

Timelines

After signing in, unloading and storing my bag across the corridor, I sat in a dimly lit room with five other tables and chairs. Laid out in front of me is a large book, filled with handwritten texts in faint watered down ink. I had requested this item, chosen it according to its relevance within a crafted landscape. This item along with others could be obtained in a digital format, a format I usually explore when working with video-based and photographic mediums. Protected by copyright and no cameras allowed, the only tools I held were a pencil and my notebook.

Returning to the National Folklore Archive years later and now accessing it online, I select a collection of digital copies of scanned 35mm still photographs. The images capture abstract and pastoral moments of gesture and bodily movement. They show crafted settlements within rural scenes and implements being used and unused. The colour palette of reddish-brown, yellow, black and white, shows both age and a nostalgic vision of the landscape.

These photographs are a cross-section of an action, severed from its timeline accentuating individual gestures. Had theorist Roland Barthes been confronted with these photographs he would've described the camera shutter as a blade in space and time of rural landscape, assessing the "having been there" quality of its contents (Barthes, 1980, p.44). I ask myself, what could have taken place either side of this moment? This attention to time for me activates these still images.

Masking the surface of my table, I layout multiple copies of each photograph. Using simple paper-cutting techniques, I decide to dissect, remove and replace. These techniques reaffirm the hand gestures within each image. I begin cutting the profiles and silhouettes of bodily extremities, taking care to keep them intact. Choreographing my own movements, I dance with the material, stepping side-to-side contorting my weight, and creating one clean movement of the blade. One of my hands holds down the photograph while the other holds the tool. My feet steadily move, shifting weight from one foot to another, my elbows lead my hips in a semi-circular movement as I sweep the cutting knife in one uninterrupted slice.

I align each photograph on a green cutting board, positioning them on numbered lines, easily remembered and individually fixed. This set up is centred in the eye of an overhead camera. Recorded from above, I review the footage before editing. I find it ironic to watch my hand cut an implement from a hand within the photograph, surgically removing it from the moment. I bring the implement to life, frame by frame, creating a stop-motion reality against real-time gestures.

In approaching each photograph as an object I believe can open up the possibility of physical manipulation and discovery of motion. When Barthes discusses the motionlessness of a figure within the image, 'they do not emerge, do not leave: they are anesthetized and fastened down, like butterflies' (Barthes, 1980, p.57). Like a butterfly pinned in a vitrine of a museum, the original 35mm photographs are items suspended in animation while housed in a filing cabinet.

I think back to my first visit to the archive and reading page upon page discovering local happenings, lore and traditional crafts, each one titled with an absurd caption. If I suffered from a sty in my eye, or wanted to know, how to properly care for my feet, I would be relieved to find the information here. As I look through the archive's online photographs, I am reminded of the humour evoked by each story's heading. This absurdity could lend itself to the functional movements of the paper-cut figures, tools and scenes.

Further within the photographic collection, I see images of handmade tools and custom-made handles have been archived. These are made from materials sourced from their locality; their wooden handles are whittled and worn by the user, smoothing their surface. They lean against the wall, propped up by their angular form, difficult to ignore their anatomical likeness. In one photograph, the shape of a tool's handle mimics a body's silhouette and contouring features. Could it be a result of repetitive use of the tool against the body? As I re-examine it, I am drawn to its slouching posture holding an inactive stance, as a day's work takes its toll on its strained joints.

When editing frame by frame, I begin to animate the inanimate, attaching human qualities to the tool. As Theorist Hannah Arendt notes 'tools strengthen and

multiply human strength to the point of almost replacing it'¹. In using any tool on a day-to-day basis, we often become familiar with its qualities, traits and movements, in order to optimally complete a task. The tool becomes a character with a recognisable personality. As I remove the tool from the captured gesture, I can animate its movements, playing out absurd stop-motion narratives.²

By coupling the photographs with effective filmmaking techniques, I believe I can ignite a re-examination of the past in a contemporary way. As I manipulate my chosen photographs alongside recording real-time footage, a juxtaposition of past and present between one place and another emerge within the editing. The combination of archival documentation and animated interventions, present a similar visual language to artist Duncan Campbell's film, *Falls Burns Malone Fiddles* (2003). In extending the notion of changing the narrative of archival documentation, Campbell's film recollects a turbulent history while re-collecting footage into an alternative narrative.

When using stop-motion techniques on the figures within the archived photographs, I am able to manipulate the movement of their gestures and consequentially their narrative. This in turn punctuates how the body moves within the landscape. Writer Declan Long asserts, that Campbell's photography is punctuated "by pseudo scientific scrawlings and animations, striving to explain the represented world and acting as chaotic and confusing additions" to the analogue information. (Long, 2017, p.135-136).

These animations prick and cut through Campbell's film. I think of Barthes idea of the 'punctum' within a photograph, it provokes and disturbs the reading of an image.³ Campbell's animation expands the punctum, 'while remaining a detail, it fills the whole picture'.⁴ As I re-examine my edited footage, I find the animated sections provoke a distinction between multiple timelines. They capture rhythms of the body from the past, only to be intervened by a hand picking up and laying down photographs in real-time, requiring the viewer to come back to reality.

¹ H. Arendt, , *The Human Condition*, pp.122

² The stop-motion movements of the tool draw attention to an unrealistic nature re-affirm the working relationship between the body and the labouring object.

³ R. Barthes, 'Camera Lucida', pp.45

⁴ R. Barthes, 'Camera Lucida', pp.45

These movements are habitual and their repetition can become engrained in the viewer's 'inner eye'.⁵ The movements are disjointed as the stop-motion reality asserts only a selection of frames, relying on the inner eye to fill in the gaps.

Combining a mixture of edited and real-time footage I believe I can create what seems like one shot. In using Gilles Deleuze's theories of "movement-image" and "time-image"⁶, I see Deleuze associates "the shot" with "the movement-image, as it relates to movement to a whole which changes, it is the mobile section of duration"⁷. In thinking about the compositional concepts of moving imagery; a frame, a shot and a montage, each one benefits the other as an arrangement of images. Through the adoption of Deleuzian ideas, I can relate the series of frames making up the animations to be a 'potential montage', 'a matrix or cell of time' making time dependent on movement and 'belong(ing) to it'.⁸

In contemplating each photograph's sense of edited time, I scroll through the photographs online, reading the archived information; its collector, place, date and format of file. *When a dredge is at a slant*, a title under one photograph, does not create a clear image, but conjures up simple bodily relationships between the collector, the object and the subject.⁹ As I read each photograph's visual and contextual information, I become an observer to its culture and society. By paying particular attention to the possible movement of the figure within the still image, I try to recreate their unseen movements.¹⁰

⁵ D. Harris, 2016, Deleuze for the Desperate #5: movement-image, (Youtube video)

⁶ Drawing upon the work of French philosopher Henri Bergson's theory of matter and time, Deleuze makes a division between 'movement-image' and 'time-image'. They are ultimately seen as a philosophy using cinema as a medium to facilitate it.

⁷ This is in regards to cinematic information such as the characters, the camera's movement and other onscreen information.

⁸ G. Deleuze, 1989, pp.35.

⁹ "Fishing: Oyster-fishing, showing the "kife" of the Billy Dredge (i.e. when dredge is set at a slant), 1957, (Duchás.ie)

¹⁰ Unlike the 35mm film used to take these photographs, the animated movements are created digitally while exploring an analogue experience of toiling the landscape. In contemplating the figures actual movements beyond this still image, I think about where the body is placing pressure and weight, how the muscles contract, relax and how the posture is disrupted and strained in completion of its task. I wonder about the muscle memory needed to perform the tilling of a field, as the repetitive motion brings rhythm to bodies surface, it creates a succession of inherent movements producing a choreographed dance

I am continually reminded of the vocal and textual language which can fuse folkloric, cultural and social observations. Using a narrated audio to discover parallels between aural and visual components, I can ignite a sense of place and create a conjunction between word and image.¹¹ Similarly structured to the audio of John Smith's short film *The Girl Chewing Gum* (1976), I place a voice-over detailing a visit to another archive over my footage. As seen within Smith's film it 'encourages the viewer to go along with the conceit' until a realisation of the disjunction between the materiality and text becomes apparent.^{12 13} I wrote my voice-over to contain language which resonates with the materiality of the architecture and presence of the formalities within archives.

Through this process I see how language can connect each archive to one another. In my descriptions of infrastructures and environmental supports (which assist in slowing down the deteriorating process), I believe I have developed an interconnection between the two archives. As the quality and control of these spaces, mirror and emulate each other, their diffused lighting and temperature controlled containers protect the contents for safe keeping. By carefully removing the objects from their hold as if coming out of hibernation, the archivist carries out best practice, laying down the object with gloved hands. In mimicking their gentle movements, I carry their reverence and respect for the past of that suspended slice of time.

with the material at hand. By reading each image, the video's ethnographic and anthropological qualities add to the demonstrative aspect of each gesture. They were collected to capture the tradition and show evidence of a past way of life.

¹¹ The possibility of juxtaposing audio and image alongside each other can cause the viewer to question what they are seeing.

¹² A. Wilson, 2016, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/smith-the-girl-chewing-gum-t13237>

¹³ For Smith's film work, the audio comes in and out of context with the moving image and flips the viewer's perception on its head while also playing with idea of the absurd.

Bibliography

Arendt, Hannah, (1958), *Labour: The Human Condition*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, pp. 79-135

Barthes, Roland, (1980), *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, France, Hill and Wang

Deleuze, Gilles, (1989), *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, London, The Athlone Press

Harris, Dave, (2016), *Deleuze for the Desperate #5: Movement-Image*, (Youtube video) Available at: <https://youtu.be/vJuvGpMpOVQ> (Accessed: 28/04/2020)

Long, Declan, (2017), *Ghost-Haunted Land: Contemporary Art and Post-Troubles Northern Ireland*, Manchester University Press

Murphy, Michael J., (1957), *Livelihood and Housekeeping: fishing*, The Photographic Collection, National Folklore Archive, UCD. Available at: <https://www.duchas.ie/en/cbeg/280> Accessed : 28/04/2020

Wilson, Andrew, (2010), *John Smith: The Girl Chewing Gum*, (1976), Tate: Art and Artists, Available at <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/smith-the-girl-chewing-gum-t13237> Accessed: 28/04/2020

Filmography

Falls Burns Malone Fiddles (2003), Directed by Duncan Campbell (DVD), United Kingdom, Duncan Campbell

The Girl Chewing Gum (1976), Directed by John Smith (DVD), United Kingdom, John Smith

Falls Burns Malone Fiddles (2003), Directed by Duncan Campbell (DVD), United Kingdom, Duncan Campbell