaky, hand-held view of the protests and low angles of conflicts at the meetings. Whilst this film is not a propaganda piece from the protesters themselves it is informed by an activist and social movement cinema that engages community in the pursuit of social change.

Thus it might be argued that in cinema, community boundaries are constructed according to the particular perspectives filmmakers operate from. Those films that emanate from within a community may engage with a particular way of symbolically constructing community that differs from that constructed from a position outside of the community.

2. Risteard O’Dohmnaill. Q&A session that accompanied the screening of *The Pipe* at The Lighthouse Cinema Dublin on December 10th, 2010.

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Snap (Carmel Winters 2010)

Eileen Leahy

Awarded best Irish film, and best Irish director for Carmel Winters at the Jameson Dublin International Film Festival, *Snap* is arguably the most impressive Irish feature of 2010. The film's narrative revolves around a mother's relationship with her teenage son, a theme that Winters visited previously in her script for Collette Cullen's short film *Odd Sock* (2000) which also dealt with secrets and a confusion of identity between mother and son. *Snap*, however, is a darker, more ominous tale that engages the familiar tropes of Irish dysfunctional families, child abuse and the malign pervasiveness of the past through our present life.

This deployment of multiple lenses in the film's cinematography invokes a fragmented reality that is provisional and unstable. Its juxtaposition of various shooting styles, from a mixture of faux 'found footage' and amateur documentary, with mobile phone recording and conventional drama techniques, supports a patchwork narrative that looks back over past events. The film thus underscores the fallibility of the photographic image and foregrounds the unreliability of memory itself. It suggests that even in the contemporary world, when memory no longer resides in our imaginations but is tangibly on record in photography, film or tape, there can still be no claim to veracity. The fractured effect of narrative and cinematography is further emphasised through rewinding, fast-forwarding and pausing the action in the edit, as though we are seeing the filmmaker in the process of reviewing his footage. This might suggest an experimental, esoteric approach to telling this story, but in fact the end result is a film that engages the attention throughout and allows the viewer to be led through the twists and turns of the plot without any major confusion or real disorientation. What this rupturing of narrative, visual and editing struct-

ures does achieve is a strengthening of the forceful characterisations and performances which illustrate the ubiquitous presence of the camera in everyday modern life and the mediated nature of reality on-screen.

Snap, however, is primarily a new take on that old perennial: the Irish mother; and in this sense it is a conventional Irish film. It is a dialogue with the prevailing cultural stereotypes of Irish femininity, in which women are "desexualised and venerated as pure mother" in a dependent, passive and domestic selflessness (Nash 1997: 110-114). As Elizabeth Cullingford (2002: 186) points out, the enduring myth of the mother in Irish culture has been used to symbolise a conflict between tradition and modernity and as an icon of nationalist sentiment. Most often embodied in the figure of the Virgin Mother, the Irish mother ideologically links Catholicism and Irishness,¹ and is an image that resonates through Irish cinema. In *Snap*, Sandra's (Aisling O'Sullivan) choice, or her regret, that, rather than a mother, she wanted to be a nun, can be read as revolving around this fundamental cultural contradiction. It could also be argued that the absence of any explicit reference to Stephen's (Stephen Moran) father bears out the notion of a virgin birth, or at least an Irish version of a virgin birth, where the woman hasn't had pleasure in the sexual act, maybe as a result of force, or, at best, coercion. The virgin mother becomes a subtle presence in this film and reinforces its links with *The Butcher Boy* (Neil Jordan, 1997) through the casting of Aisling O'Sullivan, who played Francie Brady's mother

1. Ideas of the Virgin Mary also become linked with the oppression of women in Irish Culture from the 1980s phenomenon of moving statues intertwined with real-life tragedies and scandals involving unwed teenage mothers (Cullingford 2002: 189).

in that film as well as by physical similarities between Stephen and Francie Brady (Eamonn Owens).

O'Sullivan's performance also reminds us of popular culture and cinema's stereotype of the feisty Irish female, which originated in Hollywood star Maureen O'Hara. Sinead O'Connor is an obvious example, outspoken and challenging convention, she is also the quintessential Irish single/virgin mother. Having embodied the virgin mother both in *The Butcher Boy*, and in its original incarnation in *Hush-a-bye-baby* (Margo Harkin, 1988) she is well known as a single mother who also serves as a priest. In addition she has been "Ireland's most visible crusader against child abuse" (Cullingford 2002: 193). This characterisation of a feisty Irish woman can be found to encapsulate the contradictions in Irish femininity: aggressive and defensive women, who also suggest something of the pure, unsullied, devoted and chaste nun. *Snap* further deploys ideas of the Holy Trinity, in its rendering of the relationship between the Father, the Son and, rather than the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mother, who takes her rightful place in the centre of this triad. Indeed, the grandfather's (Pascal Scott) parental relationship to Stephen and his status as patriarch in the film, reconfigures this Catholic idea by invoking the essential "incestuous edge" of oedipal conflicts at the heart of Irish national identity (Curtin 1999: 39). Thus the film offers a counter to stereotypes of the Irish family and to the staple Irish matriarch, like the one played by Brenda Fricker in *My Left Foot* (Jim Sheridan, 1989) or its opposite, the put-upon wife, as, for example, played by Angela McCourt in *Angela's Ashes* (Alan Parker, 1999). *Snap*'s construction of the Irish mother is a much more complex and layered representation than such conventional portrayals.

In this way, *Snap* can be found to flesh out the strong female characters of Irish cinema, with an intimation that Sandra's defensive aggression results from a past trauma. Her shades of the stereotypical feisty Irish colleen also suggest cinema's ambivalent relationship to such characters, fetishizing "the strong female while simultaneously working to undermine her" (Barton 2006: 145). The film's play on the mediation of reality by cinema, and media in

general, highlights the scapegoating of women, and especially of the mother, in culture. We are reminded of the documentary techniques of confessional talk shows and reality television, popular intermediaries in contemporary women's lives. We also sense Sandra's familiarity with these genres, on the one hand she is aware of how to perform for the camera, on the other there is a certain naivety in her understanding of how this performance might be managed in post production. For example, in one scene she asks the filmmaker to delete her swear words and replace them with something more acceptable. In this way she ascribes a sort of power to the filmmaker to construct a version of her, and this points to her awareness that the camera distorts, but not *how* it distorts.

Throughout the film Sandra is at once suspicious of the camera's power and confident in her ability to make use of it to get her story across. Her suspicion of the camera is a reminder of Nora Barnacle (Susan Lynch) in *Nora* (Pat Murphy, 2000), who is aware that the writer James Joyce twists her words and who struggles to retain her own identity in the face of his appropriation (Barton 2004: 118). Sandra's mixture of resistance to, and complicity in, the camera's objectification of her signals a similar complex interaction with the subject/object position of women in cinema. Her shock at how she sounds, and how she looks, when she sees herself on tape is a reminder of her powerlessness, echoed later when she fails to recognise herself in the snapshot of the child. Furthermore, like *Nora*, *Snap* suggests a conflict between word and image in the pause, fast-forward and rewind sequences, early in the film. Whilst these sequences foreground the role of the filmmaker in fabricating reality, they also demonstrate a tension between the words she speaks and her face as spectacle, and how her image is privileged over her words by the force of this male gaze.

Although *Snap* can be seen, as in Sandra's own words, to 'set the record straight' by lending a voice to the mothers who have been elided in these narratives of "the abused child of history" (McLoone 2000: 213), this is not a simplistic corrective to previous exclusions. The use of camera and editing devices to foreground the mediation of her account remind us that such

direct, 'straight', representations of her side of the story are impossible. We learn that the camera is wielded, not only by a male, but by one who is far from disinterested and who has his own dysfunctional obsession with the object of his gaze. Ultimately she remains trapped in the camera's gaze, despite her attempts to

assert, or to bury, her truth. *Snap*, whilst it dismantles some of the shibboleths of Irish culture, does not unravel the primacy of traditional social and family relations but implies that we all end up as victims of these same power structures.

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Snap (2010)

Dir. Carmel Winters

Sc. Carmel Winters

Prod. Martina Niland

Cast: Aisling O'Sullivan and Eileen Walsh

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Short Shorts: A Masala of Musicals

Barry Monahan

In a highly innovative move three years ago, Irish Film Board/Bord Scannán na hÉireann made a change to the application requirements of Short Shorts, one of their six short film funding incentives. While the Signatures, Virtual Cinema, Reality Bites, Frameworks and Gearrscannán (short films in Irish) programmes retained their basic prerequisites for funding, the Short Shorts category moved from challenging filmmakers to tell a story with cinematic originality, towards more generically-based preconditions. It was proposed, largely motivated by the generic qualities of the highly successful low-budget musical production *Once* (Carney, 2006), that the category “short musicals” was to provide the qualifying factor for producers applying for funding under the Short Shorts category.

While the move was not unprecedented – Darklight and other Irish festivals already categorised their short productions generically – the challenge to filmmakers was clearly grounded in market-based considerations. Not only was it hoped that the new designation would reinvigorate the system, bringing new energy and talent into the field, but it was also recognised that international festival programmes most often bracketed their shorts programmes in generic clusters, meaning that this kind of categorisation would inevitably facilitate the marketing and distribution of Irish talent on indigenous and overseas circuits. At festivals from Cannes to Sundance, *Irish Talent on Film* – the promotional DVD produced annually by the IFB – would include films that now moved beyond broader and less well-defined categories of “live action” and “animated shorts” towards more precise cinematic description, making the importation of generically designated compilations an attractive

proposal for prospective festival programmers.

As a result of this inventive challenge, of the twenty-eight short films funded by the board in 2009, six short productions were categorised under the title “Musical”. But while they each worked with the genre’s semantic and syntactic configurations, five of the six played in a meta-cinematic way with the conventions of the musical. Tellingly, this parodic dialectical address to generic convention happened on the level of *form* rather than on the level of *narrative*, so that while community interaction and the success of the respective protagonists’ romance were not entirely absent in most cases, the structural codes of the films were addressed first and foremost. Examples of his address included: playing with the incredibility of characters’ diegetic performing to the extra-diegetic soundtrack; the self-consciousness of mediated performance; and an acknowledgement of the artificiality of the films’ apparent seamless construction.

Three of the six short films use generic playing to comedic effect. *Dental Breakdown* and *Separations Agency* (directed by Ian Power and Shane Martin respectively) reformulated otherwise straightforward apprehension dramas by replacing dialogue with song, so that commonplace anxiety – in the first case, fear of going to the dentist and, in the second, relationship breakdown – are comically rendered by virtue of the merry lyricism of the (sung) performances at odds with the plot. *Mr Foley* (directed by “DADDY”) creates its comedy by placing the extra-diegetic soundtrack makers – musicians, foley artists, and sound effects men – into the diegetic space, so that this crew follows the protagonist around the hospital in which he wakes at the beginning of the film. Two of the other shorts in the series similarly acknowledge

the constructed nature of performance by reframing it and exposing the mediation. *A Clown's Requiem* (directed by Jason Forde) appears at first to be the back stage tale of a clown's downbeat contemplation over his last public performance, until a final 180-degree turn of the camera reveals that what we have been watching is, in fact, a theatrical presentation in front of a live audience. Similarly, *Chairs* (directed by Pete Moles) depicts a televised performance of the final round of a hypothetical international musical chairs competition.

The last of the six short musicals on the Film Board *This is Irish Film* (2010) promotional disc is very different in several respects. Unlike the five films mentioned above, *Moore Street Masala* (written, directed and edited by David O'Sullivan) does not parody or address meta-cinematically the conventions of the mainstream musical genre. Rather, it pays honest homage to the Bollywood form and, unlike *Slumdog Millionaire* (Boyle, 2008) which ends with a typical Bollywood-style musical set-piece, is wholly dedicated to replicating the structural and narrative conventions of that Eastern cinema. While it does have comic moments, these are not generated by burlesque or distorted assimilation of the Bollywood aesthetic, but by the juxtaposition and blending of local recognisable elements with those from the Indian film tradition. It is not a parody of this cinematic formula, but a celebrated affirmation of its stylistic adaptability, generic flexibility and colourful set-piece variability; something alluded to in the *masala* ("mix") of the title. The established funding category under Short Shorts also allowed a mixture of talent among the crew, in this case including the musicians Cormac Breslin and Declan Quinn of Dublin rock band *The Republic of Loose*, who moved towards the composition of soundtracks in 2008 when they established Decor Music.

Examples of this "blending" for the provision of comical or other tonal effects abound in *Moore Street Masala*. The gloomier greys and browns with which we might have painted the *mise en scène* of Dublin's iconic and renowned Moore Street in pre-Celtic Tiger years, are dramatically invigorated here with an assortment of colourful costumes and a luminous setting, as well as by dynamic song and dance routines. The

quintessential Dublin street, with its identifiable accented Irishers, is populated with an international cast of characters, including the Indian protagonist. Dublin urban rap-style slang lyrics are integrated into the Indian music, and the tonal qualities of the Eastern melodies also bring an oriental flavour to the local singing. As is typical of the genre, song and dialogue interact and interrupt each other, and "reality" moments are merged with dream sequences as, conversely, the former are used to snap protagonists out of reverie. The romantic yearning of the male lead is further undercut by the lyrics: as he sings "The magic began... when you bought skimmed milk..." his emotional expression is suddenly interrupted by his boss who shouts "Baba! Inside now!". At another similar moment the extra-diegetic music becomes diegetic when, in a cut away from the convenience store floor to the office of the owner, the music to which the characters are singing and dancing is rendered as piped over the intercom. Again, angered by this, the boss interrupts the frivolity shouting "Get back to the till!". Location jump cuts, typical of all music videos, effect another trait of the Bollywood blending as "foreign" Edenic rural landscapes are intercut with urban street scenes. The tonal blending that happens throughout is directly presented in the alliteration of the title.

True to the Bollywood narrative form, *Moore Street Masala* uses its musical and action set-pieces to assist the development and conclusion of the romance plot. A significant one of these occurs when the main film soundtrack is heard to slur to a halt as the film slows down and frames seem to get jammed in the projector. This conventional Bollywood-style transition provides for a jump cut to a fantasy sequence in which the shop assistant runs through fields with his estate agent love interest. This section of film is rendered by computer generated modification as a scratched, grainy and cyan-tinted 35mm format that is in complete contrast to the sharp, colour-saturated digital images of the rest of the film. In a moment of apposite commentary on contemporary Irish society, the heroic Baba (Deva Naidu) protects his heroine "Lady" (Anne Wilson) by fighting off "First Time Buyer" and "For Sale" signs that float surrealistically and threateningly towards her. This piece ends with a return to the musical routine which has now

become a public dance in which the whole community of Moore Street inhabitants has joined in harmonious singing and choreography. With the dramatic expressionism of the musical's melodrama, the generic coding of the ultimate dance sequence effectively represents the culmination of the couple's love connection, and the narrative that began with dialogue is resolved with the dancing group's standing final beat as the camera sweeps smoothly, vertically into a high bird's-eye position over the crowd.

These short musical productions are the fruit of the first year of the new Film Board's Short Shorts scheme. The seventh promotional disc containing films from 2010, offered productions challenged by the title "films with no dialogue", while the brief for filmmakers applying last year was "Eireann go Brágh" – roughly translated as "Ireland, Forever!" – a title that worked off the back of the two international short collection projects *Paris, je t'aime* (2006), and *New York, I Love You* (2009). This year's parameter has yet to be set, but based on the success of the first three years, we can be ensured of a future of innovative and exciting short films: one that will hopefully foster a body of native feature length

filmmakers who are as adept at working creatively within generic conventions and restrictions, as they are at providing for international market demands and networks of distribution.

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Advocating Advocacy: The Protest Paradigm in Documentary Representation – *Meeting Room* (2010) and *The Pipe* (2010)

Harvey O'Brien

On Wednesday 29th September 2010 at 7.45 a.m., 41 year-old Mayo-born Joe McNamara drove a cement truck into the gates of Dáil Eireann on Kildare Street, Dublin. The mixer was emblazoned with slogans including “Toxic Bank” and “Anglo”. McNamara’s anger was understandable in the context of a State facing a Budget forewarned to be the most severe in history. With the prospect of IMF intervention to manage a rising national debt preserving the broken banking system to insulate the decision makers from liability, people had already taken to the streets in mass protest on several occasions throughout the year, and would again in November and December. It would seem in this environment that Joe McNamara would have become a significant symbol of resistance. Solicitor Cahir O’Higgins, defended his client’s actions as ‘legitimate protest’, and there was initially widespread support, certainly interest, on social media. Souring the deal though, was McNamara’s profession. Regardless of his general or particular actions, about which no comment should hereby be inferred, it was always unlikely that the disaffected populus would adopt a property developer as a mascot.

Two Irish documentaries released in 2010 dealt with the subject of social protest. Both were historical in outlook, detailing with events in both the recent and distant past. While both are primarily thematic documentaries, each detail interactions between individuals, organised groups, the State, and the media that are illustrative of the paradigm of social protest, its place in Irish society, and the importance of its representation. Bill Nichols reminds us that the word ‘representation’ has multiple meanings in documentary film, one of which is synonymous with political representation – giving a voice to

to the subject, outlining its point of view. Of what value, then, might *Meeting Room* (James Davis and Brian Gray, 2010) and *The Pipe* (Risteard ó Domhnaill, 2010) be in terms of presenting a paradigm (or indeed paragon) of political resistance at a time when the need for change seemed so urgent?

Meeting Room recounts the story of the grassroots organisation ‘Concerned Parents Against Drugs’, which, with the initial support of Fr. James Smyth SJ, successfully drove drug dealers from Dublin’s Hardwicke Street Flats in 1982. CPAD then grew into a movement, supported by community leaders and independent politicians including Tony Gregory. Mass meetings, street patrols, and even forced evictions followed, including confrontations with well known and high profile inner-city criminal figures. The organisation ran into difficulty when a skeptical media began to question the legitimacy of this community policing initiative and intimated that its real power came from the tacit threat of paramilitary enforcement. CPAD fought on, defying increasing political pressure to cease its activities and return the rule of law to the organs of the State, and eventually some of its leaders were imprisoned. The movement went into decline, and by the end of the 1980s it had fizzled out from a force of social change to a memory of proletarian resistance.

Davis and Gray’s film tells the story of the movement through interviews with participants in it, including Fr. Smyth, John “Whacker” Humphries (whose outspoken manner and wild looks made him a minor celebrity at the time), and the late Tony Gregory. In its most extraordinary scene the film has journalist Brendan O’Brien examine his own interview with Fr. Smyth from RTE in 1982 in which

O'Brien attempted to get Smyth to confirm paramilitary involvement behind the scenes of CPAD. Smyth's silence at the time is matched by his direct assertions in the present that "they treated us as the aggressors and the pushers as the victims", and O'Brien, reflecting on the context in which he had approached this thread of the story (violence in Northern Ireland), admits there was an element of bias. The sequence edits O'Brien and Smyth as they are now speaking about their experiences then, with images from the original interview viewed on a television monitor, effectively inter-cutting the antagonists and linking spaces across person, organisation, and time. The film thus creates a powerful sense of the process of history and the means by which it is constructed (complete with its biases), simultaneously thereby bringing the subject 'alive' as an illustration of the nature, process, and value of advocacy.

The Pipe considers more recent events in Rossport, Co. Mayo, where protests against the landfall route of the Corrib Gas Pipeline resulted in the imprisonment of five men in 2005. The film follows the particular stories of several individuals whose lives have been impacted by the pipeline plan, most particularly fisherman Pat O'Donnell, whose efforts to protect his crab pots on the seabed by blocking the route of an enormous ship bearing a vital piece of construction equipment provide the film with its most dramatic metaphor for its thematic concern with the struggle between 'big oil' and 'small village' (vaunted on the poster advertising). Community is again at stake in this story, which is also defined by a collision between national and local priorities and the perceived necessity to advocate against the mechanisms of the State. Government approval for Shell Oil's operations was granted in the national interest of harvesting the natural gas resource, mandating their activities. The dispute is, in many ways, more about planning regulations than the overall ethos of capitalist exploitation, but the result is the polarising of the local community where local Gardaí are required to carry out their duties as representatives of the State by arresting friends and neighbours, and, as evinced in the film, applying physical force to remove them from their site of protest. The particular and the general are conflated in the image of Pat

O'Donnell standing defiant as successive soft-spoken but determined Gardaí attempt to cajole him, then finally arrest him to clear the way for the monstrous invader looming like an alien mothership over his tiny fishing boat.

Writing in 1932, John Grierson observed:

This sense of social responsibility makes our realist documentary a troubled and difficult art, and particularly in a time like ours. The job of romantic documentary is easy in comparison: easy in the sense that the noble savage is already a figure of romance and the seasons of the year have already been articulated in poetry. Their essential virtues have been declared and can more easily be declared again, and no one will deny them. But realist documentary, with its streets and cities and slums and markets and exchanges and factories, has given itself the job of making poetry where no poet has gone before it, and where no ends, sufficient for the purposes of art, are easily observed. It requires not only taste but also inspiration, which is to say a very laborious deep-seeing, deep-sympathising creative effort indeed (1998: 88).

The choice Grierson presents us with here is interesting – between romanticism and realism with the imperative of social responsibility as its grounding determinant. Again and again it strikes me these days how the writings of the 1930s seem as urgent and apropos as contemporary debate when it comes to how 'the times' are described, and I suppose this is no mystery given how the paradigms of recession culture are articulated with reference to the Great Depression. But here, Grierson is calling for an engagement with both social reality and the raw material of lived modernity – streets, cities, slums, markets, exchanges – with the warning that such engagement is difficult. His particular focus is actually *Berlin: Symphony of a City* (Ruttman, 1927), which he finds lacking in its recourse to poetry and romanticism, something he also accuses Robert Flaherty of in the same piece. Grierson is arguing that the temptation to step over the line into romantic evocation and emotion can cloud the issue and dull the force of your argument in terms of its social relevance, something, I think, that can be said of the differences between *Meeting Room* and *The Pipe*.

The Pipe begins with an extraordinarily beautiful sweeping image of the West Coast of

Ireland that could be repurposed for any tourist documentary. The opening montage continues by juxtaposing the sweeping vista of the coast with scenes of violence as protestors are pushed back by uniformed Gardaí, then images of Pat O'Donnell on his boat discussing the heritage of his trade for his family and his community. In these few moments the film has pinned its colours to the mast as an avowedly and explicitly one-sided account of the repression of (beautiful, rugged, embedded, rural, indigenous) local culture at the behest of an unrepresented (unknowable, unspeaking) other. This documentary of social protest begins with a queasily familiar reassertion of rather clichéd paradigms of the noble savage in the wild west standing firm in the face of progress, and this happens not at the level of the reality portrayed (which must inevitably be more layered and banal as all reality ultimately is), but of the image (and sequence of images) that portray it, which are mythic, heroic, and romantic. The film thus sets its terms of engagement in terms of an ennobling (but arguably reductive) romantic story space in which the viewer is invited to empathise with the individuals, but perhaps not so much to engage with the material conditions of their struggle, which are remote, and hereby encoded as part of a familiar Irish cinematic past.

Meeting Room begins with microfiche: a scene of unknown hands accessing rolls of recorded data from an explicitly distant past archived and now accessed to be revisited. This gives way to television footage from the 1980s recounting elements of the story, reported as they were with all of the attendant difficulties around the media representation of CPAD at the time. This locates the methodological processes of the film in the dull and dusty raw material of the historical archive. But its most important image follows: of the 'meeting room' of the title being set up with some twenty-five chairs of varying colours. These chairs will be occupied as the film progresses by the people whose stories are being told. They enter the room, sit, and speak to the camera. The room is never filled with them, and yet by the use of this image this film also encodes for us the form it takes as a documentary. This documentary is itself the 'meeting room' – the representative space within which a story is being told. The events it describes

are of the past, but those who participated can still speak for themselves, and as with the Smyth/O'Brien sequence, brought into direct collision in ways that elucidate the function of institutions and the context of Governance that shapes the means and levels at which grassroots social protest can operate. It also demonstrates the role documentary film plays in enabling engagement. The film invites us to consider that the space within which action can occur is a meeting room, a community venue, a public sphere, and that documentary can, in its own limited but not insignificant way, contribute to the furtherance of social memory that can feed public culture.

Both of these films are undoubtedly socially engaged. Both attempt to recount a collision between the forces of authority and the needs of the people over whom authority is wielded, supposedly in their interests. In the context of 2010, there is real significance in any film that articulates the means by which social protest can be carried out. In both films, the democratic experiment is a failure in terms of broad-based social change. CPAD dissolved, the claims of vigilantism and paramilitarism upheld by the media and the judiciary in ways that disabled the possibilities for grassroots political change. The Corrib gas pipeline was rerouted, but will still be built, and each act of civil protest results in defiance and heroic failure that merely delays what is clearly inevitable. Yet viewing *Meeting Room* leaves the viewer with a powerful sense of the intricacy of interconnection between the forces in play, and of the particular and grounded realities of the participants' lives. Viewing *The Pipe* is emotional, certainly, and creates a sense of empathy for what appears a virtually mythic battle for respect and dignity that centres on the stoic fisherman facing real extinction. But ironically its model of advocacy fails because it is, in fact, the dedramatized action of filing a legal protest against the use of the common peat bog by Monica Muller that actually results in real delay and change in the Shell strategic plan. As cinematic vehicles for the representation of social change, these films represent two radically different strategies that can, if we choose, be understood in terms of Grierson's criticisms as being at odds with the needs of social documentary.

In noting the differences between these two films in this way, I am not making evaluative conclusions as to their importance. Any document of protest is valuable in the age of social media, as the increasing significance of mobile phone uploads and guerrilla documentary demonstrates. But it is important to bear in mind that documentary represents a mode of thought about the nature of our reality, and it is important that films representing the possibilities for

change enable the viewer not merely to romanticise social protest, but enable our participation in it by elucidating its process.

Meeting Room (2010)

Dir. James Davis and Brian Gray

The Pipe (2010)

Dir. Risteard Ó Domhnaill

Prod. Rachel Lysaght & Risteard Ó Domhnaill

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