



2016

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Recommended Citation

Haughey, A. (2016) On the Factory's Ruins: The Death of a Nation and the Birth of a Museum, *Irish Museums Association Conference 2016* Ireland.

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Anthony Haughey

Introduction

The title of this paper is borrowed from art historian Douglas Crimp's essay, 'On the Museum's Ruins' (1980),¹ a critique of contemporary art, its institutions and politics and the dismantling of modernism. Hito Steyerl also addresses the modernist history of museum spaces in relation to film, observing that many contemporary museums are located on former industrial sites, 'the museum-as-factory',² where culture displaces a history of labour relations. Bertolt Brecht thought of the factory as an institution where antagonistic social forces had potential for revolution, he called for a radical realism to reveal the underlying ideological interests governing institutions in an effort to facilitate social change:

The situation is complicated by the fact that less than ever does the mere reflection of reality reveal anything about reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or the AEG tells us next to nothing about these institutions. Actual reality has slipped into the functional. The reification of human relations—the factory, say—means that they are no longer explicit. So something must in fact be *built up*, something artificial, posed (Benjamin, 1931).³

Brecht's call for dialectical strategies to expose corrupt political formations found its expression in the montage works of John Heartfield and the films of Sergei Eisenstein. Despite the fact that visual montage has been co-opted by mainstream culture I argue that film has the power to make "genocide fully speakable" (Arsenijević; Levi; Tomić and Stojanović, 2009).⁴ For the purposes of this paper I reverse the axis of Crimp's title to invoke the transition of a former socialist car battery production factory near Srebrenica in Republika Srpska – a symbol of the collapse of President Josip Broz Tito's former Yugoslavia and the birth of a museum dedicated to the victims of genocide in Srebrenica, which is also the setting for my film, *UNresolved* (2016). On the 11 of July 1995 women and children were separated from men and boys of fighting age at the gates of the factory, in the days that followed more than 8000 Muslim men and boys, were systematically

murdered and buried in mass graves along the Drina river basin by the Bosnian Serb Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) under the command of General Ratko Mladić, despite the fact that Srebrenica was a UN safe area.⁵

Disputed Territory (1998-2016)

I have been interested in the former Yugoslavia for more than fifteen-years, the resulting longitudinal project *Disputed Territory* is a combined photographic and video-practice artwork project investigating the continuing conflict over territory, rights and ownership of land in Europe and the subsequent displacement and disappearance of communities in the aftermath of conflict. Culminating in photographic exhibitions, art publications, installations, video and sound artefacts, *Disputed Territory* utilises diverse media formats in its efforts to document post-conflict landscapes. Central to this investigation is a series of questions in relation to the politics and ideology of remembering and representing traumatic historical events.

Archives like memory are unstable repositories, fragile and in a constant process of forming and disappearing. In the former Yugoslavia, the trauma of remembering fratricidal massacres and competing historical narratives threaten to perpetuate a violence of forgetting. Obfuscating inconvenient truths is essential for the formation or rebuilding of nation states. In his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1970)⁶ Walter Benjamin suggests that the past is a tentative (mental) image, such as images of memory. This fragile image of the past is evoked in thesis IX, in the metaphor of the 'Angel of History'. Benjamin's concept of history is a detachment from its chronological temporality. The 'Angel of History' is an impotent observer who is powerless to intervene as the debris of catastrophe piles higher and higher, obscuring a way forward. For Benjamin there is potential for redemption; as he has written, "articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing it 'the way it really was'. It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger" (1990: 247).⁷ The moment of danger in Europe in the 1990s was the invocation of historical myths to engender support for nationalist agendas and ethnic cleansing in towns and villages throughout the former Yugoslavia, culminating in the Srebrenica genocide in 1995 followed by the Dayton Accord and shifting of territorial

boundaries. It is the present where collective memory is mobilised by political agendas in order to perpetrate violence. In post conflict situations complex and contesting narratives are often reduced to a politically expedient single historical narrative (Woodward 2007, Little 2014).⁸ Unresolved historical antagonisms become deeply embedded in collective identities threatening to erupt, an ever present fear of a re escalation of violence.

Whelan has argued that the fundamental task of testimony is the retrieval of the memory of the dead and the expansion of the archive of what the historian can ultimately work with. Citing Edward Said, he suggests that testimony lies between ‘memory and history’ somewhere between ‘filiation and affiliation’. Testimony recalls events as they happened but at the same time we must recognize that memory is partial and selective. We do not remember events exactly as they happened. He suggests that an ethics of testimony could be considered as a human right – including, the right to maintain one’s memories, the right to testimony and the right to an audience. As well as having the right to tell our stories, we also have an ethical duty to hear other people’s stories (Whelan, 2005: 11-20).⁹ The ‘performed’ testimonies in the installation *Resolution* function in a similar register, recalling Benjamin and Ricoeur’s account of ethical memory and archives. Memory that is “not so much locked into the past, but is concerned with opening the past as a mechanism to release the future” (in Whelan, *ibid*)¹⁰ and recalling Taylor’s comment that “the act of remembrance is also the payment of a debt owed to the dead” (1998: 298).¹¹ If an archive is interpreted as the extraction and elucidation of histories and hidden information for critical attention, then it may be considered transformative; an act of resistance – to recover the dead, the lost voices, forgotten memories and ‘cleansed histories?’ described by Allen Feldman as “a vast secret museum of historical absence” (Feldman, 1994).¹²

Despite the over saturation and sensationalism associated with images of atrocity, it is argued that on balance it is better to circulate images of atrocity (Barthes: 1999; Keane; 1996; Taylor: 1998). Taylor argues that the absence of images of horror in society can mislead viewers. “Drawing them away from recognizing significant crimes: through no obvious fault of their own, these people simply do not know. On the other hand, the

presence of imagery and reports means that forgetting about them or refusing to see them is a deliberate choice, a conscious act of citizenship” (1998: 195).

UNresolved: A film reflecting on the twentieth anniversary of genocide in Srebrenica

In 2014 I returned to Srebrenica once again and began working on a short film, *Unresolved*, which was completed in 2015. The film reflects on the twentieth anniversary of genocide in Srebrenica, and the script was researched and constructed from archival sources including my own research notebooks, ICTY court hearings and archives, UN and military statements, first hand victim testimonies and reflective accounts from local and international commentators who have researched and written extensively about the events following the fall of Srebrenica. Most importantly, the film script foregrounds how histories are formulated by ideological constructs. I consider the film’s editing software timeline akin to a historical narrative, film editing shares an affinity with dialectical and montage techniques where in this case conflicting accounts of genocide in Srebrenica are recombined in an attempt to alienate the spectator into a raised state of consciousness. The Belgrade/Tuzla artist collective *Grupa Spomenik* argue that ”genocide is fully speakable, but that politics and critique of ideology are the only proper languages in which it can be spoken”¹³ The task of the artist is to ask the difficult questions that official state histories attempt to erase or deem unimportant to include. Whelan has argued that ”art can restore this openness to the past (...) This creates the space for a counterpoint history, of loss, of victimisation, of humiliation, so brilliantly evoked by Walter Benjamin”.¹⁴ A significant element of this loss is community memory and testimony, the hidden histories that reveal much about the lives of people who experienced significant trauma and upheaval. ”We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left, ” claims Pierre Nora, adding that ”history is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it” (Nora, 1989).¹⁵

This archival research was scripted and restaged for the film’s narrator, a male Bosniak, returning to the scene of the crime twenty-years later to uncover and disturb the official political-historical narrative with that of the unrepresented or repressed; a witness to unresolved questions of culpability. The narrative generates conflicting accounts of the

days that followed the fall of Srebrenica and critically engages with contested ideological motivations and power relations inscribing this raw history, reflecting *Grupa Spomenik*'s assertion that critique of ideology is the 'only proper language' to speak of genocide, as this excerpt from the film demonstrates:

29th of October 2014: Excavation began on a suspected mass grave in Jasenovac near Srebrenica: "Several metres below the clay and silt, forensic evidence, a moral calculus, an historical account. Who killed, or was innocent of these crimes? How many bulldozers, trucks, and warehouses were needed to hide and bury this many people? Who commissioned the equipment and employed the operators, this is the logistics of mass murder. They took their time, thought long and hard about what to do with thousands of unarmed prisoners who awaited their fate in warehouses, schools and factories". A survivor of the 1995 Srebrenica genocide said, "I began to doubt if Europe wanted us to survive or not".¹⁶

UNresolved derives its name from UN Resolution 819 which declared Srebrenica a 'safe area' in April 1993 and placed it under the protectorate of United Nations armed forces. The subsequent failure of the UN to fulfill its humanitarian mandate resulted in the Serb forces overrunning the enclave and genocide. The opening sequence of the film is a tracking shot moving across open graves in Srebrenica-Potočari Cemetery, and what follows is a reflective journey through buildings, factories and fields where thousands of men and boys were brutally murdered. These atrocity sites have returned to their original use, crops are grown in fields where mass graves were discovered, football fields and schools where men and boys were held prisoner before they were killed host a new generation of children living in re territorialised ethnic boundaries, many unaware of this shameful history.

The film is for the most part a continuous tracking shot, where movement and deep focus is deployed to enable distancing or estrangement. The spectator is denied an empathetic point of view and is implicated in the narrative through durational sequences that extend the viewer's gaze beyond the motor-sensory. As Andre Bazin argues: (deep focus) "forces

the spectator to participate in the meaning of the film by distinguishing the implicit relations and creates a psychological realism which brings the spectator back to the real conditions of perception”.¹⁷

Bazin’s call for the ethical integrity of this realist mode of address is echoed by French film critic Luc Moullet who stated that, morality is a question of tracking shots, and Godard also described tracking shots as a ‘question of morality’. Both claims refer to the failure of cinema to adequately address the suffering endured during the Holocaust and the use of intrusive filming and overtly empathetic framing described by many film critics as unethical. Or, as Barthes has written, ”we are in each case dispossessed of our judgement: someone has shuddered for us, reflected for us, judged for us... for us they have no history”... and most importantly for my argument here, the image assumes a level of active, forceful spectatorship; much like Barthes, somewhat ironically, calling on the spectator ”to interrogate [the image] violently” (1999: 34).¹⁸

In the film the spectator is invited to reflect on these conflicting accounts and enter into what Ariella Azoulay describes as a ‘civil contract’, a form of civil knowledge in relation to photography and imaging, a potential space for political relations in a tripartite contract between the subject, artist and spectators. Within this intersubjective ‘contract’ the spectator is obliged to engage with the film as more than mere evidence. One of Azoulay’s central arguments in relation to this form of image making is that the spectator stops *looking* at images (a passive gaze), and instead begins *watching* images. In this way the ethics of spectatorship is challenged; the viewer becomes engaged and is implicated in the image, bound by a contract of citizenship and responsibility to what is depicted in a photograph (or film).¹⁹

UNresolved was completed in early 2015, and in the weeks that followed, contractors from the Netherlands moved in to renovate the former Dutchbatt headquarters in the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial Centre (Tito’s former factory) where I had filmed extensively. As a result of this renovation project *UNresolved* also functions in different register, as a *historical* document which captured the building in its original state, a ‘living archive’ of sensuous traces and intersecting histories. Stuart Hall describes ‘living archives’ as a field

of (...) rupture, significant breaks, transformations, new and unpredicted departures'.²⁰ For an artist, the interpretation of archival material is not only an academic exercise; it can also be viewed as a societal intervention, where historical narratives are ruptured and re-contextualised, generating an emerging critical and contested site of reinterpretation. For Whelan, artists can perform a significant role in researching and rescuing archives from obscurity. (Re)presenting the past in such a way may be akin to Benjamin's notion of a contingent and transgressive interpretation of historical events where "art ensures that it is always possible to tell it another way; that possibility opens a space for the other, a space for dialogue, a negotiation of narratives". (Whelan, 2008: 1–9).²¹ *Disputed Territory* and the related film *UNresolved* "stubbornly and ethically holds out for the persistence of memory, evidence and testimony".

¹ Crimp, D. (1980) 'On the Museum's Ruins', *October*, Vol. 13 (Summer, 1980), pp. 41-57, Boston:

² Steyerl, H. 'Is a Museum a Factory?', e-flux journal # 7, New York, June-August 2009. Available at: <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/07/61390/is-a-museum-a-factory/> (accessed 1.11.16).

³ Benjamin, W., (1931) 'A Small History of Photography' in Jephcott, E. & Shorter, K. (eds) (2006 edition) *One Way Street and Other Writings*, London: Verso, 240–257.

⁴ Arsenijević, D., Levi, P., Tomić, M. and Stojanović, B., "Where the Genocide Was, Shall the Political Subject Be.", 2009. Available at: <https://grupaspomenik.wordpress.com/mathemes-of-re-association/where-the-genocide-was-shall-the-political-subject-be/> (accessed 9. 4. 2016).

⁵ UN Resolution 819 placed Srebrenica under the protection of the United Nations. On July 11 1995 the Bosnian Serb Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) under the command of General Ratko Mladić entered the enclave with no resistance from Dutch UN soldiers. In the days that followed more than 8000 Muslim men and boys were systematically murdered and buried in mass graves along the Drina river basin.

⁶ Benjamin, W., "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (first published in the UK, 1970) in *Reflections*. New York: Schocken, 1999, 245–255.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Little, A., *Enduring Conflict: Challenging the signature of peace and democracy*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014. / Woodward, S., "Do the Root Causes of Civil War Matter? On Using Knowledge to Improve Peacebuilding Interventions", in *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol.1 (2), 2007, 143-170.

⁹ Whelan, K., "Rights of Memory", in *Storytelling as the Vehicle*. Belfast: Healing Through Remembering, 2005, 11-20.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Taylor, J., “Shock Photos“, in D. Brittain (ed.), *Creative Camera: 30 Years of Writing*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999, 296-300.

¹² Stoller, P., “Conscious Ain’t Consciousness: Entering the Museum of Sensory Absence“, in Seremetakis, N. (ed.), *The Senses Still, Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1994, 109–122.

¹³ Ibid, Arsenijević, D., Levi, P., Tomić, M. and Stojanović, B.

¹⁴ Whelan, K., *Between Filiation and Affiliation: The space of art*. Dublin: The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon, 2008, 1–9.

¹⁵ Nora, P., “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire“, in *Representations, Memory and Counter-Memory*, (Spring), 1989, 7–24. Available at: http://www.timeandspace.lviv.ua/files/session/Nora_105.pdf (accessed 9. 4. 2016).

¹⁶ Haughey, A., UNresolved, unpublished film script. Dublin, 2015. A short excerpt from the film is available online, at: <https://vimeo.com/169721280> (accessed 7. 6. 2016).

¹⁷ Bazin, A., *Orson Welles: A Critical View*, trans. Jonathan Rosenbaum. New York: Harper and Row, 1978, 80.

¹⁸ Barthes, R., “The Scandal of Horror Photography“, in Brittain, D., (ed.) *Creative Camera: 30 Years of Writing*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999. (first published 1969), 71.

¹⁹ Azoulay, A., *The Civil Contract of Photography*. New York: Zone Books, 2008.

²⁰ Hall, S., “Constituting an Archive“, in *Third Text*, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2001, 89–92.

²¹ Whelan, K., 2008. *ibid.*, 1-9.