
IRISH FILM AND TELEVISION - 2018

THE YEAR IN REVIEW
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Introduction. Fin de Cinema? The Irish Screen Sector in 2018.

Roddy Flynn, Tony Tracy.....295

Documentary as Diversion: *A Mother Brings Her Son to be Shot* (Sinéad O’Shea, 2017)

Eileen Culloty.....305

***In the Name of Peace: John Hume in America* (Maurice Fitzpatrick, 2018)**

Seán Crosson.....308

Déjà Vu? The Audiovisual Action Plan (2018)

Roddy Flynn.....310

***The Lonely Battle of Thomas Reid* (Fergal Ward, 2018)**

Roddy Flynn317

Fear, Loathing (and Industrial Relations) in the Irish film Industry

Denis Murphy.....321

Searching for Understanding in Alan Gilsonan’s *The Meeting*

Aileen O’Driscoll.....324

Introduction. Fin de Cinema? The Irish Screen Sector in 2018.

Tony Tracy, Roddy Flynn

In July 2018, the Irish Film Board announced that it was changing its name to Screen Ireland. It was done with relatively little fanfare or media attention and indeed still has to fully work through: as late as January 2019 Irish films were being simultaneously released into cinemas bearing alternately the Irish Film Board or Screen Ireland logos. Was this the year in review's defining event or simply a timely re-branding? Either way, what might the change tell us?

In announcing the change, a PR release explained that the new name reflects the agency's "redefined, broadened remit, which has been driven both by the changing and diverse nature of the industry and audience content consumption. Screen Ireland is responsible for funding and promoting Irish film, TV and animation internationally, for skills development, and for promoting Ireland as a film location." However, the wider remit also reflected the influence of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht's Audiovisual Action Plan (discussed by Roddy Flynn elsewhere), published a month earlier, which emphasised the need to augment support for film with a wider focus on television drama production and – potentially – digital games development as part of a decade-long strategy to develop Ireland as global hub for media production.

The roll-out of Screen Ireland was timed to coincide with the Galway Film Fleadh. This is not surprising. The popular and widely attended event is now a venerable cultural institution and central event in the Irish film calendar; a deadline towards which indigenous filmmakers work in the hope of securing a prestigious premiere amongst their peers; a setting for pitching new ideas through the film market, an unrivalled opportunity for on and off-screen talent, producers and programmers to network and party.

The Fleadh has come a long way from its establishment in 1988 when industry pioneers Lelia Doolin, Bob Quinn and others hatched an idea to create a dedicated platform for a fledgling and struggling Irish film industry: "a post colonial film festival, which meant we could be subversive and narky and provocative . . . all the things you'd want to be". It's first iteration sought to find an audience for Joe Comerford's like-minded feature debut *Reefer and the Model*, an off-beat road movie set off the coast of Galway and centring on Reefer, a former IRA man and the pregnant Teresa ("the Model") "who has abandoned a life of drugs and prostitution in England". Along with other misfits "Spider" and "Badger" the group become involved in the armed robbery of a post office and are consequently pursued by Free State forces of law and order.

In tandem with friend and future political ally Michael D Higgins (Ireland's first Minister for Culture) the Fleadh was to prove a key contributor in the establishment (and re-establishment) of the Irish Film Board. The largely unremarked change to Screen Ireland in the summer of 2018 reflected not simply "the reality and diversity of the sector" (a necessary step, particularly in relation to animation) but also a shift from an ambition for Irish film as a politically charged expression of "post-colonial" and "narky" artistic sensibilities to a rubric of "content consumption". Arguably then, the Screen Ireland moniker also reflects the globalization of Irish 'creativity' in the age of ubiquitous screens.

This is, perhaps, as it should be. We have, perhaps, been too introspective for too long... too focused on cultural production imagined in relation to other, seemingly more "United" Anglophone influences (US and UK) than our own. Over the past decade, having weathered the storms of the crash (when abolition of the IFB was mooted, if only half seriously), the industry has diversified and matured to an almost ungraspable extent. Today we have an increasingly fragmented sector in terms of production (inward and indigenous for large and small screens), content, formats, audiences and distribution. These tendencies seem

likely to accelerate: as the Olsberg/SPI/Nordicity-authored “Economic Analysis of the Audiovisual Sector in the Republic of Ireland” report published in June 2018 noted, Ireland stands poised to benefit from its proximity to a UK production industry operating at capacity. The expectation that some projects will overspill into Ireland – Brexit or no – saw both Troy Studios and Ashford Studios announce expansion plans in September 2018 and January 2019 respectively. Troy Studios plan to add a fourth stage adding 33,000 square feet to their existing 350,000 footprint. Ashford are even more ambitious, planning to spend €90m to creating four new studio spaces with an average size of 40,000 square feet (thus overcoming the current situation whereby *Vikings* – which wrapped its sixth Season 6 in Dec 2018 – essentially occupied the entire facility for 8 months of the year. Thus while, as noted below, we can anticipate an ongoing increase in the output of low/no budget indigenous features, the clear expectation is that these will be paralleled by an expanded presence of large-budget international productions along the lines of AMC’s *Into The Badlands* and Disney’s CIA drama *Quantico* (which shot three episodes here in Spring 2018).

With such fragmentation – an enlarged variation of the question of national representation emerges: What stories are being told and for whom? In an era of digital production and distribution, production may still hold centre stage for scholars (as it long has in textually-led analysis) but distribution will increasingly hold more significance in terms of analysis and policy. This tension between the production of content and addressing an audience will, we suggest, be crucial to balancing the endeavours of Screen Ireland.

Feature Fictions

Although it is becoming increasingly less consequential as the primary employer and financial generator (excluding inward and post-production activity) within the Irish audiovisual sector, the feature film remains the favoured cultural barometer of “Irish Film”, despite its recent demotion to one format among many within “Screen Ireland”. Counting the number of Irish feature films produced in a given year was relatively easy until recently. Not so anymore. Counting the number of films released alone suggests a tally of 40 feature film in 2018 [films which attained at least a week-long engagement in cinemas]. As ever we find a handful of standout titles within a corpus of output of varying quality and budgets, many of which rapidly disappear. The “top six” in terms of Box Office offer a revealing picture of the state of Irish film “as film” (with Irish BO in brackets) : 1. *Black 47* (€1,579,961); 2. *Damo & Ivor: The Movie* (€291,748); 3. *Dublin Oldschool* (€240,282); 4. *Michael Inside* (€188,581); 5. *The Little Stranger* (€154,942); 6. *Rosie* (€115,000).

Black 47 (directed by Lance Daly [*Kisses, Life’s A Breeze*]) was the most popular indigenous film of the year by far, taking over half the total box office for Irish feature production, and fulfilled most the criteria traditionally required of an Irish film: story, production company, director, settings/landscape, nationalist viewpoint. Its success as well deserved by its talented director and tenacious producers who spent years trying to bring it to the screen. Such a combination proved highly attractive to Irish audiences, though less so, to those outside of Ireland where the film did indifferent business despite its story being framed within the widely recognized [Hollywood] conventions of a period revenge drama and US distribution by the respected IFC. Coinciding with the large *Coming Home* exhibition of famine era paintings (Dublin Castle, Skibbereen, Derry), Declan O’Rourke’s “Chronicles of the Great Irish Famine” CD collection and Jack Reynor’s directorial debut with the short film *Bainne* (Sky Arts) the film’s success suggested that there is a renewed interest in the famine and an urgent sense that it is time to tell its stories.

The numeric gulf in audiences between *Black 47* and other Irish releases in the top 5 (of 40!) is both striking and revealing if we locate the emphasis of a national cinema on

audiences. Despite sizable audiences – relatively speaking – *Damo & Ivor: The Movie* and *Dublin Oldschool* will have passed by many critics and scholars of Irish film. Such audiences seem likely to be largely drawn from the under-35 age bracket which was attracted to both on the basis of familiarity with popular existing source material: the long running RTE 2 comedy series *Damo and Ivor* (2013-2018) and writer/director Emmet Kirwin’s successful stage play “Dublin Oldschool” (winner of the Stewart Parker Award) as well as his viral poetry short film *Heartbreak* (2017).

At the bottom end of the top six are two respected Irish auteur directors working with material by well-established writers: Lenny Abrahamson’s *The Little Stranger* was a highly anticipated period drama starring Donal Gleeson from Sarah Water’s novel and while Paddy Breathnach’s *Rosie* – pitched as “the most important Irish film of the year” boasts a script by Roddy Doyle. Both were skillful directed and critically well-achieved works. Despite well-orchestrated publicity campaigns, the relative indifference of Irish audiences to both must have been disappointing for their respective filmmakers.

Breathnach’s would seem to epitomize the cultural function of Irish cinema, but in truth its scope – claustrophobic, intimate – would have been better suited to TV – a format where Doyle scored significant success years ago with ‘Home,’ a four part BBC mini series. Additionally, despite its clear and urgent social resonance the subject has been well aired in other media outlets for some time notably the 2016 Prime Time programme “My Homeless Family”. (Gerard Barrett also made a similar film *Limbo* in 2017 but it quickly disappeared after a screening in the Galway Film Fleadh).

The disappointment of Abrahamson’s film (interrupting a continuous upward trajectory) is more complex. It’s setting (post war England) and central theme (class ambition) seem unlikely to have ever endeared it to Irish audiences in significant numbers, even with Gleeson’s success with *Brooklyn* – another post war drama – did last year. But one suspects that its producers Element had a similar audience in mind to their other major film this year – *The Favourite* – when they embarked on the project, and with the latter they were spectacularly successful. Certainly it was mistakenly positioned as a horror by its US and UK distributors and while it has moments of suspense, it is more of a literary than a genre work. One wonders why wasn’t more prominently positioned as a Lenny Abrahamson film, given the success of *Room*?

If the Box Office fate of *The Little Stranger* contrasts vividly with *The Favourite*, the films offer striking cases from an Irish production context. Both were produced by Dublin based Element Pictures and reveal a production company spreading risk – and opportunity – across a slate of productions and activities (in contrast to the one-off model that has characterized Irish film for so long). As noted both clearly aimed beyond Ireland for their audiences (attempting to access such audiences on the back of popularity British period dramas) and anchored in long-term relationships with directorial talent.

The Favourite is Element’s most successful film to date in terms of Awards and international box office (approx. \$80 million), and re-writes Irish film history in the process. The extent to which it might be judged Irish at all is of course open to debate (on the basis of subject matter, cast and writer/director) but there is no questioning Element’s long-term ambitions to position itself as a transnational production entity working in tandem with financing and distribution partners across Europe and the US. While Element purchased the screen rights to *The Favourite* over a decade ago, its development and success builds on the experience and reputation gained through Abrahamson’s and Lanthimos’ respective *Room* and *The Lobster*. Element’s audience is now a global one and the company’s recent decision to scale back on their domestic distribution wing (established to distribute *The Guard*), along with the non-Irish settings of several recent films, indicates an increasingly outward-looking producer. It will be interesting to see the extent of Screen Ireland funding for this strategy and

what impact, if any, it may have on wider industry behavior as producers come to terms with ever lower returns and exponential competition for audiences.

More Films than Screens?

As noted there were many other Irish films for audiences to choose from in 2018 and indeed, some might argue too many. Between fiction and documentary, Screen Ireland now support approximately 20-25 films per year with a similar number being produced independently or by other means; an impossible level of output for the three Irish distribution companies to cope with. Furthermore, the continuing decline in the cost of accessing production equipment means that an increasing number of film-makers can make work without recourse to Screen Ireland aid: the last 12 months saw the completion of: Robbie Walsh's *S.P.L.I.T.* which, channelling the Belgian black comedy *Man Bites Dog* (1992) follows the quotidian existence of two Dublin gangland hitmen; *Dub Daze*, IADT and DIT alumnus Shane Collins' self-financed triptych of youth-oriented stories set in Dublin which premiered at the Dublin International Film Festival in February 2019; Cathal Kenna's *For Molly*, a cancer-themed drama shot over five days on location in Navan with a shoestring budget and; *Tradition*, Damien O'Callaghan's apparently self-financed €150,000 budget GAA courtroom drama shot in Killarney which premiered at the 2018 Kerry Film Festival. Similarly, Alan Mulligan's *The Limit Of*, set during the Celtic Tiger and made for €30,000 was set to receive an Irish cinema release in April 2019.

Among other titles we note in passing but don't have space to develop upon were *Kissing Candice*, a visceral coming-of-age drama written and directed by Aoife McArdle, Liam O Mochain's whimsical feature film *Lost & Found* (acquired Film4 for the UK and Gravitas Ventures worldwide) and Frank Berry's sober and affecting drama *Michael Inside* (reviewed in these pages last year but only finally released in April). We also enjoyed Irish dramatist Mark O'Rowe's debut feature *The Delinquent Season* starring Cillian Murphy and Andrew Scott (despite its staginess, which earned it a corruscating review in *The Irish Times*) and the equally talky *We Ourselves*, a low-budget independent film, written and directed by Paul Mercier, starring Aidan Gillen along with Catherine Walker, Declan Conlon and Seána Kerslake. Also worth mentioning is the docu-drama *Citizen Lane* directed by another veteran figure of Irish film Thaddeus O'Sullivan, with the drama written by Mark O'Halloran and starring Tom Vaughan-Lawlor as Hugh Lane. Producer Morgan Bushe's *The Belly of the Whale* was less successful both at the box office (having received a cinema release in December 2018) and critically despite a competent cast (headed by Pat Short and Michael Smiley) and Arthur Mulhern's suitably gloomy cinematography. Notionally a (very) dark comedy, a less-than-coherent narrative appeared to leave audiences cold.

The Horrors

Within Irish film production, Horror is by now a well-established genre, not least because it continues to offer attractive distribution prospects. Following its positive reception for its Sundance Premiere in January 2019, the Lee Cronin-directed *The Hole in Ground* again with Seána Kerslake was immediately acquired by renowned distributor A24 (*The Lobster*, *Ladybird* etc.) for the US market. This was followed by a deluge of global right acquisitions and at time of writing the film was set for release across Europe (the Baltic States, Germany and Austria, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Greece, Turkey, Poland and Russia), Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Taiwan, China, Japan, Singapore, South Korea and India) the Middle East; the Philippines and Latin America. Indeed, *The Favourite* aside, *The Hole in*

The Ground may well end up being more widely seen than any other Irish film this year, a function not merely of its genre but the inherent quality of the film itself.

Such films come with a variety of budgets and artistic ambitions, working as straight-on genre efforts or more often providing filmmakers with the opportunity to explore or take advantage of themes and narratives structured around repression and the Irish psyche. Such critiques of historic occlusion have been particularly skilfully deployed in Spanish horror cinema in relation to the longterm consequences of the civil war and two Irish films this year - *Cellar Door* and *The Devil's Doorway* adopt comparable methods in their approach to Irish Catholic institutions, notably the Tuam mother- and-baby home and the Magdalen laundries. Written and directed by Irish American Michael Tully, *Don't Leave Home* is another film centred on the legacy of Irish Catholicism (featuring Lalor Roddy who also plays a priest in *Devil's Doorway*) and centred on a young female American artist who visits Ireland. *The Cured* is a zombie horror starring Oscar-nominated Ellen Page (*Juno*, *Inception*) along with Sam Keeley and Tom Vaughan-Lawlor as a cult-leader which makes less use of its Irish setting for social or allegorical purposes but offers, nonetheless, another compelling central performance from one of Ireland's most gifted actors.

David Gleeson's Connemara-set *Don't Go* deals with comparable themes of trauma and missing children (one might link it with Abrahamson's *Little Stranger* in this regard also) but feels derivative (*Don't Look Now*) and clunky in its execution while its casting of Stephen Dorff means that despite the wild Atlantic surroundings the film deliberately eschews being read as 'Irish' in any meaningful way. Such a lack of specificity is a common feature of Irish genre and art-house cinema (see, for instance *Hole in the Ground* or *Mammal*) and while it presumably aspires towards attracting an audience beyond the national/local, all too often it can rob a film of cultural traction and engagement.

It is worth noting that of all the films discussed above, just two – Aoife McArdle's *Kissing Candice* and Aislinn Clarke's *The Devil's Doorway* – were directed by women. Some inroads towards addressing this massive imbalance will, however, have been made by Screen Ireland's female-focused POV scheme which, having received 65 applications, in September 2018 announced the six projects chosen for the development and mentorship phase preceding the final selection of three projects for actual production.

Small Screen Production and Gender Participation

That concern with gender is at partially mirrored with regard to TV production, even if, as the survey below indicates that the relatively few examples of home-grown drama broadcast and produced this year already have a strong female orientation. Having seen its first season acquired for US audience's by Netflix, the Channel 4 hit *Derry Girls* returned for a second season in March 2019 to increased ratings in the UK earning creator Lisa McGee the sole female award nomination as a comedy writer for the Royal Television Society awards. South of the border, RTE's drama output was noticeably characterised by female leads. Having headlined in RTE's high profile straight fiction "Striking Out" for two seasons since 2017, Amy Huberman not only returned for the second series of Stephanie Preissner's *Can't Cope, Won't Cope* alongside Seana Kerslake and Nika McGuigan but took the titular role in the comedy *Finding Joy* which she also wrote. Generally well-received and earning respectable audiences, *Finding Joy*'s disarmingly bawdy tone was clearly marked by the influence of Sharon Horgan's expanding body for UK (*Motherland* (2018) and *Catastrophe* (2015 -)) and US (the Sarah Jessica Parker hit *Divorce* (2015 -)). Horgan was also behind RTE's second comedy series of the Autumn Season, *Women on the Verge*, starring Kerry Condon, Eileen Walsh and Nina Sosanya's work. Though perhaps not quite matching the high standard of her other work – perhaps understandably given that on top of writing three shows simultaneously

(with a fourth in development for Amazon) she continues to appear in front of the camera – *Women on the Verge* was good enough to suggest the possibility for a second series. In the event, both *Finding Joy* and *Women on the Verge* were somewhat eclipsed audience-wise by the testosterone-heavy television adaptation of *The Young Offenders* which earned average ratings of 400,000 over its initial six week run and more than that for its Christmas special.

Although, *Resistance*, Colin Teevan's follow-up to the critically-panned *Rebellion* (2016) was arguably the best-resourced RTE drama production of the year, it again failed to draw in audiences concomitant to its budget, averaging 270,000 viewers over the month of January 2019. This was perhaps a response to its somewhat flat narrative, at least relative to the actual historical drama of its War of Independence setting. Indeed it was somewhat eclipsed by *Taken Down* another female-led drama from the *Love/Hate* team of writer Stuart Carolan, producer Suzanne McAuliffe and director David Caffrey. Though its focus on female characters – Orla FitzGerald and Lynn Rafferty's Garda detectives and Aissa Maiga's Nigerian immigrant – was welcome, the decision to shine onto the experience of living in Direct Provision in Ireland was arguably much more significant marking an – admittedly belated – expansion of the Irish television drama's understanding of which and who's stories count as local. This was, to a lesser extent also true of *Death and Nightingales*, writer/director Allan Cubitt (*The Fall* (2016 -) adaptation of Eugene McCabe's novel about a young woman living in the late 19th North of Ireland seeking to establish an existence independent of her domineering stepfather. In passing, *Taken Down's* focus on female detectives will be extended later in 2019 with the broadcast of *Dublin Murders*, the BBC/Starz adaptation of Dublin-based crime writer Tana French's first two novels centred around Cassie Maddox (Sarah Greene).

2018 saw TV3 celebrate 20 years in existence by rebranding itself as Virgin Media One, reflecting its changed corporate ownership. Though mainly looking to sporting content as audience tentpoles, the channel has used the substantial resources of its corporate parent to dip its toe into local drama production. *The Bailout*, the John Kelleher-produced two-part adaptation of Colin Murphy's dramatization of the near-bankrupting of the Irish state in 2010 made little impact. However, the channel's other drama foray, *Blood*, screened in October 2018 drew in solid audiences of 150,000, a decent result for Virgin Media and on a par with established series like *Emmerdale*. A family drama built around a daughter (English actress Carolina Main) returning to her family home in Meath after the suspicious death of her mother (possibly at the hands of her father - Adrian Dunbar), *Blood's* €4m budget made it by far the most expensive drama undertaken by the channel in its 20-year history. Clearly designed with a view to international sales, the show was also – incidentally – marked by unusually extensive female participation in key behind-the-camera roles. Written by Sophie Petzel, the six-part series was directed by Lisa Mulcahy and Hannah Quinn and photographed by Kate McCullagh. Female involvement extended to editing (Isobel Stephenson), production management Geraldine Daly, and even – in a possible first for Irish television – stunt co-ordination (Eimear O'Grady).

The new emphasis on female-led content clearly owes something to the ongoing impact of the WakingTheFeminists movement on funding structures in Ireland. Having previously introduced a gender criterion to the Sound and Vision scheme from its 30th round on – *Blood* notably benefitted from Sound and Vision funding to the tune of €475,000 – in January the BAI announced that it would place a particular emphasis on female-driven stories for Round 33 of the scheme. Yet while the gender rebalancing was doubtless welcomed by Heads of Drama sensitive to contemporary identity politics (including RTE's Jane Gogan who announced in October 2018 that she was departing that post after 12 years), it is worth noting that the locus for determining what television drama does and does not appear on Irish screens appears to be drifting beyond the borders of this island and thus outside the exclusive gift of

Irish broadcasters. As the Audiovisual Action Plan noted, the impact of the post-2008 economic crash on RTE's commercial finances in particular saw the channel severely curtail its non-soap drama output. If that appears to be confounded by the productions listed above, it's worth recalling with regard to *Women on the Verge*, *Death and Nightingales*, *The Young Offenders* and *Dublin Murders* that, though benefitting to some extent from RTE funding, all were commissioned outside Ireland by UKTV (the jointly owned BBC/Discovery suite of channels) and the BBC directly. Virgin Media's *Blood* was largely financed by All3Media International, a London-based distribution entity half-owned by Virgin Media's parent Liberty Global. Thus the series immediately appeared on Virgin Media UK on-demand service and was sold by All3Media to the UK's Channel 5 for live transmission. North American audiences also gained access to the series after it was acquired by Acorn Media Enterprises which operates a streaming service in the US built around UK and Irish content. In addition to acquiring both *Blood* and *Finding Joy* for the US on-demand market along with RTE's 2010 Edna O'Brien adaptation *Wild Decembers* Acorn has begun directly commissioning Irish-themed work such as the *Lords and Ladies* cooking show. *Blood*'s casting illustrates the implications of this for Irish content in its deployment in the main Irish role of Carolina Main, an actress familiar to UK audiences for roles in *Unforgotten* (2017-18) and *Granchester* (2014), and Adrian Dunbar who, though obviously Irish, is currently a bona fide UK television star after recurring roles in the acclaimed *Line of Duty* (2012 -) and opposite Sean Bean in Jimmy McGovern's *Broken* (2017). In other words, the influence of external forces on television drama production in Ireland is not limited to high profile overseas work such as *Nightfliers* and *Vikings*.

Stranger than Fiction: Irish Documentary

The opposite can be said of a genre which has gone from strength to strength in recent times: the feature documentary. "Feature docs" account for a substantial portion of indigenous production – we count approx 10 released in cinemas in 2018. This is over and above the documentaries made for RTE and TG4 (generally with the support of BAI funding). TG4 in particular has a strong tradition in imaginative and off-beat films by local filmmakers passionate about their stories, many of which deserve wider dissemination and recognition.

Although generally considered secondary to feature fictions in terms of "cultural capital" (as well as potential financial return) Irish documentary in 2018 displayed a vitality and sense of purpose that puts it at the forefront of indigenous production and central to the notion of a "national cinema". Such films shed light on a range of themes – personal, political, scientific, historical – that are largely invisible within the Irish fiction film, offering filmmakers greater freedom of expression on both thematic and formal levels.

We have space to note but a few notable productions, and in doing so identify two dominant clusters of themes. As Brexit rumbles on with potentially dire consequences for peace in Northern Ireland, a group of non-fiction films returned to the setting of the Troubles. They follow the gradual re-emergence of docu-drama / feature fictions in recent years – *Hunger*, *Maze*, *66 Days*, *'71* – but display a marked shift in focus from events to legacies, from the political to the personal and are all the more poignant and chastening for it.

A Woman Brings Her Son to be Shot; *The Image that You Missed*; *I, Dolours*; and *John Hume: In America* are each important films that bring to light the lives of a range of individuals and their relationship with Northern Irish society since the 1970s. (Lelia Doolin's 2011 film *Bernadette: Notes on a Political Journey* might be offered as a companion to this group).

Sinead O'Shea's disturbing film, reviewed here by Eileen Culotty, takes as a point of departure the story of Majella O'Donnell and her teenage son Philly who she brought to be

shot (in the legs) in the hope that this would avoid an even worse fate at the hands of local paramilitaries. O'Shea's film tells the story of one Derry family but through them, attempts (not entirely successfully) to explicate the legacy of the Troubles, the ongoing and seemingly interminable addiction of a society to conflict, to gang dynamics, to violence and overall to self-defeating punishment within an already disenfranchised community.

O'Shea deploys VO and POV camerawork to express the abnormal social and psychic predicament of her subjects but also to communicate her intimate relationship with the family whose lives she has been admitted such intimate access. Donal Foreman's film adopts a similar position but for different motivations. *The Image That You Missed* is a film Foreman has been waiting to make for much of his (young) life; a poetic investigation of his estranged father, Irish-American filmmaker Arthur MacCaig. Through extracts from MacCaig's powerful, up-close films on the Troubles, letters to Donal's mother and the son's VO musings on his father's ambitions and his inheritance (genetic as well as his estate of films), the film skilfully and engagingly blends personal and political history, while also emerging as a powerful meditation on the nature of film as a tool for personal expression. Not content with having a limited Irish release at the IFI and various regional venues Foreman has spent much of 2018 finding international audiences for his film, taking self-distribution to new lengths by bringing it to international festivals all over the world before embarking on a tour of US colleges. He has also recently taken to screening it along with MacCaig's powerful 1979 film *The Patriot Game*, a steely cinema verite account of urban unrest that recasts the Troubles as class conflict.

I, Dolours is also a deeply personal film that makes ample use of voiceover, but told from a quite different perspective, and brings us to the very heart of the IRA in the years before and following the Good Friday Agreement. Centred around a long interview with former IRA member and convicted terrorist Dolours Price, the film could only emerge after her death: such was her condition for granting it to journalist Ed Moloney. Price was an almost legendary figure among the general public for her unstinting and absolute commitment to the armed struggle, her conviction for the Old Bailey bombing of in 1973, the hardship she subsequently experienced as a prisoner (hunger strike for over 200 days with "180 being force fed" and her stubborn unwillingness to submit to the IRA ceasefire. Rarely however has she been seen or heard. She emerges here as a strikingly intelligent and profoundly principled individual who ultimately – as is the case for such people – paid a huge personal price for her beliefs in the form of depression and later alcoholism. (She died in 2013 following an overdose of prescription drugs). The film is both dangerous and disturbing: Price is a compelling subject even as she unflinchingly recounts her involvement in the murder of Jean McConville and the deaths of another three of the so-called "Disappeared" (Joe Lynskey, Kevin McKee and Seamus Wright) and names names (hence her injunction on the interview till after her death); most notably that of Gerry Adams as IRA leader. Director Maurice Sweeney offers visual variety as well as space for the audience to breathe and digest Price's testimony through effective re-enactments of key recollections, including moving images relating to her childhood, most memorably of lighting cigarettes for an aunt mutilated by a bomb explosion.

Finally, and in quite a different register was *John Hume: In America* (reviewed here), Maurice Fitzpatrick's account of a key – and increasingly overlooked – figure in bringing peace to Northern Ireland. While lacking the formal or emotional edge of the preceding films, this documentary is a well-researched and boasts high production values (narrated by Liam Neeson, with a score by Bill Whelan), and provides a worthy testament to its subject. In addition to TV screenings, the film has found a large and appreciative audience on the international Irish film festival circuit (where it is by far the most requested and screened Irish

doc of recent years) proving that there is more than one way to define audience reach and success.

A second cluster of recent non-fiction films revolves around themes of people and place, a venerable and foundational motif of Irish identity. Poetic but also political, such films emerge from the fragility of psychic and physical links to place within the context of global capitalism. Following Risteard O'Domhnaill's *The Pipe* [2016], *The Lonely Battle of Thomas Reid* [reviewed here by Roddy Flynn], *When All is Ruin Again*, and *The Silver Branch* digress from the familiar postcolonial narrative however in offering portraits of individuals often in conflict not with foreign interests, but a government often intent on economic development at any cost. While they have not attained anything like the profile or box office of *Black '47* (which in part explains the higher esteem enjoyed by feature fictions), such films provide valuable companion texts to Lance Daly's film not only as a means of illustrating the enduring legacy of place on the Irish mindset but also the shifting forces of economic history at play on Ireland as both place and space.

Irish feature docs in 2018 offered a supreme richness of subject matter and storytelling skill. Along with the themes mentioned above we also note Ken Wardrop's characteristically sensitive *Making the Grade*, Donal O'Ceilleachair's epic *The Camino Voyage* and Declan McGrath's portrait of American ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax collecting music in 1940s Ireland 1950s – *Lomax in Eireann*. Such films seemed to proudly explored the local and national, offering often more rigorous and adventurous storytelling than the homogenous and formulaic approaches that has come to typify increasingly globalized moving image production.

Speaking of global – and its digital derivative – platform capitalism, Netflix continued to exert a growing, if somewhat opaque in terms of economic benefit and audience generation, role on the distribution of Irish originated content.

The platform has been picking up Irish content for some time now, though a map has yet to be draw as to the extent of such purchases in terms of distribution territories (mainly Ireland/UK) and duration (a standard contract was 3 months). The announcement that *Cardboard Gangsters* was to be added to the platform's US & Australian sites represented a considerable achievement for Mark O'Connor's film, but as ever, the scale of audience engagement remains unknown outside the confines of the streaming giant. Netflix also took US distribution rights for Channel 4's hit TV show *Derry Girls*, and in an unusual move took Gerard Barrett's (*Pilgrim Hill, Glassland*) US set drama *Brain on Fire* (2015) exclusively for Ireland, thereby completely bypassing a theatrical release for one of Ireland's up and coming auteurs.

But the platform has also more recently begun to influence production activity. In Feb 2018, Universal announced they were beginning production of the Netflix bound horror-sci-fi *Nightflyers* at Limerick's Troy Studios – a real coup for the fledgling production space which subsequently announced plans to extend its already large facility. Although apparently cancelled after its first season, the decision to use Troy further cements Ireland's place in multi-season, large-scale TV production; an industry within an industry that boasts *The Tudors, The Vikings, Penny Dreadful* among others.

Animation

Netflix have also made inroads into Ireland's Animation sector, notably in acquiring "global" rights to Brown Bag's *Angela's Christmas* (from a story by Frank McCourt and something of a prequel to *Angela's Ashes*). The 30 minute film was released to a 125 million subscribers (with potential for 200 million audience members) in December 2018 which is undoubtedly an unprecedentedly achievement for an Irish production. Developing upon the tone of Brown

Bag's *Give Up Your Ould Sins*, the film was not just locally produced but is set in Limerick (1914) and voiced by Ruth Negga and Malachy McCourt.

That achievement must be placed alongside Cartoon Saloon's success with its Emmy-nominated pre-school series, *Puffin Rock* which is currently streamed in 25 languages on Netflix. The platform announced it would fund Nora Twomey and Cartoon Saloon's new animated feature film *My Father's Dragon*, following Twomey's Oscar nomination for *The Breadwinner* at the March 2018 Academy Awards. *The Breadwinner* – a take of a young girl living under the Taliban in Afghanistan – represented another triumph for the Kilkenny based studio, to the extent that we may take for granted their astonishing success rate: three Oscar nominations out of three feature productions. Continuing this success, Cartoon Saloon/Louise Bagnall's touching short animation *Late Afternoon* was nominated in the 2019 Academy Awards).

The *Breadwinner* did especially well in France during its delayed 2018 release but overall seems to have underperformed, notwithstanding festival and awards success. In another indication of the shifting sands of finance and distribution in the digital age and perhaps as a response to *The Breadwinner*'s difficulty in reaching audiences, Cartoon Saloon announced that Apple – in a bid to develop its own platform – bought the “global” rights to their new animated film *Wolfwalkers* (due for release in 2020).

Conclusion

We began by asking if the change in name from the Irish Film Board to Screen Ireland meant in relation to the activities and focus of the industry? Clearly it represents some demotion of the long privileged status of film as national art form but, as we have seen, works to encompass the broad range of activity that flows into, out of and through Ireland as a hub of audiovisual production within an increasingly globalized industry. This is to be celebrated. The concern for funders, policy and decision makers going forward will be in striking a balance between the needs of inward coming productions with deep pockets, the international outlook of ambitious companies such as Element Pictures, and the producers of films such as *Katie*, *The Lonely Battle of Thomas Reid*, *Michael Inside* or *The Silver Branch* . . . local, often formally ambitious, challenging and “narky” films that form the bedrock of public sphere discourse. There are also challenges not only in continuing to get such films made but encouraging them to find audiences. As current events show, an abundance of media does not correlate to an uptick in democratic participation or enfranchisement. A key task for governments in the years ahead will be the protection and stewardship of public discourse (including artistic expression), within which moving images will continue to play a central function.

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Documentary as Diversion: *A Mother Brings Her Son to be Shot* (Sinéad O'Shea, 2017)

Eileen Culloty

The farcical Brexit negotiations have exposed an ingrained ignorance of Northern Ireland among Britain's political and media classes. British politicians have repeatedly claimed that concerns about the stability of the 1998 peace agreement are nothing more than a scaremongering tactic by Ireland and the EU. In this context, Sinéad O'Shea's *A Mother Brings Her Son to be Shot* is a timely reminder that peace never settled in some of Northern Ireland's most marginalised communities. In Derry's Creggan, she finds a world where paramilitaries still enforce their own laws and, amid chronic unemployment and a soaring suicide rate, the youth are nostalgic for a conflict that officially ended before they were born. The documentary offers important insights into these conditions, but it is also guilty of trivialising the legacy of conflict and of engaging in questionable ethical practices.

Filmed over five years, *A Mother Brings Her Son to be Shot* centres on Majella O'Donnell and her sons Philly and Kevin Barry. The title refers to Majella's participation in Philly's "punishment shooting". Accused of drug dealing, he was shot in both knees by dissident Republicans. We see the O'Donnell family struggle with drug addiction, depression, and the imprisonment of the father. The wider community is represented by two community workers: Darren O'Reilly, an independent councillor, and Hugh Brady, a mediator and former IRA prisoner. While the O'Donnell family are reunited by the end of the film, there is no resolution for the challenges facing the community.

Although trained in film production, O'Shea has primarily worked as a journalist contributing to high-profile outlets including *Al Jazeera*, *The Guardian*, and *The New York Times*. *A Mother Brings Her Son to be Shot* is her first feature-length documentary. Stylistically, it is reminiscent of Louis Theroux's work with a combination of observational camerawork, expository intertitles, and a naively reflective voice-over. For Theroux, naivety is a disarming strategy that allows him to quietly interrogate his subject. In contrast, O'Shea uses naivety to structure the narrative. The film begins with her "wondering how this could have happened" and many scenes conclude with her noting that something is "difficult to understand" or "impossible to know". While the expository elements advance a clear argument about the inadequacy of the peace process, the personal observations lack focus. Despite five years of filming, the documentary never moves beyond a surface understanding of the violence surrounding the O'Donnell family. This lack of depth is possibly a consequence of O'Shea's sporadic filming schedule and the absence of a secure budget and crew. However, it also stems from a lack of engagement with her subjects; O'Shea remains aloof, wavering between expressions of amusement and bemusement. As Simran Hans (2018) noted in her review for *The Guardian*, "there's never the sense that she has a real stake in this community".

Trauma as Entertainment

More troublingly, the film's ethics are frequently dubious; especially the portrayal of Kevin Barry. As a boisterous 11-year old he is eager to perform for the camera, which O'Shea indulges for entertainment value. This is epitomised in an early scene that is a focal point of the film's publicity materials. Occupying a corner of the small kitchen, Kevin Barry stages a show-of-strength with "weapons" he has assembled from labourers' tools. He assesses their merits while giving mock demonstrations: the crowbar is useful to "whack or kill someone"; the bolt cutter is a "torture weapon" to take "somebody's finger off if they annoy you", and

the hatchet, his “favourite”, can be used “to disintegrate the head and split it in half like a melon”.

This is one of many scenes presented as comedy and the audience at the 2018 Dublin International Film Festival (DIFF) laughed throughout. Yet, consider the facts that are subsequently revealed: in a few years, Kevin Barry will display pronounced symptoms of mental illness; his father is in prison for bombing a police station; his older brother is a drug addict and the victim of paramilitary violence; his mother felt compelled to facilitate that violence; and his wider community is engulfed in intimidation, poverty, and suicide. It is cheap and dishonest to present Kevin Barry’s bravado as comedy without probing the social and psychological context of his childhood.

As the documentary continues through the festival circuit towards future distribution deals, the entertainment value of Kevin Barry remains a key selling point. O’Shea (2019) recently tweeted her satisfaction with *The Thin Air* magazine for recognizing Kevin Barry’s “extraordinary character”. The accompanying screenshot from the magazine reads: “The father is in jail for trying to blow up a police station; the older brother is blasted in the knees by the Ra and turns suicidal. Despite this Kevin Barry, drifting on the dull Creggan estate, misses the drama and the romance of the Troubles”. The glibness of this summary is striking, but it is a more accurate description of the film’s tone than most reviews in more esteemed media outlets. The latter tend to assume there is inherent journalistic merit in the portrayal of a post-conflict community, and consequently, fail to question whether there is any ethical integrity in the endeavour.

Consent and Ethical Responsibility

Towards the end of the film when Kevin Barry is older, but still a minor, he angrily accuses Republican dissidents of participating in drug dealing. O’Shea could have investigated these claims or introduced them in an indirect way. Instead, she lets a vulnerable teenager make accusations against the violent men who police his community. This is obviously reckless, but it does not seem to trouble O’Shea. When asked at the DIFF if she was concerned about the safety of her subjects, she simply noted that they all gave their consent to be filmed. Consent should not be used as a get-out-of-jail card for ethical dilemmas; not least because consent is largely a legal issue. Moreover, the circumstances surrounding consent often favour the filmmaker because “obtaining consent is part and parcel of the general confusion and excitement of the filmmaking process – a process unfamiliar and glamorous for most people” (Winston, qtd. in Maccarone 199).

There is a clear power imbalance between filmmakers and “subjects who are dependent on the filmmaker to have their story told” (Nichols). This imbalance is pronounced in cases involving marginalised or vulnerable subjects. Yet, in the publicity surrounding *A Mother Brings Her Son to be Shot*, O’Shea has frequently inverted this power imbalance to place herself in the position of weakness. In an interview on *RTÉ Radio 1* (2018), she defended her choices by saying, “they rang rings around me and I never really knew what was real and what wasn’t”. It’s worth noting that the final portion of the film presents O’Shea doorstepping the O’Donnells because they no longer want to be interviewed.

The issue of ethical responsibility has generated much debate in documentary studies where it has traditionally been understood as a fundamental tension between the rights of documentary subjects (rights to safety, dignity, and privacy) and the wider needs of the public to be informed (Pryluck). A fundamental assumption underpinning this long-running debate is that documentary is a practice aimed at advancing the public good through new knowledge and understanding.

A Mother Brings Her Son to be Shot is only partially a documentary that seeks to advance understanding. It is better characterised in terms of the “documentary as diversion” logic defined by John Corner (2002) whereby the “documentary format is entirely designed in relation to its capacity to deliver entertainment”. Corner was writing about *Big Brother* and the co-option of cinéma vérité techniques by reality television. More recently, the boom in video-on-demand services has expanded the market for documentary diversions. These diversion documentaries are designed to shock and mock: unsuspecting subjects make shocking revelations about their personal lives and audiences mock them with a barrage of “what the fuck” reactions on social media. Netflix’s *Fyre: The Greatest Party That Never Happened* (Smith 2019) and *Abducted in Plain Sight* (Borgman 2017) encapsulate this genre. With its attention-grabbing title and highly quotable scenes from Kevin Barry, *A Mother Brings Her Son to be Shot* is an ideal diversion for the Netflix cannon.

Academic concerns about the ethics of documentary filmmaking are not new, but they have largely failed to penetrate documentary practice and reception. The academic consensus is relatively straightforward: filmmakers have a basic duty to minimise any physical, mental, or social harm to their subjects; especially when those subjects are marginalised individuals or are incapable of assessing the consequences of participation. This basic ethical principle is not controversial, but it is difficult, if not impossible, to impose on filmmakers. An important starting point might be getting funders, reviewers, and viewers to treat ethics as a fundamental consideration of a documentary's value.

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***In the Name of Peace: John Hume in America* (Maurice Fitzpatrick, 2018)**

Seán Crosson

The twentieth anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement in 2018 provided a moment for reflection on the legacy of the Troubles and subsequent agreement on Irish society and political life. Unsurprisingly, this legacy featured prominently in a range of documentary works released in the past year. Comedian Patrick Kielty provided a moving and very personal perspective on the conflict (in which his father was murdered by paramilitary gunmen) and the significance of the Agreement in the BBC production, *My Dad, the Peace Deal and Me* (2018); Brian Hill and Niamh Kennedy's *The Life After* (2018) also focused on the traumatic legacy of the violence for those who lost loved ones during the conflict; while Maurice Sweeney's *I, Delours* provided a complex and intimate insight into the IRA and its activities through the testimony of former militant activist Dolours Price. Perhaps no single individual is more associated with the Good Friday Agreement than former SDLP leader John Hume, and Hume was the focus of one of the most widely circulated and acclaimed documentaries to appear, Maurice Fitzpatrick's *In the Name of Peace: John Hume in America*.

Fitzpatrick was screenwriter of the 2009 documentary *The Boys of St Columb's* (2009), which explored the lives of a range of former pupils of the small Derry school of the title, including Hume, and it was while undertaking that project that he first realised the extent of Hume's connections with US politicians. *John Hume in America* is, however, Fitzpatrick's first major documentary as a director (as well as being writer and producer of the work) and this is an impressive production on several levels. Most obviously, the film brings together an extraordinary array of contributors, including interviews with former American presidents (Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton), British Prime Ministers (Tony Blair, John Major), Taoisigh (Enda Kenny, Bertie Ahern), and major political commentators from the US, Britain, and both sides of the political spectrum in Northern Ireland, including Gerry Adams, Seamus Mallon, David Trimble, and Jeffrey Donaldson. These commentators provide insight into Hume's vast contribution but also indicate the challenges he faced across his career in charting a path towards peace in Northern Ireland. Interviews with these contributors are accompanied by fascinating archival material charting Hume's life and the development of the Troubles; narration by actor Liam Neeson; and accomplished cinematography throughout (including stunning landscape drone photography) by DOP Basil Al-Rawi.

The documentary was released with a companion book *John Hume in America: From Derry to DC* (also written by Fitzpatrick) which provides a more detailed analysis of Hume's journey as a politician, and engagement with the United States as part of his vision for resolving the conflict in Northern Ireland. However, unlike the more typical movement of film from text to screen, as Fitzpatrick indicates in his preface, it was the process of making the film that encouraged him to also produce a related book on the subject, and the book features considerable extracts from interviews featured within the documentary.

The documentary begins impressively with shots of the White House accompanied by the voice of former president Bill Clinton. This sequence sets the scene for the documentary as a whole, as Clinton emphasises Hume's success in harnessing the diaspora to bring peace to Northern Ireland. Fitzpatrick traces Hume's key ideas to a series of articles he wrote for the *Irish Times* in 1964 that set out his vision for resolving the Northern Irish conflict, and contends that this vision provided the central components to what eventually became the Good Friday Agreement. From the beginning, Hume realised that the United States could play a critical role in this process. The documentary charts how Hume brought the Troubles to the top of the political agenda in the United States through his interventions with leading Irish American figures. Key figures identified in this respect were former Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill, Senator Ted Kennedy, Senator Pat Moynihan and New York Governor Hugh Carey, collectively known as "the four horsemen" who lobbied to ensure the Northern Ireland conflict and its resolution would feature high on the political agenda of American Presidents and senior politicians. However, the documentary indicates that Hume not only convinced these influential figures to forward his agenda; he also realised the importance of the American media in bringing change to understandings of the Troubles and the potential role of the United States in its resolution.

While impressive in many respects, *John Hume in America* is limited in its critical analysis of Hume's contribution or legacy, evident for example in the absence of academic contributors. There is an overall hagiographic tone apparent with a parallel suggested in the work between Hume and Ireland itself, affirmed through the use of impressive shots of Irish landscapes (lakes, castles, rivers, coastlines) intercut intermittently with interview material. In this respect the documentary is reminiscent of George Morrison *Mise Éire* (1959). As noted by Lance Pettitt of that work, Morrison "inserted some curious bridging sequences ... which depict the sea crashing against a rocky coast. They stand out as unmotivated links in the actuality newsreel that they join. The eternal forces of nature are linked to the political narrative of nation in a rhetorically powerful romantic image" (82).

This description could well be applied to the rather sentimentalised landscape photography of *Hume in America*. The focus on America evident in the title is also arguably apparent in these sequences, reminiscent of touristic depictions of the Emerald Isle. This is accentuated further by the traditional musical accompaniment (by Riverdance composer Bill Whelan) which again suggests familiar constructions of Ireland as rural, romantic and traditional. These sequences also contribute to the overall hagiographic tone of the work, while suggesting that the arrival of peace was a natural consequence of Hume's work and vision; the reality, of course, was much more complex and multifaceted.

Indeed, it is this complexity that is absent here. While the range of voices featured is undoubtedly impressive, one is left with the overall feeling of having encountered a beautifully realised and visually impressive work, but one that lacks a more critical edge. While peace has broken out in Northern Ireland, and the province is undeniably in a better place today than prior to the Good Friday Agreement, much still remains to be resolved. Devolved government is not functioning and the fudge that the Good Friday Agreement (perhaps necessarily) was, is a major contributory factor to this. While Hume's contribution should never be forgotten, it must also be acknowledged that his approach ultimately led to the decline of his own political party as a major force in Irish politics and the rise of Sinn Féin and DUP (the hard line political forces on either side of the political spectrum) to dominate politics in Northern Ireland. One of the very few critical comments in the documentary is made by Seamus Mallon, former deputy leader of the SDLP. Mallon describes Hume as going on 'solo runs, he could not take criticism well, he preferred to be on his own' – while Hume's ideas may have provided a basis for peace, they did not provide a viable vision for what followed the peace process itself.

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Déjà Vu? The Audiovisual Action Plan (2018)

Roddy Flynn

The history of Irish cinema is littered with comprehensive strategic reviews of film policy with prescriptions for creating and developing a sustainable industry. Follow-through on the recommendations contained in these documents has often been patchy, however.

As Minister for Industry and Commerce in 1942, Sean Lemass was so disappointed with the gloomy conclusions regarding the prospects for an indigenous Irish film industry contained in the Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Film Industry, that he decided not to publish it at all.

A quarter of a century later, another Minister with the same portfolio, George Colley, entirely embraced the more optimistic conclusions of the Film Industry Committee's 1968 report (often referred to as "The Huston Report" after its chairman John Huston) which outlined a step-by-step plan for creating a native film sector from scratch. That plan was more or less cut and pasted into the 1970 Film Bill which would have seen the early establishment of an Irish Film Board. However, despite receiving a first reading in the Dail, the legislation was never pursued and lapsed with the close of the 19th Dail in 1973.

Although the ground for Michael D. Higgins' revival of the Film Board in 1993 and the subsequent expansion of Section 35 was laid by a sequence of reports in 1992 – the Independent Television Production Sector Report, the Report on Indigenous Audiovisual Production Industry (aka the Coopers and Lybrand Report) and the Report of the Taoiseach's Special Working Group on the Film Production Industry – Higgins's actions were as notable for the manner in which they cherry-picked some recommendations whilst ignoring others, such as the suggestion that the Irish Film Board (IFB) be entirely replaced with a more market-oriented industrial development body.

Perhaps as a consequence, although the first decade after the Film Board's re-establishment was marked by a remarkable flowering of film production, it was less notable for the number of sustainable production entities which emerged. From 1999 onwards, however, with the publication of the Strategic Review Group's Report on the sector (aka The Kilkenny Report), there has been a consistent emphasis on developing the Irish audiovisual sector primarily as an industrial sector, one potentially less vulnerable than other sectors to competition from other lower-wage locations contemplated by international capital. The early part of the 21st century saw the IFB appoint a business development manager (Andrew Lowe)

and various slate funding and company development schemes introduced aimed more at establishing self-sustaining firms rather than directly funding production. (Inevitably Element Pictures, established by Ed Guiney and Lowe in 2001 was an early recipient of such funding.) That emphasis on business development was echoed in an emphasis on developing marketing skills and on the importance of retaining IP wherever possible.

It is in this context that June 2018 saw the launch of the latest such report by Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Josepha Madigan: “The Audiovisual Action Plan”. Many of the recommendations contained therein were anticipated by the “Investing in our Culture, Language and Heritage 2018-2027” plan launched by Madigan in April 2018, which committed €1.2bn to capital projects related to culture and creativity as part of the government’s overarching *Project 2040* strategy to improve the nation’s social, economic and cultural infrastructure.

The Audiovisual Action Plan is Pillar Four (one of five) of the “Creative Ireland Programme”, the main vehicle for the priorities identified in Culture 2025 policy published by the Department in July 2016. Growing out of the warm, fuzzy feeling evoked by the various 1916 centenary, Creative Ireland has been tasked with some ambitious objectives, encouraging the integration of creativity and culture into education, developing local authority capacity to encourage local participation in arts activities, renewing the existing national cultural infrastructure (not least at the level of individual buildings) and helping shape a coherent international brand for Irish culture. However, the fourth pillar of the project is unquestionably more hard-nosed, focused on the development of Ireland as “a global hub for the production of Film, TV Drama and Animation”.

The Audiovisual Action Plan identifies 29 action points, organised under 8 headings. These are largely shaped by the conclusions of the “Economic Analysis of the Audiovisual Sector in the Republic of Ireland” document, published simultaneously but originally commissioned in 2016 by then Minister Heather Humphries from London-based consultants Olsberg/SPI and Nordicity (OSN). However, the Action Plan also includes a particular emphasis on skills, an area which, though referred to in the OSN report, is also heavily influenced by the May 2017 “Strategy for the Development of Skills in the Audiovisual Industry in Ireland” (produced for Screen Ireland and the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland by consultants Crowe Horwath).

Noting that in 2016 the Irish audiovisual sector (defined as including not just film and television but also radio and the digital games sector) “supported employment of 16,930 full-time equivalents” (of which 10,560 were directly employed) and “generated €1.05 billion in gross value” the OSN report points to policy changes which it suggests might result in a doubling of sectoral turnover and employment by 2022. This would be accompanied by great inward investment across the sector, a concomitant increase in the production of screen texts within Ireland and the increased provision of “Irish cultural products to Irish audiences and their export to international audiences”.

OSN justify this optimism by adverting to the ongoing rapid and global growth in screen content production, suggesting that it is expected to continue for at least the medium term as the transition to online consumption of content gathers pace. Ireland, they suggest, is potentially particularly well-placed to benefit from this increased demand for content given: our “track record of creative and technical skills”; the existence of state supports with tax credits (Section 481); soft funding (Screen Ireland and the BAI) and; as the report delicately puts it, “an ability to bring all the resources of the country to bear in making solutions work” (for which presumably read such measures as the deployment of the Defence Forces in the making of films like *Braveheart* and *Saving Private Ryan*). However, in a pointed nod to Brexit uncertainty, the report also stresses Ireland’s (soon to be unique) status as an English-language speaking member of the EU and the availability of “a first world infrastructure”

(including presumably the rapidly expanding provision of studio space at Ashford Studios and the Troy facility in Limerick), “stunning” locations and a communications infrastructure facilitating rapid transit across the island.

Given this, OSN make a set of recommendation on how to build on these strengths, again under eight headings: Section 481; the need to review all sources of film funding; the need to increase funding to bodies such as Screen Ireland and its various activities along with project development supports for games companies; skills development; regulatory reform, particularly as it impacts on the revenues of RTE; support for games and traditional screen media presence at international markets; a miscellany of other recommendations relating to retention of Intellectual Property, support for Irish language production and access to affordable premises.

However, in an acknowledgement of the failure to follow through on earlier strategies, it is the final OSN recommendation – the need to identify an agency with specific, longterm responsibility for actually implementing the suggested policy changes – that is placed at the forefront of the Audiovisual Action Plan itself. The OSN plan itself was overseen by a Steering Group drawn from the Departments of: Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht; Communications, Climate Action and Environment; and Business, Enterprise and Innovation along with the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland and Screen Ireland. OSN suggested keeping the Steering Group intact to oversee the implementation process, an idea embraced by the Action Plan which also envisages expanding the Group to include representatives from the Departments of Finance and Education and Skills. (Other groups, including Screen Producers Ireland, have also sought representation on the Group.)

In what presumably reflects the priority accorded to the various measures the second section of the Action Plan concentrates on changes to the Section 481 tax break, long held to be a critical component of the financial infrastructure drawing overseas producers to shoot in Ireland (as well as supporting indigenous production). OSN proposed: extending the operation of the credit beyond its then current end date of 2020; increasing the maximum eligible expenditure (and thus the amount of money potentially available to productions via the scheme) from €70m to €100m; extending the relief to digital games production along with; a variety of other tweaks such as extending the scheme to broadcasters, eliminating the requirement for companies to wait 21 months after their establishment before availing of support and, in general, reducing the bureaucracy associated with applications to the scheme. To support these recommendations OSN produced figures suggesting that Section 481 expenditures delivered “value for money on both a fiscal net benefit and economic net benefit basis” (6). In other words, for every euro of Section 481 funding granted to productions via the tax credit mechanism, OSN suggest that €1.02 was returned to the exchequer, a small return but a return nonetheless. Using the much broader measure of economic net benefit to the Irish economy, OSN suggest that each euro of Section 481 expenditure generated a remarkable €2.82.

Given these positive assertions, one might imagine that the Action Plan would actively embrace OSN’s proposed changes. Yet, in contrast to some of its other elements, the document is remarkably circumspect in this area and essentially makes no commitments. In practice, the October 2018 budget saw just two changes made to Section 481: an extension of the scheme until December 2024 and the introduction of a “regional uplift” which permits productions shot outside the Dublin-Wicklow area to access an additional 5% in Section 481 funding. The reluctance to more actively embrace the OSN recommendations is clearly informed by the parallel review of Section 481 – the first since it switched from an investor-led to a tax credit model in 2015 – carried out by the Department of Finance’s Tax Policy Division in the lead-up to the 2018 budget. Clearly adopting significantly more conservative cost/benefit metrics than OSN, the Tax Policy Division concluded that between 2015 and

2017 Section 481 had directly cost the state €243m and indirectly – factoring in the opportunity cost of not spending that money elsewhere (or the “shadow cost” of public funds) – had cost €315m. In consequence the Division concluded that Section 481 had resulted in a net economic *cost* to the state of €12.4m across 2015 and 2016. Despite this the Division did not, as might have occurred in the past, automatically propose suspending the operation of the tax credit scheme. (Indeed, elsewhere in their assessment, the Division acknowledges the unwieldy nature of the scheme and offers several proposals for streamlining its bureaucracy suggesting an expectation that the scheme will continue to operate into the future.) The Division acknowledges that their calculations do not include “other indirect benefits such as accommodation spend by cast and crew, trickle-down spending in local economy, increased tourism as a result of productions based in Ireland” (235), i.e. precisely the kind of factors OSN presumably did consider. Yet strikingly, notwithstanding a perception that the Revenue Commissioners have historically regarded Section 481 with a jaundiced eye, the Tax Policy Division espouses a willingness to countenance the notion of a “cultural dividend” that might be worth supporting with public funds:

the unquantifiable benefit of developing a robust film industry in Ireland and the related Irish cultural impact referred to in the analysis as the ‘cultural dividend’. In essence, the cost identified in the analysis is the price paid for the cultural dividend of having a thriving film sector in the State. (Tax Policy Division, Department of Finance, 2018. 220)

In effect the Division acknowledges the impossibility of comprehensively capturing the economic benefits of the cultural return to Irish society stemming from the presence of an active screen production sector. Thus while the Division may not be willing to contemplate an increase in the cost associated with the operation of Section 481 it is apparently willing to tolerate the current level of costs to unlock “the revealed value which society implicitly places on this cultural dividend”.

Addressing some of the other Action Plan’s recommendations lies more straightforwardly within the gift of the Steering Committee members, not least Screen Ireland. The OSN-originated recommendation for a “root and branch” review to identify “alternative and innovative approaches” to film funding has – as of the time of writing (March 2019) – already begun to be addressed by way of a Screen Ireland-commissioned study of state funding models in other countries. Similarly, responsibility for the Plan’s recommendations on Skills Development have been largely placed into the hands of Screen Ireland’s subsidiary Screen Skills Ireland (formerly Screen Training) alongside a skills-dedicated Screen Ireland sub-committee. Thus in addition to augmenting their existing work on business skills development for the sector, Screen Skills Ireland has, pace the OSN report and Crowe Horwath’s report on the audiovisual sector’s training needs, begun assessing how to match industry skillsets with the trajectory of the wider sector and how to ensure greater coordination between the kind of formal training offered by third level institutions and the actual needs of the industry. In this latter regard, Crowe Horwath called for a sequence of censuses, to establish both existing industry skillsets and what third level institutions are actually offering. The Action Plan envisages this been carried out by Screen Ireland and, coincidentally or otherwise, three weeks before the Action Plan was launched, Screen Ireland announced the appointment of a Training Manager at Skills Training Ireland.

In other areas, however, movement has been much slower. Section 4 of the Action Plan calls for a series of funding increases for, in order; Screen Ireland; Co-Production Funding; Development Funding (not only for films but also TV drama and TV formats); TV drama via a new dedicated fund; games prototype development; business development

funding; the Irish Screen Commission and; regional production. The Action Plan also calls for the creation of a clear map of production funding. Indeed several of these recommendations had already appeared as elements of the April 2018 “Investing in our Culture, Language and Heritage 2018-2027” plan which, while committing €200m to media production and the audiovisual industry over that decade, envisaged specific emphases on:

- “Co-production funding to support the development and production of more projects such as *Room* and *Brooklyn* which were Irish and international co-productions;
- Development funding to increase the value of Irish productions in the marketplace by ensuring they are fully developed before entering production;
- Funding to encourage the production of new Irish TV drama content. In recent years, there has been very little Irish domestic TV Drama and new funding will allow Ireland to take its place in this growing international market as well as reflecting our own cultural experience;
- A Regional Production Fund aimed at assisting with the cost of filming outside of the Dublin and Wicklow regions.”

These suggestions prompt a number of observations: firstly the Action Plan’s launch came eight months *after* the October 2017 establishment of the WRAP (Western Region Audiovisual Producer’s Fund) by the Galway Film Centre and Western Development Commission. Indeed the WRAP had already announced its part-financing of *Calm With Horses*, the Barry Keoghan-starring adaptation of Colin Barrett’s *Young Skins* short stories by April 2018. Thus some of the Action Plan’s funding recommendations were already in train before it was even officially launched. Indeed, in a similar vein one could say that an increase in Screen Ireland funding would indirectly lead to an increase in funding for most of the other priority areas identified since Screen Ireland is either already supporting these activities (e.g. co-production, film and television development, and the Irish Screen Commission) or has done so in the past (e.g. business development).

Secondly, since the €200m committed to supporting the audiovisual sector by 2018-2027 seems likely to either largely or entirely go to Screen Ireland, it suggests that the body can anticipate an average annual allocation of €20m each year. This would represent an increase on the €16.5m combined capital/current budget allocated to the Irish Film Board in 2017 and the €18m in 2018 and, indeed, the October 2018 Budget allocated just over €20m to Screen Ireland. Yet, looked at from a longer perspective this simply restored that body’s funding to its immediate pre-crash peak. In other words, although the €200m sounds impressive, it doesn’t immediately suggest an ambition to move beyond where the position reached in 2008 and thus the strong emphasis on increasing funding supports in the OSN report (and rehearsed in the Audiovisual Action Plan) does not appear to be supported by the level of funding envisaged going forward.

The Action Plan estimated that co-production and development funding would have to increase by something in the region of €3.5m and €2m respectively to meet the OSN projections. Even these figures are dwarfed by the €10m the Action Plan identified as necessary for the TV Drama Fund. The Action Plan is somewhat coy as to where this additional €15.5m per annum might be sourced from referring to: the “additional funding provided to Screen Ireland”; the possibility of channelling funding through the BAI and; “RTE’s plans in this area”. We return to RTE’s future finances below but, it’s worth recalling that the OSN report proposed the idea of a TV Drama Fund precisely because it identified that RTE had been forced by its straitened financial circumstances to pull back on its drama commitments. How RTE could therefore be identified as part of the solution in this context is

somewhat baffling. Furthermore, given that elsewhere the Action Plan assumes the additional funding granted to the then Irish Film Board for 2018 would be used for skills development and marketing, it's hard to see how the same money could be spent again on co-production or development.

In practice February 2019 did see Screen Ireland take on responsibility for creating the new TV Drama fund announcing that it would make up to €600,000 available for “Irish producers with a track record in TV Drama production to originate live action TV drama projects.” Though any alternate source of funding will be welcomed by those seeking to assemble a budget for television drama, it's salutary to consider the limited impact €600,000 might make in the context of modern high end television drama budgets. For example, RTE's 1916 commemoration drama “Rebellion” (admittedly the most expensive in the station's history) cost approximately €1.2m per television hour: thus even the maximum award under the Scheme as currently structured would have barely have funded enough screentime to get past the first ad break in the first episode. Furthermore, awards surpassing €500,000 under the scheme seem unlikely in the short term given Screen Ireland's pragmatic statement that “in light of the pressure on Screen Ireland resources, awards considerably less than the maximum are likely to be offered”.

Against this, the sixth set of recommendations in the Action Plan (again derived from the IOSN report) relating to the impact of regulatory reform on RTE's finances might yet indirectly improve the terms of trade for drama production if those recommendations are acted upon. The first recommendation is a no-brainer: that Ireland should sign up the recent revisions to the European Convention on Cinematographic Co-Production. However, the second and third recommendations are politically far more sensitive. OSN point out the urgent need to address the scale of licence fee evasion at a point when RTE's commercial revenues are substantially reduced. In 2008, RTE earned €240m in commercial revenues, a figure which dropped to €145m by 2013. Although it recovered somewhat as the economy picked up, reaching €158m in 2016, the last set of accounts (for 2017) saw it fall back again to €151m reflecting the ever more competitive nature of Irish television (and cross-media) advertising markets. Although the Action Plan does not mention it by name, its reference to the need for a revision of “the licence fee collection model”, appears to invoke the household broadcasting charge first mooted by then Minister for Communications Eamonn Ryan in 2011 and more or less committed to (but ultimately not delivered) by his successor Pat Rabbitte in 2012. The logic of a system which levies a fee to support public service media on all households rather than on television sets seems obvious in the context of the ongoing migration of audiovisual content consumption to the online world. Many other European countries have already abandoned their hopelessly outmoded television-specific licencing systems and there seems little doubt that Ireland would also have done so were it not for the desire to avoid a repeat of the spectacular political fallout following the introduction of the local property tax and the water charges debacle. Nonetheless, that the current system will be replaced seems inevitable, potentially leading to a €30m-€60m (depending on which estimate you accept) windfall for RTE. In a similar vein, the Action Plan recommends removing the existing “must carry” obligations whereby the dominant forces in satellite and cable television distribution – Sky and Virgin Media – effectively receive RTE (and other Irish free-to-air channels) for free. A 2014 report commissioned by RTE from Mediatique suggested that Sky and Virgin (then UPC) stood to lose €19m and €11m respectively if RTE were able to withdraw from their platforms. This suggests that the state-owned broadcaster would be in a position to leverage significant untapped value from its output if given a free hand to negotiate terms with those distribution entities. Although the Action Plan somewhat kicked these recommendations to touch by suggesting that they were under consideration by the Department of Communications, they were given further impetus by the publication of a

second five-year review of RTE's activities by the BAI in October 2018 which recommended that RTE should receive an increase in annual funding of €30m as a matter of urgency. (Indeed the BAI has been recommending to a series of Ministers for Communications that the licence fee – now unchanged at €160 since 2007 – should be increased for almost a decade to no avail.) RTE received some comfort later the same month (October) when it was announced that the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection would reinstate its subsidy of the free licence fee for social welfare recipients, augmenting RTE's finances by €8.6m.

Beyond the recommendations above, section 7 of the Action Plan also points to the need for an increased focus on Marketing although the specific recommendations cited from the OSN report relate mainly to the digital games industry. Notably however, the Action Plan does envisage that alongside Enterprise Ireland and the IDA, Screen Ireland would play some role in developing branding for Irish games at international events, suggesting that the switch from "Irish Film Board" to "Screen Ireland" really does anticipate a significant broadening of the institutions remit beyond cinema. Section 8, a sort of miscellany of left over priorities emphasizes the importance of facilitating Irish companies in retaining intellectual property, accessing affordable premises and promoting Irish language production.

Conclusion

The existence of a long-term strategic plan for the screen sectors In Ireland is to be welcomed, if only because it suggests that policy-makers are conscious that the ongoing presence of high-profile, large budget productions like the *Star Wars* sequence reboot, *Vikings*, *Into the Badlands* and Disney's *Quantico* cannot be taken for granted. Furthermore, the document seems to be informed by an acknowledgement that locally-produced culturally specific work for the big and small screens are important from both an industrial and cultural perspective. Yet it is important to stress that most of the remedies put forward by the Action Plan itself and those derived from the OSN and Crowe Horwath reports have been proposed before, in some cases since the 1990s. That the impact of policy emphases on business development has not necessarily been more widely felt is not a criticism of those prescriptions but perhaps a failure to consistently provide the financial and human resources that would see them fully implemented. The OSN report's pointed criticism of previous failures to clearly identify a single body with responsibility for driving screen policy onwards is well made but it remains to be seen whether the ad hoc Steering Group created to oversee the completion of the Plan is necessarily the best means of addressing this issue going forward, given that it is likely to be composed of individuals with a wide portfolio of responsibilities of which the audiovisual sector will be just one. While pathway dependence means that responsibility for film and broadcast policy is still divided across two department – Communications and Culture – it may be worth considering whether a clearer identification of a single government department with oversight over the screen sector as a whole is necessary to make the Action Plan a reality.

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The Lonely Battle of Thomas Reid (Fergal Ward, 2018)

Roddy Flynn

Fergal Ward's work to date has manifested an artistic sensibility often informed by a distinctly political consciousness. Working frequently with Tadgh O'Sullivan (as cinematographer / editor or more recently as co-directors), the pair seem drawn to spaces of conflict. These tensions may be overt – as in their self-financed observational short “Boxing” (2008) about Arbour Hill pugilists – or tacitly present, as in their acutely observed Arts Council-funded project “Bow Street”, a location in Dublin 7 where legal eagles from the Law Library and Four Courts daily cross paths with those reliant on the Capuchin Day Centre for Homeless People and where the shiny new apartments developed in Smithfield during the boom overshadow the much more modest two-up, two-down houses built in the early 20th century. The hypnotic “This Land 1970-1979” (2013), a collaboration with artist Adrian Duncan, takes archive footage and re-presents it in a decontextualized fashion to mediate on how the national broadcaster represented the nation back to itself during the 1970s, highlighting the contrast between the official contemporary narratives built around leading politicians and captains of industry and the sometimes less-than-straightforward manner in which they conducted their affairs. More recently, and anticipating an era of Trump, the Tadgh O'Sullivan-directed (with Ward again as DOP) “The Great Wall” (2015) used Kafka's short story “The Building of the Great Wall of China” as a starting point to explore the manner in which Fortress Europe has emerged presenting figurative and literal barriers to the ethnically othered at a moment of unprecedented global migration.

Ward's work with O'Sullivan eschews shrill ideological declarations, preferring instead to construct careful political mosaics for the audience. Nonetheless, their adherence to a progressive political stance is fairly clear, offering as they do a critique of the manner in which international capital seeks unfettered access to global markets while constraining the freedom of individuals (especially peoples of colour) to enjoy similar mobility. Their films build these argument through constantly mobile (though not restless) camerawork endlessly reframing their subjects, altering their relationships with their surroundings, and discouraging the viewer from adopting a settled, definitive perspective. Their work often throws sound and vision into counterpoint, pictures refuting dialogue and vice versa.

Given all this, Ward's decision to essay the David-vs-Goliath narrative of Thomas Reid, a lone individual pitted against the massed forces of the Irish state (represented by the IDA) and international capital (here represented by Intel) was never likely to adopt an expository mode, combining voice-of-god narration with “he said, she said” talking head interviews. Even if that had been Ward's preference, Reid's singular nature might have made such an approach impossible.

Reid's crusade commenced in November 2012, when the IDA moved to exercise their authority under the 1986 Industrial Development Act to compulsorily acquire his 72-acre farm adjacent to Intel's massive facility in Leixlip, Co Kildare. This followed on their extensive attempts to convince Reid, whose family had resided on the land for more than a century, to voluntarily sell the land to them. Reid challenged the order but, in 2013, the High Court found that the IDA was acting within its powers, thereby apparently copperfastening the compulsory purchase order (CPO).

Fergal Ward first encountered the farmer after Reid filed an appeal with the Supreme Court, arguing that the CPO violated the strong personal property rights accorded to individuals by the constitution. Drawn by the signs Reid had erected around his land

protesting at the IDA's CPO, Ward spent months cultivating his trust, literally chatting to him over the wall until Reid invited him in and agreed to be filmed.

The result is a meditative but compelling portrait of a unique figure. Those who know the film only by its poster which places Reid front and centre might be forgiven for mistaking it for an Herzog-esque medieval drama. In appearance Reid seems to stem from another era, sporting an apparently self-administered heavily-fringed haircut and presenting a stolid, largely silent countenance to the world. Ward reveals a man who lives an almost feudal existence: though presenting an bucolic image of the land surrounding the farm and Reid's close relationship with his small herd of cattle, the immediate impression is one of an economically non-viable smallholding in terminal decline. Images of abandoned – but not discarded – and decaying machinery depicts weeds growing through old car footwells, as nature re-asserts itself against technology and modernity. Reid's way of life seems both economically unsustainable though – in contrast to the environmental footprint left by his immediate neighbour Intel – ecologically sound, his organic connection to the land and to his individually-named livestock makes almost no impact on his surroundings. This sense is amplified where the camera enters the interior of Reid's home, a space largely cut off from the outside world. Even an electrical connection seems absent as we witness Reid preparing frozen food in self-contained gas-powered stove. A hoarder, Thomas literally lives in the past, surrounded by decades of possessions: going through record albums he singles out the Boomtown Rats first single "Looking after No. 1". (In a comedic interlude we later hear him ringing KFM to request they play Twisted Sister's "We're Not Going to Take It"). He reads papers from the 20th century as if they were current. But these papers are vital to his battle, constituting both a record and evidence of the nefarious doings he ascribes to Intel. (At one point, as he surveys the cadaver of a dead rabbit, he suggests that local wildlife and livestock began mysteriously dying after a period of air and soil contamination following on the initial construction of the Intel plant. Later, when one of his cattle dies, the film leaves open the possibility that this is also somehow connected to Intel's looming presence). Addressing his reluctance to discard his hoard, Thomas explains that he has a mapping system that tidying would disrupt. The effect is to emphasize the fragility of his position: he sits atop a House of Cards where removing one element would see the whole edifice collapse.

But try as he might to keep it at bay, the outside world is encroaching: earthmoving machinery is visible and audible beyond his fence and wall. Drone shots track past the boundaries of Intel's land across the road and into Reid's 72 acres, emphasizing their proximity. His one concession to modernity - the voice of radio – transmits the commonsense cant of the contemporary Ireland into this private realm. This tends to echo the discourse favoured by representatives of the state. In an early sequence, Thomas is doorstepped by the men from the IDA insisting on the critical strategic importance of his land for the larger Irish economy. As they speak, Ward's roaming camera detaches their words from their speech highlighting their bland rehearsal of – to Ward at least - meaningless corporative speak: "key strategic...Foreign Direct Investment...lands have been identified as most appropriate...large scale capital investment...critical path land problems". When Thomas dogmatically informs them that the land is not for sale, they persist: "We really need you to facilitate us". As framed by the documentary, the implication is clear: if you don't deal with us, other, perhaps less polite forces, can be brought to bear.

That the film is unapologetically on Reid's side in this conflict seems obvious. In one sequence we listen to an IDA representative express delight during a radio interview about Intel's decision to locally manufacture a new processor which has been designed in Ireland (referring in passing to how the instrumentalization of government policy, third level training and IDA activity have contributed to this outcome). However, the accompanying visual shows Thomas reading a newspaper headline "€13bn" where the "B" is replaced with Apple

Computers' corporate logo, a reference to the European Commission finding that Apple's tax arrangements in Ireland amounted to state aid worth €13bn. Without belabouring the point, the film identifies how bodies like the IDA can routinely access the public sphere via mass media and shape/frame public debate around conflicts with figures like Thomas Reid. On the radio, the mainstream discourse emphasises the role of global capital as significant employers in Ireland while sidelining their serial tax evasion. In effect then, the documentary works to bring some – albeit belated – balance to the struggle between the IDA and Thomas. (Indeed the film tacitly acknowledges that Thomas's otherworldly demeanour might render him a less than compelling advocate of his own case.)

Yet, give the particular responsibility to truth faced by documentary film, one might still raise questions about some of the choices made the filmmakers in making their (and Reid's) case. Ward's film is not above some conflation of temporally distinct events for political impact. For instance, while it is implied that Reid is listening to the IDA executive interview while reading about the Apple decision, the two events occurred three years apart, the interview (relating to the announcement of Intel's Quark processor) being broadcast in 2013 long before the European Commission's 2016 ruling on Apple's tax obligations.

Then there is the question of the film's extensive – but not always explicit or signalled – use of reconstruction and intervention in constructing the profilmic content. The latter is less problematic and clearly signalled and undertaken for poetic effect. One sequence sees Reid confronted by his own image across an array of flatscreen televisions as he walks past the audiovisual aisle in a local hypermarket.

With regard to the restaging of events, director Ward's relatively belated involvement with Reid's narrative and Reid's taciturn nature probably made some reliance on reconstruction inevitable. The film does directly interview Reid but his responses are elliptical, tending to drift down tangential cul-de-sacs, rarely offering a coherent narrative.

However, as a corrective for this, the manner in which the documentary deploys reconstruction is inconsistent and the distinction between filming of what Bill Nichols refers to as "the social world" (i.e. spontaneous pro-filmic events from the real world) and reconstructions is always clear. At one extreme, denied the opportunity to film the various court proceedings, the film chooses to restage them within the confines of Reid's own land using court transcripts as a source for dialogue. This leads to the incongruous sight of lawyers, judges and witnesses (or the actors playing them) delivering their words atop hay bales in open fields. The resulting sequences both undercut the artificial solemnity of the legal environment but also, by situating these scenes on Reid's actual land, operate to emphasize the real-world significance of the often dry court proceedings. However, these sequences are manifestly reconstructed. Elsewhere this is far less obvious. When IDA representatives first arrive on Thomas's land to directly plead with him to consider selling his land, such is the verisimilitude of the scene that at least one viewer found himself asking how the production had secured their consent to be filmed. Hard on the heels of the dawning realisation that the IDA men are in fact actors, comes the recognition that Reid himself is consciously participating in the artifice, essentially playing himself. Given his Kaspar Hauser-like otherworldly representation in the elsewhere part of the film, this comes as something of a surprise, suggesting that far from the holy fool the film presents him as he is an active agent in the construction of a narrative – that of the documentary – that will support his case. (Although it should be noted that it's unclear as to whether this sequence was shot after the Supreme Court decision which constitutes the film's climax). The viewer is offered no independent corroboration that the exchange took place in the manner depicted in the film or even that it occurred at all. Presumably it is derived from Reid's own – hardly disinterested – account of it even if the language placed in the voices of the actors playing the IDA figures plausibly echoes that used in court transcripts and very possibly in written communications to

Reid from the IDA. Indeed, on that point, another sequence shows Thomas arriving home to – somewhat ominously – find a letter from the IDA taped to his front door. On reflection it seems likely that the too is a reconstruction but so seamlessly does the sequence fit into the poetic flow of the rest of the film that its artifice is almost impossible to identify on first viewing.

These caveats are more than minor quibbles but they do not they fatally undermine the ultimate impact of the documentary. In a last minute twist – one genuinely surprising to viewers unfamiliar with the real-life outcome – Reid emerges victorious when Supreme Court unanimously agreed that the IDA had exceeded their powers in making the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO). Against all the odds, the little guy outsider not merely defeats the massed forces of state and capital but leaves them with a bloody nose when full costs in the region of €1.4m are awarded against the IDA. Yet even here, in an apparent bid to sustain the good guy/bad guy narrative, the film somewhat fudges the basis for the Supreme Court decision. The final reconstruction appears to suggest that the court’s siding with Reid was motivated by a perception that the IDA had acted in bad faith by failing to acknowledge that they only moved to compulsorily acquire the property after Intel had been unsuccessful in their own bid to directly acquire the land from Reid. In other words, the IDA had deceitfully sought to disguise Intel’s involvement in the purchase. In point of fact, while it appears that the IDA may have been less than upfront in this regard, the Supreme Court’s judgement appears to suggest that it was precisely the failure to identify an industrial user who would ultimately benefit from the acquisition that meant that the IDA had overreached the authority accorded to them by the 1986 Industrial Development Act. In other words, if the IDA *had* been open about acquiring the land for Intel (assuming this was in fact their intention) then the Supreme Court decision might well have upheld that of the High Court. This interpretation of the judgement suggests incompetence rather than malice as the primary reason for the IDA’s loss in court. Furthermore, although the final sequence refers to the “bias” on the part of the IDA it does not clarify that this relates to the fact that then IDA chairman Liam O’Mahony was simultaneously a director of the consultancy firm which had recommended to the IDA that Reid’s lands were the most suitable for purchase.

Yet to critique on these grounds is to judge it by the standards of the expository documentary which, having raised a question, would generally be at pains to find as close to a definitive answer as possible. If Ward’s film is clearly not in that mould, one might ask whether it even constitutes a documentary at all? It may be better to understand it as a poetic, political intervention, one intended to provoke reflection on national priorities rather than offer possibly spurious definitive accounts. Certainly, if the film is somewhat opaque regarding the specific rationale informing Reid’s ultimate victory, the timing of its release has amplified its broader political message regarding where the priorities of the Irish state lies. As the scale of the housing crisis has augmented in recent years, the film clearly depicts how the state’s apparent unwillingness and/or incapacity to secure land and property in order to address the housing crisis stands in stark contrast to the speed and agility with which it sought to acquire Thomas Reid’s lands.

And in a disheartening coda to the film, April 2018 saw the signing into law of new CPO legislation strengthening the hand of the state in a manner which might make future Thomas Reids or even Thomas Reid himself less likely to prevail in their struggles to retain their homes.

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Fear, Loathing (and Industrial Relations) in the Irish Film Industry

Denis Murphy

On 1st November 2018, RTE's flagship current affairs programme *Prime Time* aired a report entitled *Fear and Loathing in the Irish Film Industry*, centred around allegations of bullying and intimidation on Irish film sets, and what was described as a long-standing problem of random pickets and protests at studio gates and on the sets of visiting productions. Footage shot at one such protest was striking. One effect of the blurring out of protestor faces was an increased emphasis on the placards they carried – “Irish Film Board Funding The Abuse of Workers”, “500 Million Of Irish Taxpayers Money And No Jobs”, and “Irish Film And Television Industry A Corporate Welfare System” (RTE 2018). *Prime Time* identified the “most visible grouping” within this protest movement as the Irish Film Workers Association (IFWA), an organisation that dates back to at least 2011 when it was known (somewhat ironically, as shall emerge) as the Irish Film Workers Forum (see Sheehy 2012).

Following the broadcast, a minor twitter storm erupted, underlining the allegations of IFWA intimidation. Some film workers directed anger at Richard Boyd Barrett, T.D., identified on the programme as the politician who had “legitimized” IFWA by arranging for them to contribute to a hearing on film industry working conditions carried out at the beginning of the year by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Culture (see Joint Committee, 2018, 2018a). IFWA's appearance before the committee indeed seemed to have been an afterthought. The first of the two hearings, held on January 31 with contributors from established industry employer, labour and state bodies – Screen Producers Ireland (SPI), SIPTU, and the Irish Film Board respectively – had concluded without any indication of a further session (Joint Committee 2018). Yet two weeks later, a second hearing had been convened, with contributions from IFWA and the trade union GMB.

While it is not clear why the hearings were initiated in the first place, it seems apparent from the line of questioning during the opening hearing that the Committee had concerns about employment quality in the Irish industry. Committee Chairman and Sinn Fein TD Peadar Toibin underlined his support for State funding of the Irish industry but then went on to state that “there are undoubtedly problems in the sector”, suggesting that the industry's model of “forced self-employment” could lead to labour power imbalances and exploitation, and an institutionalised model of precarious work. The standard industry legal and accounting structures were discussed, including the international practice of channelling financial, legal and employment contracts through special purpose vehicles (SPVs) – one-off companies incorporated to carry out production of a single project, then dissolved on its completion. It was noted that this structure leads to short term contracts of employment, depriving film workers from some of the normal entitlements enshrined in Irish employment legislation. It was suggested that the Film Board might convene an industry forum to address this and other issues, including training certification – to which Film Board chairman James Hickey readily agreed (ibid.).

Two weeks later, after Boyd-Barrett's intervention, the second hearing was held. In contrast to the initial hearing, the second received widespread media coverage, owing to accusations from GMB and IFWA of “bullying and harassment” of workers, among other grievances (Libreri 2018). The industry was accused of operating working weeks of up to 66 hours, in breach of working time legislation. IFWA alleged that industry trainees were being abused, to the extent that the trainee provisions of the Section 481 tax credit legislation, along

with its legislative obligation to provide “quality employment”, were being ignored. If true, these accusations would undermine the legal validity of the tax credit scheme itself – one of the most generous in the world, a production incentive that all Irish stakeholders (with the exception of IFWA alone) consider vital to the continuing functioning of the industry as currently constituted, both as an international production hub and a producer of increasingly sophisticated indigenous content.

The response from the wider body of film workers themselves was remarkable. During the spring and early summer months, a large number of workers representing most of the film grades came together to discuss and refute the claims of IFWA/GMB, possibly alarmed by IFWA’s criticisms of Section 481. Rather than unite under the banner of SIPTU – historically the industry’s most significant trade union, although in decline since its membership peak in the late 1990s – film workers chose instead to mobilise around a series of guilds, with some twenty new organisations forming under the umbrella of the Screen Guilds of Ireland (SGI). This potentially formidable new initiative mobilised workers to form occupation-specific guilds and encouraged them to respond to the Joint Committee, which received written submissions from at least five new guilds in time to consider their contribution before issuing their report, *Development and Working Conditions in the Irish Film Industry*, in July.

Most of these submissions rejected the claims around employment quality made by IFWA, with the guilds united in their claim that IFWA was not representative of the industry, and did not speak for the majority of film workers. Published in July, the Joint Committee report acknowledged the concerns about film worker precarity. Among its recommendations, it called on Government to “[seek] to make working arrangements more secure”, and on film companies to comply with labour law. It called on the Film Board to convene an industry forum with an independent chair, to “allow all stakeholders within the sector to meet and work together to develop mutually beneficial solutions for the industry” (Joint Committee 2018b, p3).

If this was an attempt to encourage the more traditional employer, labour and state bodies to break bread with the upstart IFWA and their GMB allies, it soon foundered. Following its Oireachtas appearance, IFWA had continued its agitation, mobilising a number of protests sufficiently robust to be described in a SPI memo to member companies as “non peaceful”. A protest at government buildings followed in May, then more at Ardmore Studios later in the year, including those featured on the *Prime Time* programme. The tenor of the RTE exposé – that IFWA represented a militant trade union faction unwelcomed by the majority of other industry stakeholders, including film workers outside (and in some cases within) its membership – was unquestionable. IFWA’s blurred out picketers, alleged threats, and “industrial language” contrasted sharply with the more measured tones of the industry “establishment”. *Prime Time*’s investigative efforts uncovered the criminal and paramilitary past of at least two IFWA members, although it was careful to describe such individuals as a “rump” within a larger group. Barely a week after the programme aired, ICTU withdrew from the proposed industry forum, saying it would only sit with “legitimate” trade unions (McNulty 2018). The forum, which the Film Board had hoped to initiate before the end of the year, appeared dead in the water, and to date has still not convened.

Despite IFWA’s “industrial” tactics, there can be little doubt that its appearance before the Joint Committee has had positive implications for film workers. The subsequent mobilisation of the film guilds has arguably re-energised SIPTU’s Arts and Culture section. The union has benefitted with an upsurge in membership, as the Guilds play an active part in ongoing efforts to update the 2010 Shooting Crew Agreement between SIPTU and SPI, thereby setting new standards for film employment and remuneration in the coming decade. That in itself is a remarkable development, revitalising what had become a moribund process

as attempts to renegotiate the agreement foundered in recent years, partly due to a lack of engagement by film workers themselves.

And what of IFWA's calls for closer scrutiny of Section 481 compliance? There can be little doubt that it has concentrated industry minds around the question of training and upgrading, an acknowledged weakness that, as pointed out by John Hickey during the committee hearings, has been traditionally carried out with trade union supervision (Joint Committee 2018). This indicates an upward trajectory in trade union relevance, as does the burgeoning relations between SIPTU, the guilds and SPI. So regardless of the validity of IFWA's claims, the organisation has undoubtedly catalysed a rejuvenation of industry labour relations. As reported in the 2018 Phoenix Annual,

There's no doubt that the IFWA has lacked some of the organisation of more established unions but, without its agitation, there would be no talk of reactivating the film industry forum, where contentious industrial relations issues can be raised. (Goldhawk 7)

There is little point in convening such a forum, of course, without the representation of all sections of the industry, including IFWA. The real challenge to the Irish film industry – a flourishing one, increasingly international in its scope and ambitions, yet increasingly dependent on a tax credit system itself constituted around the promise of industry development and quality employment – is to maintain its relatively long history (at least to the outer world) of industrial relations stability. To do this, it must demonstrate its commitment to employment quality as well as employment quantity, while somehow finding a way to bridge the seemingly unbridgable divide between its established players and upstart organisations like the Irish Film Workers Association.

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Searching for Understanding in Alan Gilson's *The Meeting*

Aileen O'Driscoll

Early on in Marina Abramović's performance piece *The Artist is Present* (performed at MoMa in 2010) she realised that she had underestimated the human need for connection with others as well as time for self-reflection, and that the intensity of this need would override the hectic state of our contemporary lives resulting in a packed-out gallery with people queuing for hours to sit opposite her for the duration of the 3-month performance. *The Artist is Present*, like many of her performances, is about human connection, but it's also about pain, suffering, understanding, and empathy. The point of her work is not so much an exploration of how one personally experiences and copes with pain, but with how we understand and take action when confronted with the pain of others. As such, Abramović conceives of herself as a vehicle through which her audience work out their response to suffering, violence, and hurt. In a similar way, Ailbhe Griffith, in choosing to play herself in *The Meeting*, is rendered in the role of a mirror held up to the viewer. She astonishingly re-enacts her 2014 meeting with Martin Swan, which took place nine years after he brutally sexually assaulted her, and she unflinchingly recounts the pain of that attack and its aftermath during the meeting. Ailbhe embodies, for the audience, the trauma experienced as a result of the sexual assault and gifts us with a relived performance of the meeting with Martin in order that we may contemplate the effects of violence and the potential for healing after it.

In a film that is underpinned by trauma, healing, and violence, it is significant that *The Meeting* opens with a quote from Jacques Derrida, a philosopher keenly interested in psychoanalysis and in one of its key concepts: Thanos or, the death drive. Thanos is used by psychoanalysts to explore the question of where to "locate" violence. In other words, how can we explain the existence of violence and aggression? These were important considerations for Freud who drew on Greek mythology to help him work through these questions. In the same way Greek myths offer pared back tales of morality, of the establishment of law and order, and of the triumph of what is good and rational over what is destructive, violent and chaotic, *The Meeting*, in some respects, represents a 21st century Greek Tragedy in its minimalism and in its dealing with issues of power, violence, and the subjugation of women. Stories such as Aeschylus' *Oresteia* or Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* have been read as maps for guiding human behaviours and actions away from aggressive impulses. Yet, in its engagement with the subject of restorative justice, the film moves beyond what is simply right and wrong by searching for an understanding of brutal violence as well as healing from trauma. In this sense it is a deeply spiritual film in its consideration for what it might represent and mean for people who engage with its subject matter. Victims of sexual assault, Ailbhe hopes, might take hope from the film's depiction of how she achieves some catharsis through this process of engaging with the man who viciously attacked her.

The film opens with seven to eight minutes of Ailbhe's written statement overlaid onto banal shots of a housing estate's roundabout (similar to the one, the viewer assumes, where she was assaulted) and images of the violence inflicted upon her body (the bitten and bloodied nipple of her right breast; her skinned knees; the bite marks on her back). In its first sequence of dialogue, her attacker Martin (a pseudonym for the film), asserts that he "didn't come here to apologise". This, on the back of the opening Derrida quote that *there is only forgiveness, if there is any, where there is the unforgivable*, begs the question of how one forgives if there is no atonement by the perpetrator for the wrongdoing. The answer, as explored in this film, is through understanding. What becomes clear early on, however, is that Ailbhe and Martin have difficulty reaching a shared or mutual understanding. Much of the dialogue, which was skilfully and sensitively scripted by Gilsenan based on recollections and notes by Ailbhe and other participants of the meeting, shows the pair talking past each other. They have divergent viewpoints, which are suggested through the use of slightly muffled sound and in the tuning in and out of each other's voices; the use of diverted gazes; and the scene around the boardroom table, the setting for the conversation, which moves in and out of focus. Indeed, the sensation of being submerged, of drowning, of hearing faint and indistinct sounds pervades the film. It is suggestive of trying to communicate with someone who is not easily reached. Likewise, it may be representative of the pre-social realm as explored by psychoanalysts such as Julia Kristeva. In this interpretation, the muted sounds and water imagery conveys a womb-like impression, of the amniotic fluid around the human embryo and, as such, potentially references the debate as to whether male violence is mapped onto the male foetus in the womb and is therefore "natural" and inevitable, or if sex-based violence against women can be explained through socio-cultural and environmental factors.

This debate or question regarding the sociological versus the psychoanalytic or indeed biological reasons for violence is invoked early on in their meeting when Ailbhe refers to feeling incredulous at being identified in the Garda station as a "victim of sexual assault" and her disbelief at the strange reality of seeing her underwear in an evidence bag. Ailbhe's incredulousness is mirrored in the shock of the male photographer who had to document her injuries at the Garda station. This forces us to rethink women's subjection to violence by men as unavoidable, nudging us towards social explanations for Martin's brutal assault. In the first extended contribution from Martin he tries to explain how he felt reading the book of evidence of the assault and how it made his "heart go bang", but it's not really clear what he means by this and when he sees that he hasn't made himself understood to her, he reverts back to Ailbhe. Further into their conversation he again tries to explain himself by sharing that he always just wanted to be 'ordinary' but could never quite get there. Played brilliantly by boxer-turned-actor Terry O'Neill, Martin's tone is just off enough to suggest at emotional issues. He lauds Ailbhe's "articulation" and recounts that he was impressed with her description of him as "the personification of misogyny". "I had to look it up" he explains. But, on the vicious aspects of his crime, he seems perplexed: "I couldn't have done all that, could I? I mean, I know I'm..." he says as he trails off. Seeming to lack self-awareness and self-knowledge, he later talks about the men who chased him down after the attack on Ailbhe was over. They broke his collar bone, and of this he says: "I know you had it worse and all ...". There's a "but" here; he's looking for sympathy, and as viewers, we're wondering if he has a sense of the seriousness of the attack, and whether he harbours any empathy for Ailbhe.

Despite Martin's apparent lack of self-awareness, we do get glimpses of the motivation for the attack. Following a rejection by some young women in a bar in town, he comes across Ailbhe and follows her onto the Nitelink bus carrying her home to the Dublin suburb she lived in. He perceives her as being "so up herself" and is agitated to see her talking to some "fancy" guy. "I didn't like that", he says. Then, in answer to Ailbhe's question of why he picked her to assault, he says simply: "It was your shoes; your high heeled shoes.

They set me off. I just saw fucking red”. At a sociocultural level, we understand what he means by this. High heels are culturally suggestive of a sexually confident woman; a femininity that taunts him, that he resents since, as a male, he harbours a sense that sexual confidence should be his, and not hers. This admission by Martin has shades of ‘incel’ rhetoric; the self-titled, so-called ‘involuntary celibates’ who congregate on online forums to discuss their sexual frustration and their anger at women who won’t have sex with them. Underpinned by this, of course, is entitlement to women’s bodies and resentment if this is refused.

Envy, as psychoanalyst Melanie Klein has explained, “is the angry feeling that another person possesses and enjoys something desirable – the envious impulse being to take it away or to spoil it” (Klein 181). This idea is echoed in the actions of Martin who wanted to “spoil” Ailbhe’s confidence, her happiness, her sense of belonging and safety in the world. According to Klein, “one of the consequences of excessive envy is an early onset of guilt... guilt is felt as persecution and the object that rouses guilt is turned into a persecutor” (Klein 194). Martin’s acting violently toward Ailbhe suggests he feels that she has taunted him; that he is “persecuted” by her. Although Klein didn’t develop a social theory, she did explain that environmental conditions – factors such as unemployment or demeaning work (or for Martin, lack of success in intimate relationships) – can lead to a persecutory anxiety with feelings of anxiety toward the State or parents, or in this case, women. With no constructive outlet for resolving those emotions, guilt becomes aggression. For Klein, “the fundamental problem is the fear that stands in the way of the natural desire to love and care for others” (Alford 180); in other words, our fear that we don’t have the capacity to reconcile with destructive feelings and thereby move forward. However, by understanding our own anxieties we can begin to look outwards to the “universal” and move away from “self-interest”.

In fact, in the closing of the film, a shift away from self-centredness by Martin is suggested. A voice message left by Martin with the meeting’s facilitator asks that Ailbhe be told that he’s “sorry”. However, this mutual understanding that what occurred on that night was deeply harmful for Ailbhe seems mostly absent throughout their meeting. In response to Ailbhe’s assertion that she now hopes he realises who she is, he responds by deflecting back to himself and explains that he’s trying to get his life together and move on. “I’m doing my best”, he says. “I’m doing my best, yeah?” he repeats, looking over at his probation officer for reassurance who nods encouragement back to Martin. It’s certainly moving and reveals Martin’s vulnerability, but once more we’re left wondering if he really does know who she is or comprehend the seriousness of his actions. However, in an exchange where they do perfectly understand each other, Martin opens up about socialising with a group of friends and being asked by a female friend, unaware of his conviction, to walk her home “for safety”. Ailbhe and Martin both laugh at the bizarreness of that scenario. This is a remarkable moment in the film and offers a reminder that there are bound together by this shared traumatic experience. If, at the close of the meeting, understanding between the two has been reached, this is crucial. As Nhat Hanh has explained, “understanding someone’s suffering is the best gift you can give another person. Understanding is love’s other name. If you don’t understand, you can’t love” (10). He counsels that “compassion is the capacity to understand the suffering in oneself and in the other person” (18), and advises that “to know how to love someone, we have to understand them. To understand, we need to listen” (39). This is the work that Ailbhe does, and ultimately, we hope that Martin also has gone through this process from listening towards compassion, understanding, and consequently towards love.

The Meeting bears similarities with Gilsenan’s 2017 *Meetings with Ivor*; not least of which, the title of the films. This notion of “meeting” echoes an idea of “coming together”. Both films, which have a paired-back aesthetic, are preoccupied with healing through the face-to-face encounter, echoing Abramović’s performative work in its concern with sharing

pain, and opening oneself to empathy and self-knowledge. Gilsean's choice of subjects in Ivor Browne and Ailbhe Griffith, makes clear his own interest in the realm of the psychological. Browne and Griffith both possess and exude emotional sensitivity, intellectual rigour and spiritual curiosity, as well as a determination in the search for knowledge, love, self-love and agency. In *Meetings with Ivor*, Browne at one-point quotes Jiddu Krishnamurti: "It's no measure of health to be well-adjusted to a profoundly sick society". This speaks to what *The Meeting* is grappling with. While the film, and the process of Ailbhe and Martin coming face-to-face is fascinating and moving, and the film also suggests at what is clearly a cathartic process for Ailbhe, it attempts also to offer more than healing in our "sick society" in which male violence against women is so prevalent. This is achieved by proffering, albeit implicitly, social and material explanations for the savagery of Martin's attack on Ailbhe. It is left to the viewer to reflect on and try to understand this sickness and move us all towards a cure.

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