Overview

On the first day of the conference, scholar Martin McLoone made two comments that for me set the tone for the dialogue that followed over the next two days. In a discussion around identity and representation, McLoone suggested that the Irish were no longer "victims acted upon", but "participants acting" in the re/construction of their own identity. The second comment related to consideration of the idea of genre itself, McLoone taking the position that genre was a Hollywood concept and that it's contemporary application was somewhat dubious. What became apparent in many presentations and discussions was the contentious nature of the re/construction of Irish identity itself. For some participants, like McLoone, there was an overriding desire to maintain Irish historical specificity as a primary identification strategy. For others, a forward thinking agenda did not necessarily carry a direct historical signification of the past. Therefore, notions of identity and genre were inextricably linked.

Barry Monahan attempted to counter some of the claims waged against genre as a tool for Irish cinema and suggested that despite the threat of dominant cinema to indigenous cinema, one could not deny the appeal of popular cinema. He boldly pointed out that the reason popular cinema is popular is precisely because it can locate a faithful audience. Rather than abandoning genre, he suggested that the semantic elements of Irish cinema could be identified for their Irishness and that the syntactic elements were the primary generic components. On a related note, Michael Patrick Gillespie suggested that while *The Quiet Man* is Classical, its subtext is purely Irish and therefore liberating. He located three concepts that constituted cinematic Irishness: the sense of cultural expectation; an engagement with social issues; and an awareness of contradictions.
Therefore, Irish specificity can itself be considered a generic convention, since it is present in numerous films: as parodic intervention of genre representations (*I Went Down*); as cultural coding (*The Company of Wolves*); and as direct historical reenactment (*Bloody Sunday*).

While I appreciate McLoone's drive towards historical analysis, I found his position rather fixed to the detriment of a larger contextual analysis, bordering on an essentialist dialogue of Irishness. In regards to my own presentation on *Bloody Sunday*, McLoone suggested the film should be read from the point of view of the "moment". However, he did not explain what moment he was referring to – the political moment of the event, the moment of its release, the moment of its consumption – nor did he consider how a non-Irish or non-British audience might read the film outside a nationalist identification system. His approach could constitute an outright neglect of pragmatic analysis, an indifference towards syntax, in favour of semantic primacy.

In many cases, the cinematic representations of Ireland were being viewed with an eye for authenticity and realism. Two examples were the presentations by Raita Merivirta on

Michael Collins and by Joseph Moser on *Bloody Sunday.* Merivirta cited the absence of key biographical information about Collins and noted his transformation from violent gunrunner to a likable "Robin Hood" character. Moser went so far as to suggest that *Bloody Sunday* was more successful than other documentaries because of its "unbiased" and "balanced" approach. While I am leery of analysis rooted in notions of authenticity and realism, this approach can open the door to considering genre as an enabler or as a disabler in representational strategies. This idea brings us to the question of Hollywood genre versus Irish genre. Clearly the desire for national cinemas to distinguish themselves from Hollywood is a rejection of America's cinematic colonization, the imposition of American specificity (including history, politics and value systems) onto national cinemas. However the concept of genre can be separated from Hollywood, reclaimed and reconstituted by national cinemas. The concept itself does not necessarily taint the construction of identity.

Within Irish cinema, genre identification often takes the form of genre parody. Monahan moved in this direction with his sympathetic analysis of genre. His approach suggested that genre may be a system of identification/recognition through the mocking parody of Hollywood stereotypes, and therefore offer a system of self-analysis and re-coding. For Monahan genre can offer the same 'point and shoot' impact as the comic scene he presented from *I Went Down* in which Brendan Gleeson's character speaks of the need for a committed and convincing approach when aiming a gun at someone.

In attempting to negotiate genre in relation to Irish cinema, I would like to consider Rick Altman's statement that "if the text fails to serve as a memorial both to a collective past and to a current collectivity, then it is not fulfilling a generic roll." (188) This statement of the intertextuality and transhistoric placement within genre can also be applied quite appropriately to the idea of collective memorializing of an Irish past. The notion of generic 'family resemblances' takes on another layer of meaning here. Altman's statement also coalesces the relationship between genre and nation, identity itself being "invented, dispersed, disseminated, as the communities that we inhabit become more imagined, constellated, ethereal." (205) These concepts can be found both explicitly and implicitly within Irish cinema and were present throughout the conference proceedings.

Dana Och "Straying From the Path: Horror and the Breakdown of the Cliché in the Films of Neil Jordan"

In her presentation, Dana Och focused on Neil Jordan's *The Company of Wolves* as an Irish horror genre distinct from American horror. Och considered both the iconography and iconology of the film to locate its most distinguishing element – the integration of socio-political events. She suggested that Jordan posits a collective nightmare where the boundaries between the animal and non-animal body are blended thereby distancing the audience from the horrific body spectacle found in the typical American (slasher) horror

genre. These Irish films are not "scary" per se, but represent a shift in the protagonist's desire to explore the multiplicity of worldviews. Characters accept their "otherness" so there is a lack of horror for the protagonist, the horror of otherness is transferred to the audience to negotiate. This single film was used to exemplify a body of Irish films in relation to a generic body of American films. While this approach can be viewed as somewhat insular and problematic, Och's observations were quite interesting. Fundamentally, this difference in horror genre construction represents a breakdown of the cliché in favour of a coded language of Irishness.

Company's narrative is constructed as a series of eternally connected circles, therefore resisting a totalizing narrative and by association the identification of truth claims. In relation to this, Och recognized the lack of a fixed and identifiable monster as symbolic of a continuous, unresolved "Troubles". In this cinematic landscape, voice and gaze become primary and the female protagonist is psychologically darker than American horror conventions. In addition, women are empowered in this narrative, existing as the central storytellers, the makers of meaning and therefore occupy a force of resistance against moralizing tales. The clichéd gender construction associated with American horror is transformed. Further to this idea, the main character Rosaleen represents multiple identities through the mirror or dreamstate, a characterization that Och feels represents a critique of women under nationalism. Overall, Irish horror was described as an emptying of the 'affect' found in American horror.

In summing up these differences between Irish and American horror, Och elaborated on the different marketing strategies of *The Company of Wolves* in each country that had a tremendous impact on the success of the film. Its failure in the U.S. was attributed to the distributor's choice to market it as a slasher genre, thereby creating an expectation of graphic blood and gore that was not satisfied. This observation ties in nicely with Rick Altman's pragmatic analysis of genre.

Cheryl Temple-Herr "Thinking Inside the Box"

Cheryl Temple-Herr identified the recurrent generic image of human cargo, the person as contraband. This "emerging genre" represents a separation from the past and an engagement with the future. Temple-Herr engaged with genre as a more complex system of repetitive concepts or themes found in a body of films, not necessarily as a generic image emptied of historical-political references. Therefore, transhistoriography may itself be considered a dominant 'generic' trait of these films. Temple-Herr identified the migrant as both a transnational and fetish object. This movement from the "world known" to the "world unknown" represents movement through a state apparatus where one is transported and radically dislocated. Genre is used here as a social representation within a colonial framework, the universal trope based on (paradoxically) specific individual experience. Stories of migration parallel Irish colonial trauma and

simultaneously illuminate issues of racism within Ireland itself. In this sense, Ireland is positioned as both the colonizer and the colonized, as a changing nation harbouring resentment towards foreign faces.

The 'box' is the transition, transportation, the journey, that which is not representable. It is as much about the psyche as it is the closed, dark passages of cargo holds. Being 'inside the box' is the ultimate disenfranchised container for humans in boxes, organs in boxes, the body as a reductive vessel. This idea of being 'inside the box' offers an interesting parallel with criticisms waged at genre as conventional representation that elides the diverse experiences of individuals, cultures and nations, thereby itself performing a type of disenfranchisement. However, the derogatory universalizing affect associated with genre (the "universal" often interchangeable with "America" in this case) has also been challenged. Genre is in the process of being 'reclaimed' for cultural purposes, as its own identification strategy in the development of unique constelled communities. This idea can be tied back into Temple-Herr's thesis on representation of migrant peoples that rests on a tension between fantasy and experiential reality - both Europe, as immigration destiny, and Hollywood, as representational force, can be identified as the purveyors of fantasy and the disruptors of difference.

Temple-Herr compares the tragic endings of *Zulu 9* and *Odd Man Out* as the traumatic unworlding/reworlding of the migrant on the screen, where colonialism and migration come together. Temple-Herr offers an intertextual reading of the final scene in *Zulu 9* where the frightened black immigrant reaches into her pocket for a lighter with which to ignite the gases emitting from the truck she has just traveled in, thereby killing everyone within the vicinity. Temple Herr finds this scene significant in relation to the Silk Cut cigarette advertisements that depict white colonialists fighting the 'native savages' who offer them cigarettes and a light in order to distract them from battle. Films of this emerging genre are therefore trying to work out something that is not yet resolved, themes that are connected to live issues. The result being a genre of tragedy with an open narrative structure used, perhaps, as a tool to counter or shift the deeply alienated gaze.

Michael O'Connor "Not Black and White or Green: Mythologizing Irish Immigrant History"

Michael O'Connor focuses on the documentary *Out of Ireland*, which covers the Irish immigration to America and the subsequent assimilation of Irish immigrants into the dominant ideology of the U.S. O'Connor focuses on the visual strategies employed in the narrative that include paintings, prints, and archival photographs but never re-enactment. He considers the idea of "the truth affect" after Bill Nichols and attempts to explore Nichols concept of the loss of the indexical bond between the historical origin and its (re)construction. The clip O'Connor uses is an archive photograph of an immigrant community being evicted from their homes that is overlaid with voice-of-god narration, a

camera pan across the surface of the photograph that isolates individuals in its frame, a traditional Celtic music track (that was later marketed), and most notably, an atmospheric soundscape that serves as a form of auditory reenactment within the still image.

With regards to genre, it would seem that the documentary form is here assumed to be a genre form. While this is debatable within genre criticism, the move towards consideration of genre categorizations in relation to narrative structure makes room for this filmic 'style' to be viewed as a generic 'form'. This film might be positioned within Temple-Herr's "emerging genre" of migration, and it does characterize what I have identified as Irish specificity as a generic convention. Its semantic elements are also quite conventional so it is conceivable that this categorization of *Out of Ireland* as genre is appropriate. In this respect, O'Connor considers the visual elements above for their conventionality. What is interesting, however, is the impact of these generic elements on the reading of the historical event, i.e. the inherent tension between the surface of the image and the use of that image in historical documentary. In this example we can consider the place of genre as an enabler or disabler in the construction of meaning in historical documentary.

Within the scene extracted from *Out of Ireland* a very directed reading of Irish emigration is at play, infused with tradition and emotionalism located in the music and the soundscape. There is no room for any other reading beyond that imposed by the visual and sound cues. In this sense, rather than inducing a sense of placelessness as genre style can do, the Irish 'place' haunts this image and the viewer experience. What becomes apparent is the iconic imperative within the conventions of voiceover, Celtic music, and archival photographs that participate in the construction of a mythic identity of Ireland. Ireland's "otherness" is highlighted and in this case genre can be a disabler for identity construction.

Martin McLoone "Cinema, City and Imaginative Space: Hip Hedonism in Recent Irish Cinema"

Martin McLoone chose the film *Goldfish Memory* to explore the interrelation between city, cinema and modernity, where the cityscape is likened to a screenscape, a montage of attractions, the camera as flâneur. However, the crux of his analysis of this film is a criticism of its "hip hedonism" and its "three second memory" i.e. its disengagement with history, the emptying out of any social-political acknowledgement in the narrative. For McLoone, the presence of an historically-rooted nationalist identity is paramount to Irish cinema. In this film, Dublin is a real city, yet it is far more touristically portrayed than politically activated. It is a landscape peopled differently, with young urban queer couples dominating the narrative. For McLoone, the absence of an explicit political narrative is pointedly political and problematic. McLoone firmly believes in the need to reinforce one's identity – where one comes from is important.

The paradox of McLoone's essentialism is that it relies on a generic nationalism, a series of representational conventions that are absent from this film. While McLoone disregards genre theory, he is indebted to the political shorthand it offers. The absences he locates are conventions. *Goldfish Memory* seems to embrace a lack of historical specificity, offering a sublime questioning of memory and it can be identified as part of the romantic comedy genre. However, since McLoone does not acknowledge this possibility, the nature of his argument is clearly positioned outside any desire to use genre as a productive tool for Irish cinema. The 3-second goldfish memory that elides history is viewed as a parallel elision of Irishness.

McLoone chooses not to engage with the commodification of queerness in the film, nor the parallel emptying out of queer political history, the 'normalizing' for generic sharability. If this film is indicative of the next generation of filmmakers in Ireland, it is conceivable that they will shed the "burden of their forefathers" in order to move forward. *Goldfish Memory* may suggest an historical-political repositioning for Irish and queer identity, but it also points to the changing landscape of transnational cinema.

Christine Gledhill "Genre and Nation"

Christine Gledhill entertained the idea of genre, while acknowledging that Ireland and Britain are not producers of strong genre cinema, that is, genre cinema in the Hollywood sense. She located the parallels in discourse between genre and nation, suggesting that if national cinema runs counter to Hollywood, genre by extension might do the same. She identified the ideological problems with the concept of genre (and nation): the need to police boundaries, the essentialism of its terms, its exclusion and 'othering' practices. In addition, she identified postmodernism's threat to genre, paralleled by co-production's threat to nationalism. She proposed a rethinking of the concept of "genre" with all its baggage, in favour of "genricity" an analysis of the possibilities within generic universal tropes.

Gledhill considered the possibility of generic verisimilitude as a mirror of cultural verisimilitude suggesting the potential for a symbiotic process of growth and change. However, she stated that the public-ness of genre implied a shared agreement, a passive recognition within a cult audience that creates a series of contradictions between genre/culture, life-work/imaginary work, and ideology/aesthetics. Therefore, the use of genre requires an awareness of these polemics, and concurrently the acknowledgement that genricity and nationalism are fluid and not fixed. It is this awareness, often represented in Irish cinema's reflexivity, that makes it possible for Irish genres to exist. These ideas suggest to me that Irish genre cinema is in perpetual dialogue with itself, or rather, that a dialogue between historical genricity and Irish genricity exists within the filmic text.

Gledhill suggested that national cinemas incorporate Hollywood directly and indirectly, often hybridizing itself within multiple genre frameworks. Similar to Barry Monahan's description of the semantics and syntactics of Irish genre cinema, Gledhill suggested that the tropes and conventions of Irish genre cinema are infused with Irish specificity within an American genre framework. However, while American genre may strive for balance, Irish cinema invokes imbalance, a recognition of difference and sameness within its narrative. For example, adult characters in Irish cinema often strive to negotiate their identity while the child protagonist lives in a fractured world. This sense of displaced identity echoes Temple-Herr's notion of the box, the psychological transition from the past to the present.

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