Re-envisioning Identity: Cinema and Social Memory in Northern Ireland

by

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the ways in which visual culture, through the medium of film, navigates and constructs social memory, and consequently identity in Northern Ireland. I question how Irish history is evoked in the present in a way that influences socio-cultural boundaries in Northern Irish society, and why visual images in particular become so effective. Northern Ireland is a place where the past is purposefully and ritually evoked in the present as a means of maintaining polarization between Catholic and Protestant communities and strengthening support for this polarization on the one hand, while conversely, preventing against a loss of recognition on the other. Integral to this relationship is the way in which Ireland's history remains active in the lives of those who reside in Northern Ireland through their interaction with cinematic re-presentations of their collective past. In essence, the ability to re-create or re-present an act or theme of historical importance is essential to creating contemporary witnesses to this history, and thereby enabling a form of recollection and memory. While consumers are not uncritical of the re-presentation of their society on screen, I do argue that they layer onto the film the social contexts in which they live. In the case of Northern Ireland, these contexts have been shaped by segregation, animosity, and in some cases violence, all of which set up the socio-cultural boundaries in which films are negotiated. This paper reflects on the relationship of cinematic images to the viewer, and the inextricable attachment of the viewer to the social context in which this relationship is constructed.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On November 26th 2003, after months of postponements and uncertainty, citizens in Northern Ireland headed to polling stations to elect their Assembly representatives. The election result was both unsurprising and disquieting: in place of the 'moderate' nationalist and unionist parties, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) and the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) respectively, their more 'extreme' counterparts, Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) gained victories, usurping the moderate parties' position as the 'voice' for nationalist/unionist politics in Northern Ireland.[1] Shortly after, Gerry Adams, president of the Sinn Fein party, told Ireland's RTÉ Radio that the traditionally anti-agreement DUP had changed its viewpoint somewhat. The DUP's Nigel Dodds, however, said the majority of Unionists in the new Assembly would *not* support the Good Friday Agreement (10 April 1998).[2] While questions remain as to the degree to which this election will ultimately affect the peace process in Northern Ireland, the results point to the tenuousness of the process and the stubborn resilience of the conflict.

The ways in which conflict has been maintained in Northern Ireland have long been the focus of academic review. One need only to look at the listing of reviews published under

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[1] The final election tally found the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) with 30 seats, the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) with 27 seats, the Sinn Fein (SF) with 24 seats, and the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) with 18 seats. The previous Assembly election in 1998, however, saw the DUP with only 20 seats, while the UUP held 28 seats. Furthermore, the SDLP held the nationalist advantage with 24 seats, while the Sinn Fein held only 18. *I use the terms 'Nationalist' and 'Unionist' admittedly as a catch-all here. The most common way to differentiate between Nationalists or Unionists themselves is by characterizing them as 'moderate' or not. While this distinction may not be wholly helpful in describing the numerous differences between moderates and extremists, this term of differentiation is nonetheless useful in such a discussion.*

[2] The Agreement was endorsed in two separate referenda of the people in Northern Ireland, and the people in the Republic of Ireland, on the same day on 22 May 1998.

International Conflict Research (INCORE) or the plethora of publications and research program information available from the Institute for Conflict Research in Belfast, as evidence of the extent of contemporary discourse on and around conflict in Northern Ireland. It is difficult to miss the countless evaluations of symbolism and propaganda as conveyed through Protestant marches on the commemoration of King William's victory at Battle of the Boyne (1690), or by the meter after meter of nationalist and pro-IRA murals that line the city-side of Falls Road. These forms of cultural expression are deeply entrenched in the social fabric of Northern Ireland – particularly at sites of increased conflict, as is the case in Belfast and Derry. The effects of these cultural expressions on the community as a whole are of particular interest to both academics and practitioners, such as those involved in conflict resolution and the public service. In *Clashing Symbols: A Report on the Use of Flags, Anthems and Other National Symbols in Northern Ireland* (1994) for example, authors Lucy Bryson and Clem McCartney evaluate the use of national symbols in Ireland and their potent effect on conflict. In a further collaborative effort, *Symbols in Northern Ireland* (Buckley 1998) uncovers the many ways in which symbols, from Hallowe'en costumes to the Titanic, have come to have a role in shaping Northern Irish society. There seems, however, to be a disparity between the quantity of these analyses versus the lack of information regarding the role that *cinema* plays in the North, and whether or not cinema actually *affects* viewers in any meaningful way. My interest in cinematic re-presentations in particular, and their relationship to conflict in Northern Ireland, stems from this curious lack of information.

Ireland has a burgeoning but 'booming' film industry, and prides itself on the high caliber of films produced domestically (The Irish Film Board: 2005). At the Irish Film Institute in Dublin, patrons can find reams of books celebrating the development of Irish Cinema, its importance to the economy, culture and history of Ireland. Scores of others analyze the ways in which the Irish have been portrayed in film and the effect that these portrayals have had on the world's perception of the Irish. In fact, cinema is deemed so important to Irish culture that in 1998 the Film Institute held a conference, *Nationalisms: Visions and Revision*, to which even the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Bertie Ahern spoke. The goal of the conference was to "plot the development of nationalism through the 20th century – both north and south of the boarder – using documentary footage…[as part of an] ongoing debate about nationalism, in all of its forms, as seen through this century's quintessential medium, film." (Dodd 1999: iv.)

While cinema clearly carries a great deal of importance in Ireland, it also seems to be disregarded in its influence on society. It would seem that film is accepted as a mirror to Irish society, one that reflects timely perceptions, priorities and social trends. However, a great deal of cynicism remains as to whether that reflection is consumed and negotiated by the society being mirrored. If it is true that there exists a two-way exchange between a society and filmic images that re-present it, then we are left to speculate on what effect this exchange may have.

On a fundamental level, this question may seem rather irrelevant to interested parties, especially in relation to more pressing issues, such as the effect of housing or educational

segregation on Northern Irish youth, or the continued use of violence and aggression as a means of 'resolving' both interpersonal and intergroup disputes. Throughout this paper, however, I argue that visual re-presentation of traumatic and key historical events affects all such relationships, and cinema is certainly no exception. In a country where contemporary strife is heavily contingent on past events and conflicts, recollection and remembrance is key to reifying age-old boundaries (Bolles 1988; Bourguet et al. 1990; Climo and Teski 1995; Climo and Cattell 2002; Connorton 1989; Halbwachs 1980; Pillemer 1998). In turn, recollection is made all the more powerful by a contemporary act of witnessing. It is in this integral relationship between what is seen and what is understood that cinema plays a key role in Northern Irish social relationships: it is both a product of, and an influence on, society and as such, has a varied yet potent effect on those who engage with it.

In his book *Transformations in Irish Culture,* Luke Gibbons writes that many historians and social scientists have:

> "relegated questions of culture entirely to the margins of the social process. Culture is, at best, a mere reflex of more manageable, 'objective' realities...or, at worst, a smokescreen, concealing economic and political truths through myth and other rhetorical excesses. Either way, cultural representations are at one remove from society, and hence are in no position to act as agents of historical change or help us understand social processes." (1996: 9)

This perspective obviously overlooks, if not maligns, the ways in which people actively engage cultural representations through acts of spectatorship and viewing. As Gibbons argues, "in an Irish context, such reductionist approaches have set themselves the task of

explaining away cultural practices, or symbolic aspects of behaviour, in terms of the 'hard facts' of politics and economics, as if questions of ideology and meaning conveniently evaporate as soon as class and power come on the agenda" (1996: 9). In relation to the tendency of historians and social scientists to relegate culture to the margins of the social process, Richard Slotkin notes that "historical experience is preserved in the form of narrative, and through periodic retellings, those narratives have become traditionalized...each new context in which a story is told adds meaning to it, because the telling implies a metaphoric connection between the storied past and the present" (1996: 12).

My research raises connections between Ireland's history, imagery and the power of representation, and their combined effects on the production of contemporary cinema and its relationship to the understanding and experience of contemporary social conflict. The interdisciplinary nature of this paper threads together theoretical discourse on the causes of conflict and effect of remembering and representing trauma from the disciplines of Political Science, Sociology and Anthropology. This interdisciplinary focus is necessary to adequately account for the complex and multi-causal nature of conflict and the way in which visual culture interacts with members of a conflicted society.

Constructing an interdisciplinary paper required tapping into a variety of research methods and sources – this was particularly the case for creating the complimentary film that accompanies this paper titled *Seeing Things*, which touches more specifically on the question of the potency and reception of symbolism in Irish cinema.

Over a period of approximately 8 weeks in the Fall of 2003 I carried out fieldwork in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. While resident in these places I obtained data about my topic from personal interviews, visual research, and archival inquiry. Upon returning to Canada I sought to connect the broader theoretical context of the paper to my field-based experience and knowledge of contemporary Irish society. *Chapter 1* establishes the research methods and research design employed in both fieldwork and analysis. It evaluates the scope and boundaries of the research, particularly as they pertain to my attempt to produce both a written and visual record. *Chapter 2* then sets up the initial theme upon which the discussion of social conflict is based. Here, namely memory and witnessing are discussed, with the perspective that history and its remembrance are maintained by cultural signifiers that act as the crux of identity building and resultant social relationships. I address the concept of *social* or *collective* memory as cited by Jacob Climo (2002) and Maurice Halbwachs (1980) among others, who speak of the importance of vicarious memory, and its role in the maintenance of conflict. *Chapter 3* discusses the role of visual signifiers in memory construction and continuity. In this chapter I focus on the ways in which visual culture acts as a tool for society to shape cultural boundaries and their relationship to these boundaries. While these issues are discussed in general, the chapter highlights the case of Northern Ireland specifically through a survey of popular visual signifiers, such as graffiti and banners. The role that cinematic images play is discussed in *Chapter 4.* The case of Irish film and its coming of age as an industry is discussed through a recognition of the quantity of 'Irish' images produced for consumption. I follow this with a discussion of the impact of the cinematic element of 'instantaneous narrative.' Finally, I argue that due to their degree of authority

in Northern Ireland, cinematic images play a significant role in conflict propaganda and resolution. To do this, I look at theories of visual consumption and the ways in which public discourse can set up boundaries for the reception of images. I conclude in *Chapter 5* with a discussion using examples from the aforementioned chapters to argue the effectiveness of visual images in Ireland to either reify, exacerbate *or* negotiate tension.

Chapter 2: Research Design

Both a film and a research paper resulted from the fieldwork and discourse analysis undertaken during the preparation of this paper. I firmly believe that each contributes to each other and the research in unique and informative ways. The written paper allowed me to engage pivotal texts and discourse on the importance of social memory to the recollection of history and the power of ethnic nationalism. The film, on the other hand, offered me the chance to make a critical statement, using others' voices and images, about the effect of the aforementioned issues on a community of people. Creating a film to accompany the written thesis meant working within the very medium that is at the centre of this research. It is my hope that investigating the importance of the visual, namely film, to the construction and deconstruction of identity and social relationships as I have in text and film itself, offers new insight into what is a sizeable hole in the discussion of Northern Ireland's troubled past and present.

Two concerns arose while doing non-field based research for this paper. First, I needed to cast my 'nets' of inquiry wide in order to maximize the type of information available on my topic. Second, it was simultaneously important to focus this information such that the core of the research and film was not over shadowed or detracted from by the breadth of topical information. As it was my intent in this research to engage both the written and the visual record as they pertain to these issues, it was essential to draw influence from a number of different sources: literal, visual, and aural. When brought together for analysis, I hoped to reveal commonalities or patterns of understanding presented through the diverse modes of research dissemination. Theories of the importance of social memory

or the production and consumption of visual representation are extensive enough that one could potentially run the risk of over articulating the theoretical implications of my research to the detriment of understanding these theories in light of an important social issue.

Textual Resources

The basis for this research is gleaned from literary works on social memory, Irish history, nationalism, and ethnic conflict, as well as from a survey of texts on cinematic representation, visual culture, and imagery. Texts were chosen through participation in a number of Graduate courses undertaken during the year previous to research, through a survey of library resources at the University of Victoria, University of British Columbia, University of Alberta, Simon Fraser University, and numerous others. Furthermore, Dr. Dominic Bryan, Director of the Institute of Irish Studies at Queen's University, was tremendously helpful in providing me with a detailed list of appropriate texts and studies. These texts formed the impetus for this research, either by what was said or, conversely, omitted. Texts were divided into general thematic or topical areas, between historical, cultural, psychological, or visual. The areas in which they overlapped, namely in the areas of remembrance, social interaction, and cultural product narrowed the focus of the paper considerably.

Visual Resources

A number of Irish films were also studied and are discussed in this paper in order to highlight an array of assertions made about visual representation and social memory. To

narrow the focus, I organized a wealth of Irish films into four categories: pre-1970, Anglo-American produced, post-1970 Irish produced, post-1970 American produced and post-1970 independent. Out of the categories listed above, the films discussed in this paper are films that were produced by Irish filmmakers, after the 1970s, typically deal with important social issues, and are considered mainstream Irish features.

The first category of film I created was distinguished from others due to its age and source – namely these are films that were created prior to 1970. Generally speaking, films about the Irish produced during this period of cinema were largely British and American productions. *The Quiet Man* (1952), is probably the most well known of the older Irish films, and while there is a great deal of sentimental value to the film, it is not one which has resulted in thoughtful interaction with the Irish conflict, but rather serves as an Anglo-American romanticization of Ireland and Irish Culture. As Fidelma Farley (2003), Professor of film studies at the University College of Dublin noted during our interview, the film seemed to focus on the Irish connection to the land and the myth of Mother Ireland. In the film, upon seeing Maureen O'Hara glide across the emerald fields of a local farm, John Wayne's character questions whether he is simply in a dream. The sentiment connotes a sort of synergy in Ireland between the real and the myth, or between reality and a dream, a sentiment that clearly characterizes the film.

A second category of film, despite a degree of dependency on American or British studio funding, features productions made by Irish directors and producers. These films were produced post-1970 and typically address more contemporary social issues, such as

religion, family and politics. While these films are not completely free of North American influence, they are nevertheless generated from Irish social context. Examples of films in this second category are *Michael Collins* (1996), *Some Mother's Son* (1996), *Butcher Boy* (1997), and *Cal* (1984).

The third category of film relates to those made by American filmmakers that tend to only 'feature' the Irish, such as *Patriot Games* (1992) and *Braveheart* (1995). These are now the most common type of American film that relates to any degree to the Irish or Irish culture. While helpful for a discussion of the stereotypical portrayal of the Irish and its implications on American perception, these films are not widely useful to this discussion of social memory.

Finally, the fourth category of film includes smaller budget, independent films, made in both North and South Ireland, that attempt to stretch pre-existing topical boundaries, such as *Goldfish Memory* (2003) and *Spin the Bottle* (2003). These films tend to deal with less common themes, or at least endeavor to neutralize them to a greater degree than many features. While films of this type are touched on in this paper for their illustration of counter-trends, they are not widely screen by the public, and thus are not the primary focus of this research.

Field Resources

The textual and visual research conducted for this paper offered up a *vast* potential list of topics for discussion and it was integral that the subject matter be more clearly focused.

In order to ground the information and give it direction, I decided that it would be necessary to go *to* it and field work was organized in both Dublin and Belfast.

While there are a number of important texts on Irish cinema and scores more on political and religious history, there are few that link these topics in a particularly substantial way, especially with respect to *why* these linkages happen and what this says about social relationships. Furthermore, since the topic of Irish conflict and social memory is so complex it was felt that direction could be gained by speaking to those fully immersed in such issues. In both Dublin and Belfast, interviews were arranged with a number of different informants who I hoped would assist in giving direction to the research. These interviewees comprised of: academics of sociology, political science, and film studies; researchers and practitioners, such as professionals engaged with conflict studies analysis, and those involved in cinema, namely persons working with arts or film councils and festivals. Interviewees were selected by searching Irish university and college databases to locate academics and researchers who studied any combination of the aforementioned issues. Furthermore, a survey was conducted of all major arts councils and/or organizations in the Dublin and Belfast area and individuals connected to these organizations were sought out. Due to the location of the fieldwork and the consequent time zone difference between myself and potential interviewees, each individual was sent an inquiry email with an attached detailed description of the research, taken from the approved University of Victoria ethics form completed prior to departure. It was noted that the research called for me to conduct interviews and that the production of a film that would, in part contain these interviews. The latter request to film interviews

was granted by most interviewees. Fortunately, there were no negative responses received to my requests for personal interviews, with the exception of particular individuals being away on Sabbatical, or with the suggestion that fellow colleagues may be of greater assistance.

This aspect of my fieldwork was not without challenges, however. While prospective interviewees responded positively to my requests, they were subsequently guarded during interviews. I found this to be particularly the case in Belfast, where interviewees were quick to offer qualification for statements and sometimes shied away from making assertions or judgments regarding social conflict in the North. In Dublin, on the other hand, interviewees were much more open to giving definitive observations on the causes of strife in Ireland in general. Interestingly, however, these same interviewees simultaneously acknowledged a general reluctance to speak of matters pertaining *specifically* to North as though, perhaps, they felt unqualified to do so. Regardless, the character of these exchanges added my sense of the overall complexity of the issue. As interested as interviewees were to discuss issues of visual representation and social memory, they were also keenly aware of the sensitivity of the issues and their contentious nature.

Due to time restrictions on completing interviews in the field, information was also compiled through film archives and collections with the help of the Linen Hall Library in Belfast, and the Irish Film Institute in Dublin. Finally, a number of key locations were visited and filmed, such as Kilmainham Gaol in Dublin, helping to put texts and

interviews, filmed or otherwise, into visual context. Generally, this field research was integral to narrowing what could be an impossible amount of information into a set of more concise and suitable questions.

This journey to the source of information ultimately added a layer of depth to my research that was quite unexpected. Traveling to Ireland, both North and South, meant more than simply interacting with interviewees – it also meant interacting with the social landscape. This social interaction made an unmistakable impact on the way I perceived and understood my research, and importantly, on the way I engaged with the information gleaned from interviewees. Inserting myself into the social context I was studying, albeit as an observer, added a weight and sense of purpose to the work. As a woman of Irish descent, the research ultimately grounded my own social memory. I had the experience of suturing this transported social memory to that of others, attaching it to something tangible and rather profound.

To aid in the cataloguing and analysis of information gathered during the course of eight weeks of field work, each interview was also audio recorded so that no pertinent information could later be forgotten or misinterpreted from notes. Further, any materials deemed useful at the Irish Film Institute archives were not only photocopied for future use and accurate citation, but were also compiled into a catalogue for future reference. Finally, other materials such as *Troubled Images* (a cd rom composed of political images and essays found in the Linen Hall Library's Political Collections) were purchased for use and reference upon commencement of the writing of this paper.

To reiterate, my central research question for this paper asks: *how and by what means does visual culture, through the medium of film, navigate and construct social memory, and consequently social relationships in Northern Ireland.* To begin to address this question I needed to enhance relatively scant textual research on visual culture and social memory by suturing together disparate types and forms of information. As noted by an interviewee "we are bound by the fact that there has yet to be a major survey of viewership and visual consumption done of the general public in Northern Ireland" (Langlois 2003). However, it was during this fieldwork that belief in the importance of social memory and visual signification to relationships in Northern Ireland was strengthened and the focus sharpened. While it may not be possible to poll a significant cross-section of Northern Ireland as to their relationship to visual culture and filmic images, it is nonetheless possible to ground substantially such qualitative questions. If nothing else, this visual, textual and interview-based research links together these questions in a way that identifies a feasible and entirely probable relationship, one that is integral to present day Northern Ireland. Such interdisciplinary research allows us to ask interesting questions about the effect of visual culture on those who consume it.

Chapter 3: History and its Remembrance

To understand the connection between visual culture and contemporary Irish social relationships, it is necessary to return quite literally to the beginning. It would be misguided, however, to attempt to summarize the entirety of Ireland's complex history within the pages of this paper. Rather, I would like to touch on a select number of key points in this history that are of value to the discourse on the importance of social memory to the Irish conflict. In relation to the subject matter of this paper, this survey of Irish history touches on the critical events that influence and characterize acts of memorialization and remembrance in Northern Ireland.

Briefly, these influential critical events in Irish history are bound up in the colonization of Ireland by the English beginning in the 16th century. The invasion of the island was important to English powers for two key reasons. First, leaders saw the control of Ireland necessary to consolidate Protestant power during the Reformation. Second, the strategic importance of Ireland for the protection of England's boundaries and economic interests (mainly from the Spaniards) was a top priority for the crown (O'Sullivan See 1986: 33). Generally, colonization took place in two ways: through settlement and religious segregation. There was limited settlement in the south and west where control over the land was primarily in the hands of usually absentee English landlords, as well as a substantial settlement in the North by Scottish Presbyterians (O'Sullivan See 1986: 33). Effectively, this occupation not only demolished existing social and political systems, but also served to create the foundations of religious and ethnic turmoil. Using religion as a

basis for settler domination, the indigenous population was denied any political rights or land ownership, making them wholly dependent on England.

Inevitably the colonization of Ireland produced a power disparity between the Gaels, who represented the Catholic population, and the Scottish/English invaders who were wholly Protestant. It is important to note that while religion is cited time and time again as the cause of intolerance in Northern Ireland, it is highly doubtful that the indigenous population would have fared much better had it been Protestant itself. Instead, I would argue religion was part of a larger concern that motivated colonization, but served as a useful marker on which to identify "either side" of the conflict.[3] It was written that the Irish "live[d] like beasts, void of law and all good order...more uncivil, more uncleanly, more barbarous, and more brutish in their customs and demeanors, than in any other part of the world that is known (Gallagher 1957: 217). Statements like the above are typical of those that justify the exploitation/colonization of indigenous populations around the world (Fleras and Elliot 1999; O'Day 1997). Regardless of the reasons for colonization, the result was certainly clear. The Act of Parliament which had declared Henry VIII King of Ireland, led the way for the granting of formerly Gaelic plantations to English landlords, the execution and enslaving of rebel tribal leaders, and the forced migration of numerous tribes to special reservations (O'Sullivan See 1986:33). As a result of colonization and the Act of Parliament, a structural framework was laid for a rift between

[3] I would argue that religion is used almost exclusively when discussing the Troubles because it is no longer possible to identify one group as Irish and the other as English. The Troubles are not caused by the innate hatred of the Protestants by the Catholics, or vice versa, but rather a complex dispute over land and resources. While the terms unionist and nationalist are also problematic, I believe them to be much more appropriate.

the 'Irish' and the 'English' that would continue to grow rather than weaken over the coming decades.

While the Gaels were marginalized by England, they were not passive. Rather, the annexation of their land and discriminatory rent and voting policies resulted in mass riots and protests by the indigenous population (O'Sullivan See 1986: 37-38). In order to assure protection by the English 'homeland' the Scottish Gaels and other immigrant Protestants pledged allegiance or 'loyalty' to the crown. In return for the uncompromising allegiance of the Protestant population, England would continue to protect them and ensure their financial stability (O'Day 1997: 5). O'Sullivan See writes, "in the populist consciousness of Ulster, religious and economic interests were coterminous. Catholics were seen as defacto disloyal subjects, by virtue of their religion. Therefore, any economic liberties ceded to them were evidence of a violation of the covenant of Loyalism" (1986: 39).

Strains between the two parties were exacerbated even further when, in 1921, the Island was partitioned under the Government of Ireland Act, another influential critical event. The six counties of the north remained within the United Kingdom while primarily Catholic south (Eire) became independent. For many indigenous Irish (Catholics), Northern Ireland belonged with the south. A separation of the two was the 'last straw', so to speak. While Dublin agreed with this view, Protestants in Northern Ireland saw it as a victory and evidence of the strength of the Orange resistance to independence, something

which continues to be celebrated and memorialized in Northern Ireland today (O'Sullivan See 1986: 39).

However, Protestant dominance was not guaranteed under such circumstances. Instead, the separation of North and South strengthened resolve amongst the indigenous population which resulted in a number of strategic defensive moves by the Protestants such as the gerrymandering of electoral boundaries to maintain the Protestant alliance and control over the Northern Irish government at Stormont (O'Day 1997: n.p.).

While the actions of Unionist (Protestant) parties and supporters may have been questionable, they were based on a very legitimate fear. To much of the world, Northern Irish Protestants were still equated with colonialism and oppression. They were seen as 'neither here nor there'; not truly English (or Scottish), and yet not truly Irish and thus had claims to little. The fact remains, however, that generations of Protestants had lived and died in Ireland and considered that land their home. Losing this land (and subsequently their power over it) to a unified island, the majority of which was Catholic, was not an option for them (Finlayson 1996: 88-91). As such, divisions would remain intact. Keeping society volatile and uncooperative was in essence the only way to 'maintain' it through various means, since concessions on either side would ultimately lead to a perceived loss for one side.[4]

[4] Indeed by 1951, half of Belfast's wards contained populations which were either over 90% Catholic, or 90% Protestant. Territorial segregation, separate social institutions, and segregated schooling were prevalent.

This troubled past has never effectively been resolved and instead has at times been exacerbated or largely ignored by those with the power to change it, depending on their political and economic interests. An excellent example of this is the case of the 1981 Northern Irish hunger strikes. On March 1, 1981 Bobby Sands, then leader of the Irish Republican Army at the Maze prison, refused food to protest for the reintroduction of special status for Republican citizens. His choice of date was not accidental, it marked the fifth anniversary of the ending of this special status by the British Government (Bew 1993). The hunger strikes not only served to drum up popular support for the nationalist cause, but also to increase the spotlight on political leaders, who undoubtedly benefited from the event. While Margaret Thatcher's hardline stance toward strikers could uphold her conservative image among Tories, Republican leaders could in turn capitalize on this hardline stance and the suffering of strikers to revisit publicly what they viewed as purposeful long-term discrimination (Bew 1993: n.p.). The political agendas of both parties effectively allowed, if not supported, the deaths of 10 of men by self-starvation at the Maze Prison. Despite public outcry, neither side would give in to the demands of the other – ultimately the prisoners paid the price, giving the IRA a martyr in Bobby Sands and his contemporaries and Loyalists a reconfirmation of the "contract" between themselves and the Crown.

While the rest of Europe has been changing around Northern Ireland, the battle lines within the country have remained solidly intact, perhaps oblivious to the transition of the rest of the continent, perhaps in opposition to it. Regardless, ongoing conflict has certainly kept the region highly visible within Europe and without. This visibility has had

its benefits: while it is one thing to be in a state of constant uncertainty, it is another to be forgotten or overseen. There is no longer a clear cut 'foreign' and 'indigenous' population. Discrimination and grievances of the past have been based on this distinguishment and they are often projected into the future. A lack of appropriate or adequate resolve allows or excuses the social conflict of the present. It is ironic to both mourn the troubles of history and yet to cling to it fiercely for its ability to seemingly protect you. Indeed, history has a heightened importance in Northern Ireland: its recollection insures that no one forgets to which side they truly belong. Until the 'battle' is ultimately resolved the boundaries must be retained and sensitized so that they are not forgotten. For this reason, what seems like 'ancient' history to the rest of the world, carries the utmost importance in both the North and South: to belittle its significance only demonstrates a lack of understanding, and so too does a prediction of a future without it.

Analyses of the importance of history and of the conflict in recent years have brought to light numerous important questions surrounding identity and belongingness. What does it mean to be 'Irish'? Who belongs and who doesn't – can anyone claim ownership over the land and the culture as it has developed today? What we do know is that the country seems to be caught up in a zero sum game. The land remains largely polarized and often focused on its conflicted and traumatic history, which arguably serves to maintain this polarization.

At the heart of the inability to address this conflict adequately lies the complex and often misunderstood causes of rifts between Unionists and Nationalists. Labeled as a religious

struggle, ethnic conflict, and post-colonial revolt, among other things, the causes of the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland are multifaceted and at the best of times, complicated. To understand fully the ways in which memory, identity and visual representation intersect in Northern Ireland, however, the importance of history to the conflict must be dissected. Generally, history is conceptualized in two ways. First, the history of conflict and contestation is evidently long in the region: modern day conflict in Northern Ireland has very deep, contested roots, making it necessarily integral to the shaping of contemporary relationships. Neil Jarman (November 4, 2003), an interviewee and Director of the Institute for Conflict Studies in Belfast remarked that due to its relatively long roots, the conflict is heavily dependent on history to support its legitimacy. As noted, the current state of affairs in Northern Ireland is due to a number of interrelated events and conditions, many of which are historically entrenched and heavily influence the present. For example, the Battle of the Boyne, won by William III, or William of Orange, over James II in 1690, secured Protestant administrative and economic control over the Island, where a set of penal laws were created and implemented to ensure Protestant ascendancy. This major battle and the social structure it helped to create was directly responsible for the Fenian Uprising almost two centuries later, and was central to the Easter Rebellion of 1916, which ultimately led to the Irish War of Independence from 1919-1921. It has been noted that out of this one central battle, all other events have originated. During our interview in November 2003, Neil Jarman likened the Irish conflict to a spoked wheel, arguing that that the Battle of the Boyne serves as the central key event around which all other events, relationships, and beliefs rotate (Jarman November 4, 2003).

Second, history is important for sociological reasons. Namely, the social context in Northern Ireland is monopolized and polarized between those who stake a claim to the land based on heritage, on indigenous rights if you will, and those who stake a claim to it based on a contract between the settler population and those who installed them. A claim by the latter to the land in which they now reside and the right and responsibility to rule over it exacerbates the 'victimhood' of the indigenous population, resulting in an active acknowledgement of their own rights based on a historical ownership. The growth in cultural expression in both the North and South can be seen as a testament to this acknowledgement. Along with the revival of the Irish language has come a number of diverse and popular expressions of Gaelism such as the Riverdance, international arts festivals and the emergence of popular Irish musicians such as the Chieftans and the Coors. As discussed in Michael Gallagher's *How Many Nations Are There in Ireland?* (1995), the popular view of the Irish has thus been dominated by classic Gaelic mysticism, which is bound up in an attachment to the land and its history, mythical and otherwise. While this is particularly the case in the Republic, where under the leadership of Eamon DeValera citizens experienced something of a cultural revolution of sorts (albeit restricted and controlled) in which great strides were made to recapture what were considered lost traditions.[5] This expressionism and its international support has only helped to validate and encourage the Nationalist cause in the North. Consequently, the 'settler population', or Protestants feel the need to validate and justify their place, often a place of privilege, by recalling said contract *as well as* highlighting and emphasizing historical dates which are important to their own cause. Arguably, and in the case of

[5] Eamon DeValera was especially supportive of the increased use of the Irish language something that has been relatively successful. The1996 census of Ireland showed that 1,095,830 people, 32% of the Irish adults, are able to speak Irish.

Ireland, as evidenced in Protestant marches and symbolism, these are dates that recall important victories over the aforementioned indigenous population – in this case Catholics. I would argue that this is not necessarily a conflict over whose history is *correct*, but rather whose history is *more important* – a problem which has not been alleviated by successive governments.

Northern Ireland, therefore, is a place where the past is purposefully and ritually evoked in the present as a means of maintaining polarization and strengthening support on the one hand, while conversely, preventing against a loss of recognition on the other. What is integral to this paper, however, is the way in which this history remains active in the lives of those who reside in Northern Ireland. I would argue that if history is to remain integral to the conflict it needs to be *remembered* by the population and that in turn, this collective remembrance is made only stronger through an individual's acts of witnessing. Despite the tragic events of the past decades, it is not possible that every person will have an individual memory based on the witnessing of an actual pivotal act upon which to base their emotional and perceptual interaction to the conflict. Furthermore, cohesive social memories are not created in a vacuum by the coincidental similarity of thousands of individual experiences and their emotional effects. This is especially the case with the recollection of age-old happenings such as the Battle of the Boyne and the triumph of 'King Billy'. In these instances the ability to re-create or re-present an act or theme of importance is paramount to making witnessing possible, and thereby, recollection and memory.

If history is essential to the maintenance of the conflict, or rather, *particular* aspects of history are integral, it must be remembered by those involved and it must be remembered in a *particular* way. It is difficult to see how the individual might construct and maintain their memory of such broad historical events in the absence of others in their group or in the absence of a structure by which some things are remembered while other things are not. Indeed, a person's identity and experience with conflict is a "social construction and subject to negotiation from moment to moment" (Buckley and Kinney 1995: 1). Society shapes not only memory, but the *ways* in which history is to be remembered. Thus memory of one's culture, is used to create identity: personal, familial, social, and national.

My discussion of memory deals mainly with the concept of social memory, rather than that of an individual: while it is the case that individuals hold particular memories of particular events, social memory speaks to the ways in which history is recognized and remembered for social or communal purposes. It is important to distinguish between the individual and their social memory since, as Nathan Wachtel argues, "the individual's remembrance is the meeting point of manifold networks of solidarity of which [he/she] is a part" (Wachtel 1990: 6). My interest in social memory comes from the belief that individuals, especially in instances related to social events rather than individual experience, rely on the input and influence of the broader group. It is for this reason that it is also termed 'collective memory' and is important to the Irish case because cohesion between varied parties relies on a common goal and common priorities – but also on a

common understanding of history and background – one which justifies the constituents' relationships to each other and the group in general.

It has been suggested that human experience is conceived as a process of "constructing and reconstructing a life narrative" and "what is most intriguing about the self is that identity may be as determined by events we believe happened to us as ones that did" (Singer and Salovey 1993: 157). Indeed this argument is well documented in the works of Maurice Halbwachs, who may be considered the 'founding father' of the study of social or collective memory. Halbwachs' work was important for its attempt to analyze the effect of social relationships on memory in a way that helps to define individual and group identity, and for highlighting the curious relationship between memory and history. Important to this definition was Halbwachs' distinction between autobiographical memory, historical memory, history, and collective memory, which he characterized in the following way: "autobiographical memory is memory of those events that we ourselves experience while historical memory is memory that reaches us only through historical records" (Olick and Robbins 1998: 111). He continues that while history itself is "the remembered past to which we no longer have an 'organic' relation – the past that is no longer an important part of our lives – collective memory is the active past that forms our identities" (Olick and Robbins 1998: 111). In this way, the areas between history, memory and remembrance blur in a way through an active rather than passive reconsideration. History is not static but kinetic through the very act of recollection. In as much as history is important to Irish social conflict and relationships, so too is memory. Memory serves as the link between contemporary Northern Ireland and its troubled past.

In relation to Halbwachs' distinctions, Jeffrey Olick writes that "though collective memory does seem to take on a life of its own, Halbwachs reminds us that it is only individuals who remember, even if they do much of this remembering together" (Olick and Robbins 1998: 111). However, in reference to this pivotal relationship between the individual and the group, Halbwachs observes the dependency of the individual memory on collective in his work *The Collective Memory*:

> "...suppose that remembrances are organized in two ways, either [in a] group about a definite individual who considers them from his own viewpoint or distributed within a group for which each is a partial image. Then there is an 'individual memory' and a 'collective memory'...These two memories are often intermingled. In particular, the individual memory, in order to corroborate and even to cover the gaps in its remembrances, relies upon, relocates itself within, and momentarily merges with, the collective memory" (1980: 50-51).

These 'momentary merges' can be seen as a byproduct of the act of remembrance in Northern Ireland, manifested through marches, reenactments, and the viewing of film – popular or documentary. At these intersections individual memory merges with collective memory. Collective memory fills gaps in while it is simultaneously given strength through individuals' recognition of this contribution. In this way, individual memory is contextualized and given substance. The collective memory joins the individual in a broader relationship – one which is defined by the fact that it is collective.

Halbwachs continues by stating:

> "an event takes its place in the sequence of historical facts only some time after its occurrence. Thus, we can link the various phases of our life to national events only after the fact. Nothing demonstrates better how artificial and external is that operation that consists of referring to

> demarcations of collective life for mental landmarks. Nothing demonstrates more clearly that we really study distinct objects when we focus on either individual memory of collective memory. The events and dates constituting the very substance of group life can be for the individual only so many external signs, which he can use as reference points only by going outside himself" (Halbwachs 1980: 54).

Halbwachs goes on to say that remembrance is "in very large measure a reconstruction of the past achieved with data borrowed from the present, a reconstruction prepared, furthermore, by reconstructions of earlier periods wherein past images had already been altered" (1980: 69). Why then is this remarkably instable phenomenon we know as memory or remembrance, so integral to social relationships and the individuals who enact them?

Jacob Climo notes that memory is the foundation of self and society (Climo and Cattell 2002: 1). We are always 'steeped in memory' and without it there can be no self, no identity. Climo writes:

> "Without memory, the world would cease to exist in any meaningful way...without memory, groups could not distinguish themselves one from another, whether family, friends, governments, institutions, ethnic groups, or any other collectivity, or would they know whether or how to negotiate, fight, or cooperate with eachother" (Climo and Cattell 2002: 1).

For this reason, "social memory is deeply embedded in important contemporary issues: the truth of memory, history and culture, who owns them, and their roles in identity and nation building" (Climo and Cattell 2002: 1). Climo concludes that memories can create "communities of memory" or bring together a broken community, but they can also tear a community apart. In the case of Northern Ireland, telling the story of a nation's past is a highly political act involving struggles over whose stories will be remembered and

preserved and whose memories will be repressed or forgotten. In her research on Chilean memory, Cheryl Natzmer (2002) argues that the ownership of memory is a question of power. Individuals and groups struggle over who has the right to represent the past and whose memories will become institutionalized. Creative expression is an arena where that struggle takes place and where it can be observed. She writes that "through the stories that people tell, the images they create, the social dramas they enact, and the institutions they embrace and resist, the events of the past are interpreted and transformed into social realities. Memories are given physical substance and become history" (Natzmer 2002: 161). While Natzmer speaks specifically of Chile, she notes that the struggle over memory is especially intense in societies recovering from periods of civil war, state terrorism, or ethnic conflict – an apt description for Northern Ireland. She argues that "in a society where the past is highly contested, the ability to create a social history or national narrative that can accommodate the memories of opposing groups may well determine the success of reconciliation efforts" (Natzmer 2002: 161).

Natzmer continues that, "the telling of a story involves the active participation of a teller and a listener and provides a platform for the intersubjective formation of new social realities" (2002: 174). In the case of Chile, the military coup that overthrew Allende occurred over 25 years ago. She notes that "the children of opposing sides...are now young adults. The stories they have heard told and retold by their mothers and fathers, or alternatively the silences of the stories not told, have shaped their own identities and their sense of place in history" (Natzmer 2002: 174). While the history of conflict in Ireland takes place of a greater distance of time, it is not unlike the Chilean case in this respect,

where we can describe both as "two nations sharing the same territory, but divided by and ideological chasm and opposing memories of the past" (Natzmer 2002: 162).

Integral to the Irish case, is a phenomena known as 'vicarious' social memory. Vicarious social memory pertains to memories of usually distant history that are passed on to further generations who would not have personally experienced them. The memories become their own as a member of the society to which they belong. As Jeffrey Olick states, "being social presupposes the ability to experience events that happened to groups and communities to which we belong before we joined them as if they were part of our own past..." (2003: 123). Intergenerational memory is arguably paramount to one's identity and the subsequent continuance of tradition, beliefs, and in some cases, animosities. Wachtel notes that "as long as memory is only perpetuated through the members of a social group, the changes that affect it take place against a background of continuity: for there is a 'living link' between generations" (Bourget et al. 1990: 7). The continuity of relationships between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland allow potential changes to be interpreted in a way that reinforces this relationship rather than challenge it. This generational link is one studied very closely with respect to Holocaust survivors and their transmission of memories. In relation to Holocaust survivors, Climo writes, "through strong emotional attachments, vicarious memories may be passed from one generation to the next...or they may be passed over many generations as collective memories of groups that share a common historical identity..." (Climo and Teski 1995: 176). While he is specifically speaking of the commemoration of the Holocaust in a public ritual and his subsequent personal feelings of loss and anxiety, feelings that he

believes are due to personal identification with historical collective memories, this phenomena is not isolated to the families of Holocaust survivors. Rather, Climo's personal interaction with a collective history aptly highlights the way in which vicarious memory in general works intergenerationally with the individual as a part of a greater social group. In one such writing on Jewish culture, Climo notes that the key to understanding how vicarious memory is transmitted from one generation to the next "lies in the emotional commitments we make to the collective identities they perpetuate" (Climo 2002: 118-119). He continues that "memory...and the cultural creation of memory repertoires or patterns of remembering that are distinctive to particular groups become essential components in the persistence of both individual and collective memory" (Climo 2002: 119). Climo writes in reference to the Jewish Aliyah, or migration to Israel, an act undertaken in this case by American Jewish immigrants (Climo 2002: 113). The act serves to link individuals to the larger context of Jewish culture, history, and ideology. Climo could, however, just as easily be speaking of the experience of the Irish Protestant or Catholic. Northern Ireland is a region where over 90% of schools are still segregated into essentially Catholic and/or Protestant managed institutions (McKenna and Melaugh 2004: n.p.). It is believed that this educational segregation is important because "segregated schools differ in the cultural environment provided for children" (Gallagher 1995: n.p.). Also, as F.W. Boal notes in *Belfast: Walls Within* (2002), there is also a grander, geographic segregation at work in Northern Ireland that helps to separate the population in such a way that the way they move about the city itself, and thus the stores they shop at and the neighbours they come across are all intentionally structured to separate communities of people. In relation to this structure, he

writes that "[the walls] represent power, but they also represent insecurity; domination, but at the same time fear; protection, but at the same time isolation" (Boal 2002: 693). The residential segregation of Catholic and Protestants in Belfast has helped to solidify each group, "providing an environment for the inter-generational transfer of cultural tradition" (Boal 2002: 693). Certainly, the educational and geographical means by which boundaries and fissures have been reified in Northern Ireland help to continue social animosities and marginalization through education and even structured personal movement.

Chapter 4: Visual Signification

A force equally as powerful in Northern Ireland is the use of cultural objects and symbols that act as conduits for the transmission of tradition and social memory. Indeed, visual signification plays a major role in such transmission, finding its way into all facets of daily life. As murals on city walls, painted curbstones in residential areas, banners during the marching season, or textbook pictures used to illustrate Ireland's complex and troubled history, visual signification acts as a potent yet comfortable method of re-presentation in the form of cultural expression.

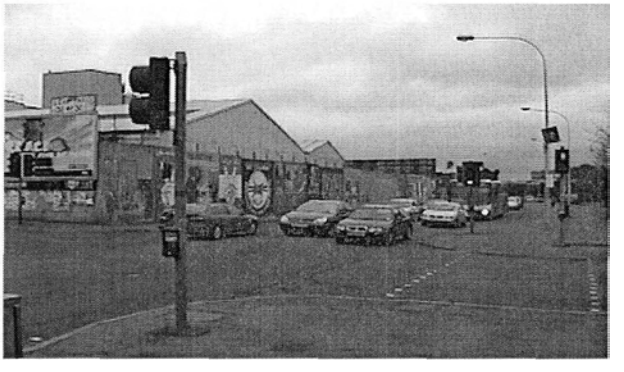

Figure 1. Republican Murals. Taken by the author. Falls Road, Belfast, 2003.

Many of these 'sites of recollection' or 'acts of recollection' are shaped around either key Protestant or Catholic historical events such as the Battle of Boyne. This type of exclusive group recollection is evidenced by the seeming lack of *nationally* celebrated or recognized events. Only very recently has Remembrance Day become a joint memorial or recognition rather than a solely Protestant one, and even now it is a contentious affair. On the afternoon of November 12th, 2003 I traveled to the University of Ulster at Coleraine to interview Dr. Tom Langlois, Professor of Media Studies. I had been sure to buy a poppy to wear that week, and immediately became conscious of the genuinely

chilly temperament of a number of passersby, but blissfully ignorant of my apparent faux pas. After an in depth discussion with the professor regarding symbols and emotional/cultural attachment, Dr. Inglis saw fit to use my poppy as an example. He explained that, while Protestants recognize the day as one of mourning for those lost during the World Wars on behalf of the British Empire, Catholics see any kind of memorial as kind of betrayal, whereby it is recognized that Irishmen fought and died for their sworn enemy, the Crown (Langlois November 12, 2003).

Figure 2. Garden of Remembrance. Belfast, 2003.

It was noted that very few people wore poppies, a common and widely recognized WWII symbol, but also a visual marker of community affiliation in Northern Ireland, which may explain the two separate occasions I was honked and gestured at whilst walking from my temporary residence that morning. In Catholic neighbourhoods, in place of cenotaphs stand memorials to those lost in the Troubles, namely members of 'the resistance' and/or the IRA. A poignant example of such a memorial is the Garden of Remembrance in Belfast. Beyond an iron gate and past a walkway inlaid with the Celtic cross rests the memorial, carved with a number of Catholic/Gaelic images depicting the dead as martyrs for Ireland. As is often a feature at WWII cenotaphs, wreaths have been placed near the

base. Here, however, the Republic of Ireland's flag flies above. Now that efforts to recognize *all* Northern Irish who died in WWII have begun to succeed, a tentative understanding between the two communities has been fostered. With little exception, however, places or acts of recollection are usually exclusive to one group or the other in Northern Ireland. With the use of highly significant and coded symbols, serve to highlight the importance of an exclusive past, and to 'nudge' along the memory of these important events for all members of the community.

Many sites and acts of visual recollection in Northern Ireland take the form of graffiti, murals, and other forms of artistic expression, and also represent exclusive themes and symbols. Images in general have a particular kind of power in the nature in which they are constructed and consumed. Images help to produce the society in which they are created but likewise are a product of it. In this way, visual re-presentation has a co-dependent relationship with society – its goals, values, fears and questions and communicates important aspects about a society and its culture. As Valda Blundell notes, "in arguing that art communicates ideas or meanings, we are saying that art is one of a number of systems of signification by means of which humans attribute meaning to their experiences and thereby order their world" (2000: 35). She continues that art forms can be employed as signs "because they are capable of meaningful interpretation (Blundell 2000: 39). The 'interpretation' of images is the key element in visual signification. Images need to be interpreted by those who are consuming it – people who decode images according to their values and beliefs as shaped by the social construct in which they live.

Figure 3. Let Erin Remember the Days of Old. Belfast, 2003.

For example, the image of Eire, found in numerous murals in Northern Ireland is representative of traditional Catholic/Gaelic imagery. Dressed in green, the figure, always a female, is literally attached to the land, a symbol of the connection of the Irish to their land and of the importance of the image of Ireland as the Mother figure.

Figure 4. Mythological Princess Erin. Photographer: B. Rolston, 1994.

In the background, other elements crucial to Irish symbolism are found – for example, lyres or harps may also be present – an Irish national symbol meant to signify the importance of music and the arts to the Gaelic culture. Finally, such murals are often

Figure 5. Gortrighey AOH div 387. 1997.

bordered in traditional Gaelic knots, further acknowledging the ancient character of Ireland. These images immediately recall or serve as a reflection of the Irish and their values, but, and in relation to the central aspect of recollection, also indicate the importance of history.

Together, the images project the 'ancient' aspect of Gaelic culture, reminiscent of a mythical past where Ireland was a peaceful and beautiful land evoking a sense of timelessness. In general, the images work together to both remind consumers of their 'glorious' past and to implicitly acknowledge the Gaelic claim to the land based on historical ownership.

Protestants, too, are not wanting of images to express their cultural and religious beliefs. On parade banners, for example, the image of King Billy takes centre stage. Unlike Catholic images that recall historical ownership and rights, Protestant imagery typically

Figure 6. William of Orange Crossing the Boyne, n.d.

recalls key events that, in essence, serve to justify their prior leadership and control over the land.

Figure 7. Border Guards, 1997. Photographer C. Cregan

Thus the image of King William of Orange perched atop his white steed, sword pointing onwards and upwards serves two purposes; first, to maintain memory of the event as a defining moment for the Protestant community and second, as an example of the Protestant ideal of bravery and loyalty. In a single image, King Billy encapsulates both the memory of a key historical victory that helped to solidify Protestant supremacy for

centuries, while also highlighting the perceived national character of Protestants – one which is fundamentally different from the Catholics.

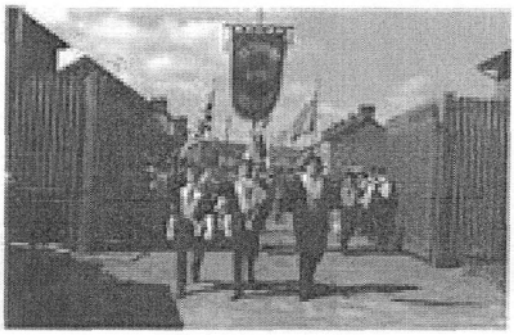

Figure 8. Image of a 'Peace Line', 1994. Photographer, Frankie Quinn.

These very banners, both Orange and Hibernian, work in tandem with the act of marching to further focus communities on their troubled history. 'Sites of recollection' manifested through creative and political expression, melt into 'acts of recollection' through which history is virtually evoked in order that it be preserved intergenerationally. Marches coincide with pivotal historical events and may even be followed by a re-creation of these events that give spectators a glimpse of their history and triumph over their adversary. As noted in the *Economist,* there are approximately 2500 Protestant marches and 250 Catholic ones during the summer months, "each an aggressive assertion of identity" (1995: 52). In his piece on the marches, John Lloyd writes in the *New Statesman:*

> "the Boys' [Loyalists] march is one of the few remaining public rituals of these islands still charged with meaning. It is grass-roots organisation of a very high order…they are a sight to see. They play "Blaze Away", and "Old Derry's Walls", and "We'll Die, We'll Not Surrender", and "Onward Christian Soldiers" and, of course, "The Sash My Father Wore". The Boys' and other Loyalist marches have long caused nationalist protests and often roused violence. They have in the past made a point of marching through nationalist-supporting areas in order to emphasize that the state remains British" (1996:18).

While these marches are exclusive to one community or another, they are evidently not secretive or overly guarded, but rather are purposefully displayed and showcased often through traditionally conflictual areas of the city. According to Cairns and Smyth, the disruption caused by the marches is great in both symbolic and material terms. They state:

> "businesses, shops and restaurants close across Northern Ireland, a significant proportion of the population leaves on holiday and the nascent tourist industry is dealt a fatal blow...In 2001, although the confrontation was not characterized by the protracted violence of previous years, 2,000 troops and police were mobilized to man massive barricades erected to enforce a ban on the parade passing through nationalist areas." (2002: 146)

I would argue that this symbolic and material disruption helps not only to nudge memory and loyalty among the acting group but, as a consequence of visibility, further reinvents and solidifies recollection and old animosities with members of the non-participating community. Devine-Wright writes that Orange parades are a "form of historical commemoration in which the past is actively represented by a group of people who share a sense of belonging and social identification" (2001: 299). He proposes that participation in marches can signal important information about "the temporal nature of an individual's social identity" (Devine-Wright 2001: 299). Furthermore, these marches are not age exclusive. Indeed, anyone of any age is encouraged to participate, which helps to support tradition through to younger generations (Bryan November 19, 2003). As John Allcock remarks, "the acquisition of modern identities, therefore, does not consist in the simple abandonment of traditional identities, but in their reconstitution" (2000: 19).

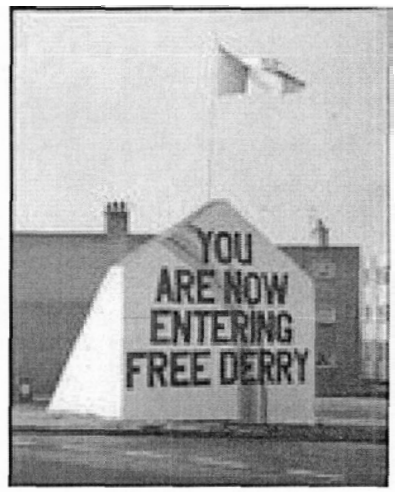

Figure 9. You Are Now Entering Free Derry, 1994. n.a.

Lastly, it is not uncommon to see this type of 'memory inducing' imagery or visual culture literally injected into the physical space of Northern Ireland, and again, into spaces that have been historically sites of turmoil and challenge over 'rightful

Figure 10. Protestant Arch, n.d., n.a.

ownership'. Derry is one example of such a place. Depending on which side of the city you enter, visual images identify which community resides there. On the Catholic side, a bold sign reads *Now Entering Free Derry* and is bolstered by vibrant murals coded with Gaelic imagery. In effect, the sign claims the territory as Catholic, the words and images recall past conflicts fought in the name of independence. Enter elsewhere, however, and you may find yourself having to pass through a Protestant archway welcoming entrants to

what is apparently a loyal Protestant city. The archway is likewise imprinted with social symbols associated with Northern Irish Protestantism – Masonic symbols and the Crown, among others. The archway reinforces the historical pact created between England and the Protestant settler population – the remembrance of which is in many ways pivotal and central to the Loyalist/Unionist position in the conflict.

In general then, the evocation of important historical events, leaders, and cultural symbols through visual re-presentation acts as a daily inducer of social memory, which helps to support social boundaries as well as social fissures. Overall, there is an interesting dichotomy in Northern Ireland between kinetic visual culture such as marches, versus murals, graffiti, and other 'permanent' imagery. Both work to mutually reinforce the other, creating a continuous and consistent connection between the past and the present.

I was particularly struck by this connection while in Belfast during field work. Tensions were heightened during my time there due to the upcoming election. Daily on television, news reports recounted prior social conflicts such as Bloody Sunday (1972), bombings, and turmoil surrounding particular political leaders such as Sinn Fein's Gerry Adams. After the evening news, I would often head to the local store, which was stacked to capacity with newspapers whose front pages contained stories and images of violence and conflict. Upon leaving the store, I was immediately faced with Provisional IRA graffiti, murals and posters that called for revolutions, support for IRA 'prisoners of war' or other calls to action. During my journey from the Catholic neighbourhood where I stayed to

Belfast city centre, I came across war memorials, murals of solidarity with Palestine and Basque separatist movements and a host of other images. Furthermore, throughout my stay there was a constant police presence in my neighbourhood and a helicopter hung directly over it 24 hours a day. During my first week of fieldwork in Belfast, two men were shot down the street from where I stayed. This latter incident had the effect of infusing the still images I encountered with more meaning. While many of the murals, curbstones and other markers had been present for decades in some cases, or spoke to distant historical events, the contemporary events enlivened them and made them more relevant. Conversely, in the absence of the helicopters and the shootings, the police presence and news footage, the still images kept me aware of social conflict. I seemed to be constantly reminded of where I was and where I belonged.

In relation to this engagement of the viewer with the image, Worth argues that:

> "the framework of the anthropology of visual communication suggests that symbolic worlds are patterned and amenable to being studied in a larger framework than pictures. Primarily, this framework helps us to look at pictures as that aspect of culture called communication. It suggests that we treat pictures as statements, articulated by artists, informants, scientists, housewives, and even movie and televisions producers. We can ask our interpretations of what was meant, and then we can ask whether our interpretation of what was meant is good, bad, beautiful and ugly. But by asking whether our interpretation of what was meant is true, we are, I am afraid, merely asking whether we guessed right. What we should be trying to understand is how, and why, and in what context, a particular articulator structures his particular statement about the world."
> (1981: 197).

I would suggest that what is even more important to the Northern Irish case, if we are discussing the ways in which the visual communicates, is that we try to understand how,

why, and in what context those who consume the images relate to them and those who create the images. Worth is correct that by asking whether our interpretation is true we are asking whether we guessed right, but perhaps what we should be asking ourselves instead is how viewers respond and interpret the images created and how the relationship between the producer and the consumer and bound up together in the social context in which they live.

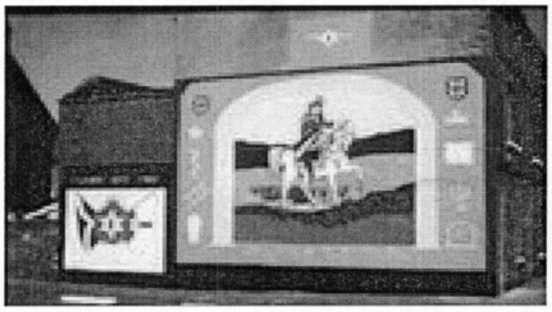

Figure 11. King Billy at the Boyne, 1980. Photographer: B. Rolston.

As highlighted through my personal experiences in Belfast, the relationship between the viewer and the image takes place in a social context in which history is made relevant to contemporary social issues and how contemporary social issues reinforce the importance of history. This context helps to shape what is perceived as truth: how it is represented and how it is negotiated. For example, the image of King William on his white horse surrounded by Protestant iconography (Figure 11) establishes that community's attachment to the Battle of the Boyne as a key historical event. The image has both denotative and connotative meanings. The first level, that of denotative meaning relates to a primary implication of the image. For example King Williams's Horse is representative of an epic battle: his physical strength and agility is displayed through his rearing stance in the picture. Arguably, the horse, pure white in colour, is representative

of strength, victory and virility. The denotative meaning of the image, however, leads immediately into a connotative meaning which is heavily reliant on the knowledge and background of the viewer and thus carries a special message that is not universally understood or appreciated. In Northern Ireland, this white horse takes on another mantle, as displayed prominently in marching banners, it serves a symbol of victory of Protestant ideals over those of the Catholic population and the contractual/historical rights of Protestants and subsequent moral authority inherent in their loyalist pact. The victorious pose of the horse and rider are not indicative solely of a triumphant battle, but also of a triumph of one culture over another.

This image and the event it depicts are then commemorated through the act of marching, which connects history to contemporary social activity. The impact this activity has on the public via the injection of police barricades along marching routes or the violence that sometimes breaks out between Catholic and Protestants, further distinguishes and separates the two communities in a way that reinforces the importance or potency of images like King William.

As Larry Gross notes in his discussion of the work of Sol Worth, "[he] was imbued with the conviction that visual media were forms of communication that, while fundamentally different from speech, could and must be seriously examined as ways in which human beings create and share meanings" (Gross 1981: 1). Why then is the visual so integral to social memory and its recollection? Visual media, by conveying important meanings to consumers is one important system of signification. Valda Blundell suggests that

although we experience the world directly, our understanding of the world is possible only because we are able to represent the world through signification. These creative expressions are a way of translating our understanding of social contexts in which we live, and they provide a means to explain our thoughts and feelings about such experiences. The images speak to a social climate that has been developed over hundreds of years and they become relevant to contemporary social relationships through the translation of viewers.

While there may be no firm agreement as to the cause of conflict or its solution amongst the seemingly infinite body of literature on the subject, cinema in Ireland has addressed the core socio-political issues that raise difficult questions for viewers. Central to such questions is the issue of identity: what it means to be Irish, who is, and who is not.

Chapter 4: The Cinema and Signification

Lance Pettitt (2000: 28-29) argues that, given that the 20th century's major political disputes have been over national territorial disagreements, it is not surprising that the development of popular cultural forms such as cinema become an extension and representation of conflicts within and between different nation states.

Larry Gross writes in reference to the work of anthropologist Margaret Mead, that we need to examine our "largely unexamined notion that all or most photographs, and, in particular motion pictures, are a mirror of the people, objects, and events that these media record photochemically" (1981: 128). In other words, he recognizes the questionable logic of the jump we make when we say that the resultant photographic image could be, and should be, and most often is something called "real", "reality", or "truth" (Gross 1981: 128). He continues that many ethnologists have provided us with stills and motion pictures that they and others have used to articulate some of the most important statements about culture made in recent years (Gross 1981: 186). He is arguing that there is great value in visually recorded data about behaviour and culture, "so long as we know what it is that we recorded, so long as we are aware of how and by what rules we chose our subject matter, and so long as we are aware of...how we analyzed the various units of film from which we will do our analysis" (Gross 1981: 194). Importantly, he recognizes the usefulness and validity of film – that it says something important about culture, which must mean that to a degree, film interacts with culture, but he does not recognize or acknowledge *how* film interacts with this culture. In other words, he says that to use films

in our analysis of culture, we need to acknowledge what and who we are recording and how we organize this film. Gross' acknowledgment does not really account for consumption of these images: how and why does film engage with people in such a way that we can argue it reflects or says important things about culture? Furthermore, this consumption or interaction is not controllable by a filmmaker or producer and thus our detailing of method is truly one-sided and gives us an insight to production but not consumption.

The tangible boundaries that have developed in Northern Ireland in the form of peace walls, curbstones, or in the form of community markers such as murals or graffiti, are erected on screen for viewers to consume. Interestingly, unlike the social and political environment that for a great deal of time institutionally sanctioned discrimination against the Irish Catholic, Irish films have historically tended to highlight Catholic culture and the nationalist story. Films such as *Michael Collins* (1996) and *Some Mother's Son* (1996) show the ethnic Irish community as a phoenix, rising from the ashes and working valiantly for a just change. This portrayal of that community begs the question, if these stories purport what it means to be Irish, then does this differ from being British or Protestant? These visual boundaries that are raised reaffirm tangible geographic boundaries in the North. The constant re-negotiation of boundaries in turn suggests that there is a deeply embedded understanding of what these boundaries are, by both the producer and the viewer.

What is especially poignant about film is the interactive nature between producer and consumer. As an interviewee put it to me, audiences are captive – to watch a movie is not the same as reading a book where one can stop reading at a time of their own choosing. Fidelma Farley (October 27, 2003) suggested during our discussion on the power of film, this audience captivity only serves to enhance the potency of the interaction between the consumer and the image. Furthermore film, in the very manner in which it re-presents important events or relationships can *simultaneously* deliver countless images, symbols and meanings to an audience – it depicts culturally important events on the screen in a way that audiences relate to because of social circumstances, regardless of what social group they come from. In effect, still images, such as those found in murals, or as graffiti on school walls, and the stories they tell – stories that are often also delivered through the narratives of the preceding generations, are given over to the audience in real time.

In relation to this active engagement, Nichols writes that:

> "the appearance of movement brings the graded signifiers of analog codes into play along a diachronic or temporal axis as well as the synchronic or spatial axis of the still photograph…the movement of people and things – actions, gestures, expressions – takes propriety over that almost instantaneous slice of time captured by a single photograph…with film…images appear to move, in time, again as their referents did once before" (1981: 70).

With respect to Irish films, I would argue that it is not necessarily the case that culturally specific symbols are always purposefully imbedded in any given film to elicit a specific response, but that rather that movies call upon memory instigated by images. By means of symbols, we can enter into processes of communication and exchange with one

another: "symbols represent us in these processes" (Nichols 1981: 1). Nichols further speaks of "images used in the service of ideology" (Nichols 1981: 1). Generally, he asserts that ideology uses the fabrication of images and the processes of representation to persuade us that how things are is how they ought to be (Nichols 1981: 1). The pertinent question related to this assertion is 'whose ideology'? Can we truly speak of one person's or one party's ideological impression on a nation of people as though there is no other influence on them or further, that they do not challenge this impression? However, if the relationship and its pretenses remain so staunchly in place, can it not be that this relationship has become maintained by society itself and that to ask for the originator and perpetrator of this ideology is a fruitless question? What comes first in the formation of ideas, the individual or the society, and why do we speak of them so often as though they are mutually exclusive? The question seems fairly crucial, since Nichols writes, "[the ideological use of images] presupposes obviousness, a sense of 'the way things are', within which our sense of place and self emerges as an equally self-evident proposition" (1981: 2).

Interestingly, Nichols adds that ideological systems must be favoured by a population for them to be retained: "no society could long endure if it constantly had to force its members, to assume their places within its relations of communication. We must want to be recognized in that place, in those images we take to be ourselves" (1981: 2). This recognition of place is integral because it is in turn a recognition of social inequality, and this can be seen as either 'beneficial' or 'detrimental', dependent upon the party to which

you belong. This recognition of images as representative of the social group strangely validates either groups 'position' – whether it be one of 'victim' or 'rightful victor'.

As Nichols asserts, "seeing is believing, and seeing how we see ourselves and the world around us is often how we believe ourselves and the world to be. Images generally present views...and how we see them has everything to do with how we see ourselves" (1981: 5). I would argue again that this is a cyclical phenomena. Our memories are shaped by personal experiences and social contexts and they help us to form a view of ourselves and our environment that we seek out in images and our understanding of them. In absence of such a clear view, we tend to criticize images for their disconnect from ourselves and our realities. The images that help to negotiate and reaffirm this view are functional to us in that the way we see them is directly related to the way we see ourselves and our community, hence the reaffirming aspect of imagery. It is also the case that this relationship between the viewer and the image is strengthened through consistency, since this consistency creates a legitimacy for the symbolism embedded in these images.

Not surprisingly, the element of consistency is also integral to memory and ever present in Northern Ireland. Politically and socially relevant images are delivered through commemorative acts and education, among other methods. The historical basis of these images combined with their social significance creates a legitimacy that is only encouraged by their consistent appearance, setting an early memory and reference point for community members.

While we differ in our use of terminology, Nichols presents a similar argument when he discusses the importance of recognition: "the phenomenon of recognition indicates the maintenance of consistent relationships by marking their reappearance" (1981: 37). He further writes that recognition...reconfirms our way of seeing, it validates our habit. Recognition has the force of a mould shaping new information to expected meanings (Nichols 1981: 37). This recognition is fostered in Northern Irish society and is thus integral to the maintenance of social relationships and for animosities: "[their] perceptual habit, [their] way of seeing is confirmed" (Nichols 1981: 37).

Included in his discussion of image recognition, Nichols (1981: 38) highlights what he coins as 'pleasure in recognition.' Pleasure in recognition is uniquely integral to the Northern Irish case in that this pleasure in recognition solidifies a sense of self and relationship to others in the same social group, and due to the positive portrayal of this relationship it stands to reason then, as Nichols (1981: 68) writes, that 'pleasure in recognition' is especially forceful when what we recognize is a figure highly charged with meaning such as ourselves. While the bulk of Irish films have focused on the Nationalist/Catholic struggle, Nichols writes that our ability to 'metacommunicate' when engaging with film " becomes a necessary defense against accepting a place or placement of ideological proportions...metacommunication, affords us a means of talking back, of contestation as well as a means of 'taking in'" (1981: 94). In Northern Ireland, this exercise of 'talking back' or contestation, is in essence a way of reaffirming the status quo. While one could argue that the reception of highly coded images helps to reaffirm

only one groups beliefs, concerns and social memory, which simultaneously marginalizes another, I believe it also suggests that through this contestation of images, the social order between the two parties is maintained. Social order is predicated or characterized by marginalization and a contestation of history.

Indeed, Nichols (1984: 95) mentions that Aristotle regarded joy in recognition as the basis for the enjoyment of art, this is perhaps why positive or negative responses to popular Irish film tend to correspond with how viewers recognize or relate to the filmic images they see. I would suggest that the potency of this pleasure relates to the individual's connection to the re-presentation of the social group: one which is enriched by a nationalistic pride which either attracts or repels the viewer. An excellent example of this personal relation was observed in reporting about the filming of Neil Jordan's film *Michael Collins* in numerous European and North American newspapers and magazines. One paper wrote:

> "...most of Ireland seems riveted by the Michael Collins film; public and media interest is so high it's off the scale...there was an open call for extras who would play the audience in a scene were De Valera addresses a public meeting. The film's producers desperately hoped that they would manage to get as many as 2,000 people; 4,500 turned up...and more than half had to be turned away....'It was absurd,' [Stephen] Wolley said. 'It's like we're performing some service. We've been given this ticket, this key to the city. Because it's Michael Collins, whatever we do seems OK. People just want to feel they're a small part of it. I can't tell you how exciting this is to the people of Ireland" (Gritten 1995: 4).

As production of the *Michael Collins* (1996) film can attest, Irish films also often deliver a particular potency through the timing of their release. Is it a coincidence that the film was produced and released during and shortly after the all-party peace talks. In an

interview, Seamus Duggan (October 30, 2003), Director of Film Base, noted that there was a great deal of parallel drawn between the character of Michael Collins and Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams. Not only did the positive momentum behind the talks create the environment in which support for the filming made it possible, but the two events coinciding allowed for viewers to make an association between a powerful figure in Irish history, and a powerful force in contemporary Northern Irish politics.

Furthermore, it has also been argued that timing plays a particularly important role in the release of Irish films with respect to the ability of Irish viewers to consume images and narratives that depict what is a deeply troubled past. Seamus Duggan (October 30, 2003) noted in such a discussion that a degree of time often lapses before a film is put to the screen due to the intense emotional effect of the depicted events on Irish society. Films such as *Some Mother's Son* (1996), which recounts the Hunger Strikes at the Maze Prison land *In the Name of the Father* (1993), which depicts the case of the Birmingham Five and their wrongful imprisonment for a terrorist bombing, represent events that have

Figure 12. In the Name of the Father, 1993.

otherwise remained untouched by producers for years and even decades before becoming a realization. Duggan (October 30, 2003) mentioned that Ireland is thought of as an abused society, one which is only really now starting to address past trauma; film is seen

a method for working through this trauma. The recent signing of the Good Friday Agreement (1998), helped to defuse the tense atmosphere in the North and South which was serving to controversialize any and all social discussion of the Troubles. A period of healing combined with a changing political climate to 'allow' for the visualization of Ireland's history and its eventual cinematic production. In an interview with Seamas McSwiney shortly after the premier of *Michael Collins* Neil Jordan responded to a question about the possibility of his film having a therapeutic effect on viewers by answering, "I hope so, psychoanalysis teaches us that we shouldn't bury things in our past, that we should bring them to life, bring our traumas out to the surface. We should stop blocking, we shouldn't be in denial. So if making a movie about these subject matters does this, then I think it should have a certain cathartic effect" (McSwiney 1996:12). It is interesting that Jordan speaks of the traumatic past as something that is owned by the collective society, something that has been 'experienced' by those who will see the film, even if they are only 16 years of age, for example. It seems appropriate that because of the power of films and their impression upon those who it aims to re-present there needs to be a temporal distance between the event and its cinematic recreation. Rather than time weakening the effect of prior problematic events, film instead brings them to the surface of popular public debate in a way that allows people to engage with the accuracy or inaccuracy of what is considered a recreation of pivotal and identity forming events. I doubt that the film was particularly 'cathartic' for Protestants in the country, but public engagement with the film involves active remembering on the part of the viewer and effectively reestablishes the importance of history and conflict to

contemporary Northern Ireland. I would argue that it is due to this reestablishment that movies like *Michael Collins* (1996) are important to the North.

In many ways, films are the product of their time. Over the past three decades, film has become an increasingly indigenous industry on the island. The birth of the Irish Film Board in 1981 and its reestablishment in 1993 combined with the work of the Irish Film Institute, Film Base, and many others has served to raise the prominence of Irish made films and directors such as Neil Jordan and Jim Sheridan. While the boom is recent, the importance of film in both the North and South is legendary.

There has been no shortage over the past seven decades of cinematic representations of the Irish. However, in the past, these images were created by British and American directors who helped to create the popular image of the Irish. The stereotype is one centred on the viewer's ambivalent perception of the Irish: it is both appealing and repellent. The stereotype represents the Irish as both culturally rich and religiously devout, while simultaneously taken easily to violence and the drink. In *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938), for example, there are three Irish stereotypes battling each other: the Irish gangster, the Irish priest, and the Irish cop. *The Fighting Sullivans* (1944) portrays the true story of the five Sullivan brothers who served on the same US Navy ship in WWII at the Battle of Guadalcanal. Despite the WWII theme, the film dwells on the Sullivans' youth spent mostly roughhousing and fighting and suggests that not one of them was highly educated, or graduated from high school. The gaze from the outside made an impression on American movie-goers who were introduced to the volatile Irish man, a

rather sexed-up version of the real McCoy, while British spectators had their view of their troublesome neighbours confirmed socially.

Films about the Irish were not only for the eyes of foreigners, however. Rather, Irish citizens became increasingly attracted to the medium of film, despite rampant censorship by the Catholic Church, which was constantly concerned with the effect that non-religious visual imagery may have on its 'flock'. There are numerous potential explanations for the Irish love of cinema. Arguably, films allowed for an escape from the general social oppression by the Catholic church of many of its parishioners. Catholic censorship in Ireland is well known, but despite all attempts to divert attention from the cinema, the Church was not entirely successful. As Kevin Rocket (October 23, 2003), Professor of Film Studies, notes that the attempt by the Church to control viewership by removing the more 'illicit' scenes, in many ways backfired. He argues that what they had not considered was that the imagination of what *was* there was greater or more powerful than what had been cut out (Rocket October 23, 2003). Throughout the 1950s until the height of the Troubles, film not only offered a level of interaction with social issues that had been taboo, but also seemed to expand and encourage the imagination of spectators. It could also be that during this time the cinema offered an escape from 'Troubles' in both the South and North. A non-ending cycle of violence and uncertainty made an escape to the cinema even more appealing. Furthermore, Fidelma Farley (October 27, 2003) argues that, despite any potential stereotypes, there was something rather exciting and romantic about being able to see one's country and kin projected onto the big screen. It has been argued that slowly over time the Irish became more and more accustomed to

seeing themselves represented on screen, and represented in a particular way for particular reasons (Hughes November 19, 2003).

Indeed, Irish society was so engrossed with the cinema that at one point, in the early to mid-1900s, the southern Irish saw themselves as the most movie going population in Europe, despite the fact that this perception was ill-formed (Rockett October 23, 2003). Regardless, this ill-formed perception is significant: it highlights the importance of cinema-going to the Irish. While they may not have actually been the most movie-going nation in Europe, its importance to their culture made them believe this to be true (Rockett October 23,2003).

Gradually the production of films began to shift from being predominantly foreign funded and produced to predominantly indigenous. The construction of an Irish infrastructure on which to build an Irish film industry allowed directors and producers of Irish origin to begin to construct their own image of Irish culture and society, albeit with American financial backing. Despite a change in the degree of Irish control over film production, topical engagement has changed very little. Whether it be a fascination with their own troubled history or a need to revisit prior traumatic events in order to reconcile the past to the current social environment, a good majority of films, or rather the most popular of them, tend to deal with Irish history in the North and South, or with familiar plot lines of the importance of tradition, history and family (Farley October 27, 2003).

Figure 13. Michael Collins, 1996.

When it comes to such Irish films and filmic images then, the film *Michael Collins* (Figure 13) is of particular interest to me, especially due to its association with vicarious social memory. The film represents a pivotal event in Irish history, that of the separation of Ireland into North and South and the subsequent civil war in the Republic. The film traces the career of Irish Republican hero Michael Collins, from the Easter Rising to his death in 1922. The story of Michael Collins, who became one of the founders of the Republic of Ireland, highlights the complicated and tragic developments that led to the separation of the island. While Neil Jordan addresses the relationship between the British and the Irish in his film, he also focuses on the complex relationship between Collins and his supporters, and the more aggressively separatist Republicans led in part by Eamonn de Valera. It is this latter relationship that is particularly interesting. Jordan highlights the fact that Collins' sacrifices for the independence of the Republic of Ireland, did not come without great personal cost. While some were willing to 'sacrifice' the northern colonies for the sake of independence, the film acknowledges that many Republicans saw this as betrayal.

Stories of this time period are both well-known and contested, as are all narratives of historical events in Ireland, but they are not often evoked in such a potent way on screen. I believe that the overwhelming attention, both positive and negative, to the film Michael Collins and its reception by the public, speaks directly to the concept of social memory and how the visual re-presentation of historical can serve as a means for society to 'witness' and engage with previously unexperienced events.

To begin, discussion around the film and its making was, to say the absolute least, intense. The film's production was broached often by those I interviewed and also appeared regularly in various types of documentation and correspondence I uncovered while researching at the Irish Film Institute. The sentiment was conveyed in two ways: the first comprised of the flurry of letters to the editors of many Irish papers by citizens of both the Republic and Northern Ireland and by both Protestants and Catholics. Letters retrieved from the Irish film archives not only found people heatedly debating the accuracy of the film, but also making connections between the film and personal memories they have of the Irish conflict. I found it interesting that people were not necessarily arguing over the quality of the film, for example its cinematography and acting, but rather over the ways in which they felt the film adequately served as a historical document not only based on what they knew factually about the period, but also what they knew or 'remembered' of it *socially*. Other letters suggested that the film had not only served to engage viewers with the civil war, but also that witnessing its re-presentation had brought to their minds prior events that had happened in their own

communities or to their own selves that were related to the themes addressed in the film. In one such letter, for example, a correspondent wrote that:

> "The film [Michael Collins] also brought back to my memory one day when, as a child, I found some metal canisters among the trees outside. I brought them to my father, who said they were a legacy from the Civil War. He said that the Free State Army sent to the house to say they required possession within 24 hours. It was Christmas week, and my father went to the officer in command, and explained that three generations were living in the house and it was very difficult to leave just then and particularly painful for his elderly parents. He said that if they could remain till after Christmas, the house would be vacated promptly. He was told that he had been given 24 hours to leave, that the army was moving in at the end of that period and if there were any people still in the house, the soldiers would get them out" (Horgan 1996).

It is interesting that the correspondent uses personal memories that are generally unrelated to specific events highlighted in the film to criticize its substance – namely the level of violence depicted compared to the non-violent hardships dealt to her family during that same period. Her memory as an individual is inextricably connected vicariously to social memories of events that preceded her. These events are brought to mind and given substance by the visual re-presentation of the civil war.

Other letters of correspondence gave the film merit based on personal experiences directly connected to events or persons re-presented on screen. In one such letter it was written that,

> "this meeting [at which de Valera urges the burning of the Custom House], attended by most of the leader not in jail, took place in our house...most of the leaders arrived on their bicycles, which were left in the front garden for anyone to see. When de Valera arrived, he said to my mother: "I want you to send two of the boys outside to keep watch." Mother believed keeping watch would be dangerous and said: "I will do no such thing." She probably thought to herself: "I have already lost my

> husband and now they want me to lose my children." Thinking about this in recent years, I am now convinced that de Valera knew very well that two boys outside the house could give no warning to those at the meeting. He wanted us outside, as he knew that if there was a raid there would be a shoot-out and all those inside the house would be either killed in the fighting, or arrested. It was for our safety that he wanted us inside" (O'Rahilly 1996: n.p.).

Rather than debating the accuracy of the timeline, the location of the event, or any other number of film related criticisms, the writer instead fixates on the one instance to which he has a personal connection to debate the character of the man and his actions in response to the negative image of De Valera portrayed in the film. In this instance the film connects the man, through his memories to the memories of others who would criticize the actions of De Valera.

A second type response to the film was that it was seen as above criticism. The screening of *Michael Collins* was described by many of my interviewees as a "national event" – one that was attended by a record number of people. The film was said to be above criticism in some way because of its weight and importance. During an interview with Eamonn Hughes (November 19, 2003), Professor of English at Queen's University Belfast, he explained the phenomena by describing to me a conference in which he participated shortly after *Michael Collins*' release. During a session on Irish film, mediators remarked that summarizing or discussing the social impact of the film was unnecessary as it was widely 'understood'. Hughes questioned the practice of utilizing unpaid 'extras' in a film that capitalized on their emotional or psychological attachment to the characters and events. While he quipped that it was the first time he remembered

ever having been booed at during a conference, but there was a belief by conference participants that critical engagement with the film was unnecessary. This coupled with the clear discomfort with criticism of the film is quizzical and telling, particularly in relation to the evident distaste of the film by others. I would suggest that both avid criticism and defense of the film by viewers demonstrates the social significance of visual re-presentation.

Another telling phenomena related to the film was the way in which people, namely Catholics, wanted to physically engage with it. As mentioned earlier, there had been an open call for extras for the film – and *thousands* of people came from all over both the north and south of Ireland for no money and with their own 'period' costume. Extras wanted to take part in what they saw as a piece of their history, as an integral social memory and for what was essentially a telling of *their story*. Furthermore, there were people who saw this film who had not been to the cinema since the Quiet Man – some 40 years earlier, and there were some people who had *never* been to the cinema (Duggan October 30, 2003). Participation in the filming of *Michael Collins* (1996) can be likened to participation in marches and other acts of commemoration, which play an important role in the evocation and preservation of history.

Figure 14. Some Mother's Son, 1996.

In the Name of the Father (1993) (Figure 12) and *Some Mother's Son* (1996) (Figure 14) also serve as recent examples among many. Their production and release was similarly followed by an intense discussion of the historical events they depict, making pleas to either the emotional attachment or disdain the public has towards 'heroic' figures. Certainly, 'heroic' figures are integral to the impact visual imagery has on social memory as they encapsulate and symbolize any number of signifiers, just as graffiti or banners may for a particular social group. John Regan remarks in his article *Looking at Mick Again* (1995) "as with all politicians and military leaders, visual projection is crucial: and in a time of war, this importance is magnified. In the case of Collins, the visual image is of heightened influence on our reading of him" (1995: 18). The biographical interpretation of Collins has influenced and fed visual re-presentations of him. In turn, visual re-representations may have fed each other to reinforce the romantic myth of Collins (Regan 1995: 18). The myth of Collins is an important piece of Irish culture that commingles with other images and symbols of Catholic or Protestant culture to reify social identities.

Memory and identity are not created in a vacuum, they are constructed socially often via the use of symbols and images and over time become deeply entrenched in society. People attend a film with socially constructed memories and perceptions, and these may or may not be reinforced by the film.

Worth (1981: 7) noted that his decision to see film as social rather than individual expressions led him to question whether there were underlying rules for the shaping and

sharing of meanings in film. He writes that "there is no meaning in film itself...the meaning of a film is a relationship between the implication of the maker and the inference of the audience" (Worth 1981: 7). How is it that this inference and relationship can in general be so very consistent? I would suggest that this is due to an overarching social construction of memory, which helps to define members of a group and reify their social beliefs and values based on this shared memory. In the neighbourhood where I stayed in Belfast, this social construction took place a variety of ways through residential and school segregation, the display of Republic flags, murals, political posters, and a myriad of other markers.

In a politically and emotionally charged arena such as Northern Ireland, film can thus have a number of different effects: it can help to reify tensions through the evocation of memory, exacerbate, or even negotiate them. Concern has been voiced in the past in books, newspaper articles and letters to the editor, that film can serve to incite violence or increase conflict. Since many Irish popular films tend to favour or highlight the nationalist case, or nationalist history, in theory this exacerbation is founded in Catholic anger over old wounds and restitution, and in Protestant anger over misrepresentation and inaccuracy. In reference to the film *Michael Collins* (1996), one correspondent wrote to the Irish Times "...is it really a coincidence that the outrageous bomb attack here in Derry last week took place a mere hundred yards from the cinema, where the so-called freedom fighters, in all probability, saw the film and were inspired to carry out their atrocity?" (Haslett 1996: n.p.). Another wrote that *Michael Collins* (1996) was released "at a time when we should be giving the Provisionals no false historical fodder with

which to feed raw recruits...these fictional atrocities, through the power of a movie, pass into the iconic imaginations of our children. Are we asked to believe that the Provisional IRA will not use them to work on the minds of the Diarmaid O'Neills who cross their path?"(Harris n.d.). This sentiment, while arguably alarmist, is one that is widely felt in reaction to representation of traumatic past events. Seamus Duggan shared this sentiment when he discussed public sentiment toward the upcoming television movie *Holy Cross* (2004). The movie chronicles the story of two fictional families, one Protestant and one Catholic, who lived through the real-life turmoil that erupted in 2001 when Protestant protestors hurled stones and verbal abuse at Catholic primary school girls who were making their way from the Catholic Ardoyne area of north Belfast to walk a few hundred yards through the predominantly Protestant area of Glenbryn to the Holy Cross primary school. The release of the film, set for 2004, was not as far removed from the actual events as Irish films usually are in our interview and Duggan said that he found people asking "is this too soon?" (October 30, 2003). There was a fear that the film would renew tensions in the community and widen fissures in already strained emotional relationships.

It has also been suggested, however, that films can serve to ease or negotiate tensions by allowing a venue for discussion and engagement with difficult subjects. Theoretically, this could be attributed to the view of films as a social product, one that has entertainment value and thus to a degree is depoliticized. One interviewee confirmed such a feeling when she discussed the opening of the controversial film *Cal* (1984), which chronicles the tale of a young Catholic boy who is tormented by Protestants and made to participate in the IRA. In describing her youth and personal experience with conflict in Northern

Ireland, Shauna Kelpie (November 12, 2003), Director of the Foyle Film Festival, remarked that she was surprised when the film was released. *Cal* (1984) seemed a highly risky film to release at a time that government had a great deal of control over popular media. However, she remarked that the film offered a 'neutral' space from which to discuss highly conflictual topics (Kelpie November 12, 2003). Growing up in Derry, Kelpie noted that individuals were identified as either Unionists or Nationalists, Catholics or Protestants, and as such discussion of important social issues could not happen without drawing attention to oneself as being a proponent of either Loyalism or Republicanism. As the film instigated discussion in the public sphere through such media outlets as newspapers, magazines and television, individuals could discuss its subject matter without clearly eliciting such negative reactions (Kelpie November 12, 2003). In this way, it could be argued that film may also have a 'healing' effect on society by allowing it to confront painful memories and work through them after a sufficient period of time has elapsed.

The last possibility, that film reifies social boundaries, seems the most likely general outcome of public interaction with popular film. What became increasingly evident, and what was relayed often to me by many interviewees, is that historically, very little has changed in film: the themes and foci have not tended to shift drastically and those that do attempt to create new and innovative films are often not highly supported. They tend to make low-budget films that are screened to minute audiences at festivals. For example, *Goldfish Memory* (2003), which looks at the dating scene in contemporary Ireland and *Spin the Bottle* (2003) about an ex-con trying to make money on a national talent show

were just a few of the independent films screened at the 2003 Foyle Film festival. While they touch on a relatively apolitical contemporary storyline, they are generally not the type that would be produced as feature films for mainstream audiences.

Social context greatly helps to determine when films are made, by whom, and what aspects of the story shall be told. This is particularly the case with Irish films which have tended to focus on the numerous upheavals of Irish society and its past troubles: social memory works in relation to the contemporary social construct to help solidify perceptions and boundaries. From the period at which the Hunger Strikes ended (1981) the number of films dealing with the troubles proliferated exponentially.[6] As noted previously, the political transition and atmosphere of open dialogue that accompanied this transition created a window of opportunity for the production of films that addressed Irish history more directly. Furthermore, these films were created at a time of relative prosperity for the Republic; the southern audiences that viewed them desired to heal emotional and financial wounds, and to celebrate their rise from the ashes. However, the juggernaut of Irish film, produced primarily from the south, had a secondary effect on the North. This time of 'rebirth' in the Republic was not mirrored in kind in the North. While time may be seen to have healed old wounds in the south, it has arguably served as a bleak reminder of the spatial and temporal distance to those in the North. Films like *Michael Collins* (1996) celebrate the independence of Ireland but this independence was won by 'sacrificing' the North. The same year that *Michael Collins* (1996) premiered,

[6] A survey of Irish films in the 1940s and 1950s shows comedy as the genre of choice. In the 1950s and 1960s Irish film turns to the subject of the Irish in America. Through these four decades the conflict in the North is portrayed only a handful of times. In the 1980s, however, films about the Irish conflict number at almost half a dozen and during the 1990s, well over a dozen films on this topic were produced.

Some Mother's Son (1996) was also screened to audiences. The latter film's depiction of the Hunger Strikes serves as a stark reminder of what has not been achieved in the North, and the violence that this struggle has brought to the country.

We are thus left with the following question: if these themes of history, memory, and social construction which feed into both the making of and reception of films are so prominent in Irish society and indeed, are buoyed up and evidenced in many other aspects of social life, such as parading, is it possible that a film can be made that will not serve to, in some way, maintain social memory and consequent social boundaries? I am making the case that social constructions help to shape the retrieval of visual messages.

Conclusions

Jarvie writes that as far as many people are concerned, films have the ability to influence views and that, as such "they [can] exert influence in a number of ways: by teaching the wrong values; by causing psychological damage; and, by provoking undesirable group behaviour" (1978: 4). However, it seems interesting to me that the influence of popular film is often perceived as a transformer of perceptions or beliefs. Why is it that we presume that influence means to change, for bad or good: that the 'activity' of influence is necessarily only effective in that it is able to alter someone or something? I would argue that equally as powerful, or perhaps even more so, is the effect that influence has on the maintenance or reification of social relationships, beliefs and ideas. That film's ability to reinforce rather than to change does not mean that it is not influential, indeed I believe that it is quite the opposite. As Jarvie writes, the movie-goer is not passive, but rather "is armed with a highly active and selective brain" (1978: 13). However, this brain "sees the world against a background long predating exposure to film" (Jarvie 1978: 13). Certainly, viewers are not passive receptors of information, but this doesn't mean that images are necessarily criticized either, nor may they be criticized in a way that is ultimately counter to the social environment in which they exist. In fact, the engagement of the viewer with the image actually strengthens the impact due to the fact that recipients of visual imagery are not passive. In this instance Jarvie speaks of the 'active model' that he describes as:

> "a mind confronts a screen. Visual and aural information comes to it, is selected, interpreted or organized into meaningful sounds and images – the image is not, as it were, for all to see. Given common cultural and language most viewers will reconstruct the intended meaning, but that they are engaged in this activity must not be forgotten...This is not just a solitary observer, this [person]...is a product of society, along with certain

> of its institutions and is affected by them, stands in certain of its traditions, and understands its conventions" (1978: 142-143).

Furthermore, Nichols writes that:

> "our recollection of past events depends on how our present intentionality is negotiated...the past does not exist outside of the selectivity, the purposefulness of our recall...Cinematic narrative, though, approaches closer to myth than to history: it seeks to resolve contradictions and provide models for actions in the present, not the past, though it may use the past to do so" (1981: 143).

Interesting in the case of Northern Ireland is how the process of resolving contradiction serves to solidify fissures. The recent election is just one example of the longevity and potency of these rifts. During our interview in November 2003, Neil Jarman highlighted this by drawing attention to the increasing cultural space between the Irish Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. He remarked that, increasingly, each community is stressing their unique cultural and linguistic qualities as a 'nation' of people. (Jarman November 4, 2003). He suggests that they are not presenting themselves as two sides of the same coin, but rather, are two separate communities reinforced by a diversity of visual re-presentations.

The reconstruction of identity and memory affects the production of visual images, including cinematic representation. Identity and memory is in turn validated by these visual representations. When consumers attend the cinema they bring with them the social context in which they live, one that is shored up by the cyclical reinforcement of identity and memory with cultural expression. Furthermore, the social manifestation of this cyclical relationship acts to effectively validate social memory, interaction and visual

representation. The conflict in Northern Ireland that is borne out of the social fissures maintained by conflicting identities and memories is re-presented in film and consumed by viewers. By stating that something resolves contradictions it suggests that there is some kind of negotiation or resolution at work and, further, that resolution takes on the guise of being positive or 'progressive'. However, there is another aspect to the notion of the resolution of contradiction, and that is that imagery *allows* for the contradiction of everyday lived experience in Northern Ireland compared to the overlying and influential ideological and social restrictions.

Climo and Cattell remark that "social memory is deeply implicated in important contemporary issues: the truth of memory, history and culture, who owns them, and their roles in identity, nation building, hegemonic relationships, and other situations. Memories can create 'communities of memory' or bring together a broken community but they can also tear a community apart" (2002: 27).

I would not argue that film will not exacerbate or negotiate tensions. However, there is a *relationship* between the producer of images, the consumer of images and the image itself that is constantly negotiated, but is being negotiated in a particular social construct. Due to social and political circumstances in Northern Ireland, one aspect of this relationship can not change drastically without the other – from where does resolution come? Reactions to plans for the future of Northern Ireland will ultimately depend on the politicians' and policy makers' ability to include the past. And yet, the past is comprised

of trauma and conflict, characteristics that will undoubtedly be utilized by filmmakers and consumed by a public that craves for justification.

Ultimately, due to my experiences in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, I would argue that the North is caught in a cyclical relationship between history, visual re-presentation, and remembrance. Northern Ireland is a country that staunchly clings to its past. Both Catholics and Protestants or Nationalists and Unionists fear that relinquishing their past will result in a reliquishment of their identity as a people, and therefore their power. Furthermore, this history is a traumatic one, and the historical events that are considered critical to the identity of either group are ones which ultimately serve to widen and deepen the gulf between them. To keep this gulf wide, these historical events must be remembered and remain relevant to each generation. For centuries, this history has been kept alive by murals, banners, and marches. More recently, popular film has been added to the catologue of visual re-presentation that reifies social memory. In turn, the maintenance of this deep divide and its active remembrance reifies conflicted social relationships that then affect the consumption of images.

Cinematic images are certainly powerful, and I have no doubt they influence the society they reflect on. In a country such as Northern Ireland, however, this influence combines with other methods of social construction such as segregation to reify and justify boundaries, to keep a troubled and traumatic history relevant, and to maintain conflict.

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