

Truth, Dare or Promise:  
Art and Documentary Revisited

Edited by

Jill Daniels, Cahal McLaughlin and Gail Pearce

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**P U B L I S H I N G**

Truth, Dare or Promise: Art and Documentary Revisited,  
Edited by Jill Daniels, Cahal McLaughlin and Gail Pearce  
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## CHAPTER NINE

# PLACING THE THREE BERNADETTES: AUDIO-VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF BERNADETTE DEVLIN MCALISKEY

LIZ GREENE

This chapter considers three documentary films made for different exhibition spaces, on television (*Bernadette Devlin*, John Goldschmidt, 1969),<sup>1</sup> in the art gallery (*Bernadette*, Duncan Campbell, 2008)<sup>2</sup> and in cinema and on television (*Bernadette: notes on a political journey*, Lelia Doolan, 2011),<sup>3</sup> and draws from interviews with these filmmakers, and the Civil Rights activist, Bernadette Devlin McAliskey.

Utilising archival footage, music, and interview material, these three artifacts span a forty-two year production and release schedule, and all attempt to portray Bernadette through a contemporary lens. In a post “Peace Process” Northern Ireland, Doolan’s film asserts that Bernadette remains on the margins due to her revolutionary Socialist politics, and not, as has been argued, because of her continued support for the armed Republican struggle. Edward Saïd’s work on collective memory is drawn upon to outline why there has been a frequent need to (re)turn to Bernadette and her political perspectives.

Bernadette Devlin, later Bernadette McAliskey, and/or Bernadette Devlin McAliskey became active in student politics whilst studying for her degree in Psychology and Celtic Studies at Queen’s University Belfast in the late 1960s. She was a founding member of the student organisation, People’s Democracy, which was launched at the start of the Civil Rights movement. This movement, which emerged in 1968, in Northern Ireland, surfaced due to poor housing conditions and high unemployment rates for the Catholic population, although, it has to be stressed that the Protestant working class were also suffering under the Unionist government policies of the day. The

Civil Rights movement was spurred on by events taking place internationally, particularly in France, Czechoslovakia, the USA, and Mexico. Despite brutal repression by state forces, the Civil Rights movement gained significant support because of a policy of non-violence, uniting Catholics and Protestants in opposition to discrimination and poverty.

In 1969, at the age of twenty-one Bernadette stood as a Unity candidate for the Mid-Ulster constituency, and was quickly seen as a beacon for the movement. It is within this ferment that she was elected to the House of Commons. She remains to this day the youngest female MP ever to be elected to the UK Parliament. In the press she was referred to as “Fidel Castro in a miniskirt”, “Cassandra” and the “Irish Joan of Arc”, all labels that Bernadette has been keen to eschew.

Bernadette held on to her seat until 1974. During this period she spent time in prison for organising the defence of the Bogside, a Catholic area in Derry city. This defence, against police repression became known as the Battle of the Bogside and was a significant high point in the Civil Rights movement. She later became a founding member of the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) but quickly became disillusioned with the paramilitary wing, the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) and the power it held over the political wing. Bernadette became a leading spokeswoman on the H Block Committee, campaigning against poor conditions in the prisons, and is the only surviving member of that body, the rest having been murdered by Loyalist paramilitaries. Bernadette was shot seven times in an ambush at her home in 1981, but survived this assassination attempt. She took a step back from high profile politics in the mid 1980s and now works for the South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP) campaigning for migrant rights at a local community level and is still an advocate for revolutionary Socialist politics combining her community work with a continued activism. Bernadette is a passionate class organiser and has been outspoken against sectarian politics and the power sharing Stormont government, which has been in situ since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. At the last general election in Northern Ireland, she offered her support to People Before Profit, a broad left organisation founded by, the Socialist Workers Party, a Trotskyist organisation.

As I outline above there have been three documentaries made about Bernadette, so, why make a documentary about Bernadette?, or, more

importantly, why did three filmmakers decide to make a film about her and why did two of them come out within a three-year period between 2008 and 2011? John Goldschmidt's *Bernadette Devlin* is a clear example of a verité documentary, capturing fly on the wall material in the turbulent political moments of 1969. But, to make two films during the "Peace Process" ten years on from when the Good Friday Agreement was signed, needs to be analysed here. Interestingly, both Doolan and Campbell hail from the Republic of Ireland, Dublin to be more precise, and both spent time studying in Belfast, Doolan at Queen's University Belfast and Campbell at the University of Ulster (Belfast). Bernadette's politics clearly spoke to both filmmakers and artists about a particular time and period in recent Northern Irish history. Both engaged in a significant archival research process to bring Bernadette out from the side-lines, jolting our collective memories.

Edward Saïd noted the need for collective memory in post-colonial societies. Writing specifically about Palestine and the collective struggle for nationhood, he states:

people now look to this refashioned memory, especially in its collective forms to give themselves a coherent identity, a national narrative, a place in the world, though, as I have indicated, the processes of memory are frequently, if not always, manipulated and intervened in for sometimes urgent purposes in the present.<sup>4</sup>

In 1969, if we take Saïd's lead in our analysis, then we can clearly see there were urgent conditions that needed to be dealt with in the present and Goldschmidt's documentary project had the vital task of addressing that critical moment. This programme was made utilising a limited amount of archival material mixed with new footage to weave together a Civil Rights narrative. But if we are now in a post "Peace Process" phase and have all moved forward into the promised land of power sharing, then why have two subsequent projects centred on Bernadette? With Campbell and Doolan we have films that are re-familiarising audiences with the political ideas of Bernadette.

From the outside, Northern Ireland may appear to be a safer more settled society in comparison to the height of the Troubles. However, the power sharing government in Stormont has in fact increased the sectarian division in Northern Ireland. More peace walls have gone up since the "Peace Process", than were ever in place during the Troubles.<sup>5</sup> We now live in a segregated society that has not delivered economically or socially

for the people who live here. The recent tension over the flying of the Union Flag at Belfast City Hall, and the continued “Flegs” protests indicate a deeply divided and unjust society. The power sharing government has tied Unionist, Loyalist, Republican and Nationalist politicians to the mandate of Westminster. The austerity measures imposed in England and Wales are similarly being implemented with an Orange and Green hue. It is within this frame, a state that is economically propped up by Westminster, where further austerity over the coming years is to be imposed on those who can least afford it, that we see the need to question how we best move forward. Unemployment figures are high, wages are low, hospitals and schools are being closed. The traditional political representation of working class Catholics and Protestants has either been bought off in government, as is the case with Sinn Féin, or has been knocked back with the death of the visionary Loyalist leader, David Ervine of the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP). In times of austerity, sectarian tensions are ratcheted up as the traditional divide and rule tactics of the sectarian parties in power offer no solution to the political or economic failings in society.

In this political arena, it is clear why filmmakers and artists are making work that questions this status quo. Bernadette is an obvious inspiration here, she offers a consistent oppositional ideal that stresses that the economic demands need to be met in order for the two communities to move forward. So, to reformulate Bernadette, with a reanimation of the archive allows the gallery visitor and film audience to take part in that process. Saïd suggests that: ‘[C]ollective memory is not an inert and passive thing, but a field of activity in which past events are selected, reconstructed, maintained, modified and endowed with political meaning’.<sup>6</sup> This active field of enquiry into the archive requires the various audiences to question who Bernadette is and was, what she stands and stood for, and opens a door to what could potentially be. The aspirations of these films offer a way out of the sectarian quagmire, not in a clearly defined sense, but in a way that challenges the homogenous view that we are all in this boat together. We see an art piece exhibited in 2008, and a feature documentary released in 2011, sharing a common production period, both addressing the urgent task of the present conditions.

I interviewed Campbell, Doolan and Goldschmidt over the telephone and via Skype and email to discuss with them their documentary representations of Bernadette. These conversations flowed across many topics, but there were four reoccurring themes that cropped up in relation to their work:



production, the archive, exhibition and politics. In this chapter, I will consider these films in relation to the discussion I had with these filmmakers, unpicking their various practices and outlining their methodologies. I also interviewed Bernadette Devlin McAliskey and discussed these various representations with her.

### ***Bernadette Devlin (John Goldschmidt)***

This documentary programme opens with archival footage of Bernadette sitting on top of a car. We hear the roar of the crowd and a news reporter say: 'Here is the news for today, Friday, the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 1969. The twenty-one year old student, Miss Bernadette Devlin has won the Mid-Ulster by election. The result declared just after 4 o'clock this morning was, Miss Devlin 33,648, Miss Anna Forrest, of the Unionist [Party], 29,431. Majority 4,211.'

After the title 'Bernadette Devlin' the archival footage continues, contextualising through voice-over that 'Miss Devlin will be twenty two next Wednesday and will be the youngest MP at Westminster since 1919 and the youngest woman ever elected to the House of Commons'. We see and hear the sensation her success has caused locally and the impact she is having on an audience of all ages.

The documentary cuts to Goldschmidt's footage of Bernadette enjoying a drink and cigarette in a pub. She begins to sing "Óró sé de bheath abhaile" while the crowd join in the session. We are introduced to a young woman out with her friends, letting her hair down. She does not look unique or different to her peers of the day. We see behind the public image of this young activist, with exposure to her walking on the beach, sitting watching television, and on the telephone to Mr Robert Porter, Minister for Home Affairs, during the Battle of the Bogside. We are exposed to Bernadette's politics, which are clearly marked here as Socialist. We see her organising the defence of the Bogside, taking responsibility for the women and young children, offering tactical advice on how best to defend the area from police assault, in every sense organising the resistance. Goldschmidt's documentary continues to be an exciting portrait of a radical activist at the peak of the Civil Rights struggle in Northern Ireland.

This documentary makes some use of the archive to provide a backstory, including news footage, political cartoons, and newspaper and family photographs, but in the main this documentary is made using a cinema

verité style, with handheld Éclair 16mm cameras and portable sound recording equipment. Goldschmidt and his crew cover considerable ground, shooting fearless footage in the height of battles and riots. There is one montage sequence set to Thunderclap Newman's 'Something in the Air', but apart from this scene the rest of the documentary offers discrete glimpses into Bernadette's political ideas through direct interviews, and showing her political engagement in Derry, Westminster and the USA.



*Bernadette Devlin* (John Goldschmidt, 1969, ATV, 51 mins)

During the interview sequences with Bernadette, we see archival footage utilised, either as still photographs or moving image to accompany some of the momentous events that Bernadette is describing. We see Bernadette alone in London, moving within a foreign land, that of the press association at the Dorchester Hotel. She knocks over the sugar, and nervously comments on this, before delivering an unapologetic speech about how she will never be a politician. This then cuts to Bernadette marching with her comrades in People's Democracy, singing the revolutionary anthem "The Internationale". Bernadette in voice-over informs us that she knows what poverty and inequality is, she is positioned more comfortably here with the people in Derry, than in a hotel in London. Bernadette is seen making Socialist speeches calling for the unity of Catholics and Protestants. She is generous with her time, signing autographs for those in the crowd afterwards. We see Bernadette on the coast, reflecting on her ideas, and religious beliefs, whilst idly playing with a medal of the Virgin Mary in her Claddagh-ringed hand.<sup>7</sup> The

documentary cuts to an assistant in a telephone box reading out an article written by Bernadette for a newspaper, Bernadette is shown to be asleep in the car. The documentary is reflective throughout showing us an activist who is critically unpicking her own role and place in society.

I asked Goldschmidt about his motivations to make such a documentary. He discussed the production of this television documentary and his full editorial control over the material, and noted:

When Bernadette was elected as a Member of Parliament, I suggested making a film about her to the Head of Documentaries at ATV, I thought it would be great and Bob Heller immediately said yes, let's do that. So I tried to meet Bernadette and she thought it was a good idea. I was fortunate in being of the right age to be able to make films about people of my age, at the right time, when there was no interference editorially in a way that subsequently was enforced on television companies to do with current affairs. So it was a golden period.<sup>8</sup>

This is clearly something that Goldschmidt does not feel would be possible in television today. He went on to stress the success of the documentary:

The reason the film worked, and probably still has some emotional impact is because Bernadette Devlin was totally open, didn't ever say, "don't film this", didn't ever try to influence anything. She went about her business; I went about what I thought I should do to make the best film. There was never any tension, never any disagreement about anything.<sup>9</sup>

To be able to freely set about making the documentary with little interference from the television company and/or the protagonist was a successful combination for him. Although he did suggest that the programme did have its detractors when it aired: 'The film went out and forty five Members of Parliament tried to stop it, complaining about it afterwards. It was a major event for ITV it got a lot of coverage, there was a lot of controversy.'<sup>10</sup> However, Goldschmidt did succeed in making his programme without interference.

When asked about his use of archival material and what this contributed to his film, he emphasized:

I don't want to make films based on archive material; I want to make films about living people in the present day, making a traditional documentary, I really wasn't interested in making film out of archive. It is just when you are dealing with Bernadette Devlin and you get to make the film a week

after she has been elected to Parliament, you have to tell the story beforehand. I wasn't around then so I had to use other material to be able to illustrate how she had ended up as the youngest Member of Parliament, in Westminster.<sup>11</sup>

To Goldschmidt it was important to make his work as contemporaneously as possible. The *verité* footage of Bernadette at the Battle of the Bogside was key to this success. I asked Goldschmidt about the extraordinary footage he and his crew captured. When asked whether there were two cameras at the Bogside, he stated:

No, there would have been one cameraman at a time. I went back, I went there on several occasions, and I probably had a different cameraman for a different trip. Bill Brayne was the guy in the Bogside, he was really terrific... We were hiding and shooting out of some apartment window when that B Special policeman fires his pistol at us... He was fearless and technically these 16mm Éclair cameras had only been around for a while so you could really go anywhere and shoot anything and you could just have it on your shoulder and shoot. I didn't think about footage, which of course was much more expensive in those days than today but there is only so many hours and only so much you can film in a busy day. The camera can only churn over so much, but we shot everything that moved in the Bogside. We ran around, it was him and me and the sound recordist, there was just the three of us and we were running around everywhere and not sleeping and just excited, the adrenaline of the situation, to be able to be filming all of this with total access. There were the two sides, behind the police line, and on the Bogside side of it, and of course we could cross over from one to the other, and the others didn't but I didn't have any identification, we were a camera crew, we are filming, we are doing this. When you are making a film you are allowed to do whatever needs to be done, because you are making a film. Nobody really attempted to interfere, if anything the people on the Bogside side of things knew who I was and I could just go anywhere, everyone was just trying to facilitate my access to whatever was happening.<sup>12</sup>

To have caught such footage with such a small crew was a matter of being well organised, well connected, and in the right place at the right time. The technological developments in a short five-year period allowed for portable equipment to be used by a small documentary crew.

When asked about the representation of Bernadette's politics in his programme and how this aligned with his own political perspective at the time, Goldschmidt noted:

She saw herself as a revolutionary Socialist in a political way and did not want to be involved in sectarianism, whether it was the Protestant working class people being represented by Rev. Ian Paisley or the anti-Protestant Nationalism. She was in favour of all ordinary people, all working people, and not for sectarianism. I would have been very sympathetic towards any kind of Socialist, Republican meaning non-monarchy, meaning Democratic kind of aspirations.<sup>13</sup>

Goldschmidt was clear in his shared anti-sectarian, democratic principles and outlined that he would not have been comfortable with the development of terrorism within the Republican struggle of the 1970s and 1980s.

Goldschmidt's documentary is surprisingly fresh today, with its use of handheld camera techniques, an eloquent montage sequence of the Battle of the Bogside, and the extensive access to Bernadette outside of the public arena. Goldschmidt did utilise the archive to a limited extent to tell a backstory, but it is also clear why other filmmakers have made use of his footage for their documentaries. Goldschmidt's documentary is exemplary in outlining a young female revolutionary as public representative.

### ***Bernadette* (Duncan Campbell)**

Campbell's *Bernadette* is an experimental work made for the art gallery. The film first premiered at the Queen's Film Theatre, at the ninth Belfast Film Festival, on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008, and then enjoyed a four-week exhibition at Belfast Exposed. The film, lasting thirty-eight minutes was screened every hour at Belfast Exposed, not on a loop, and was therefore somewhere in between the traditional screening practices of narrative film and art gallery installation. Campbell's film interweaves archival footage, some of which was in Goldschmidt's earlier work, with fictitious re-enactment, animation in the form of scratching on film, an asynchronous soundtrack, and a reading from Devlin's autobiography and a fictitious voice-over by an actor.

The film opens with a black screen, words appear on screen, but without context, we see surnames, which we can surmise were people involved in the making of the film. Interspersed with these names are the words "BEGIN THEN AGAIN" which is the one clear pointer as to how we should consider this work. We are presented first with a fictitious Bernadette; the camera crawls up the leg of a chair and rests on the image of a foot. It is not Bernadette's foot, but these fictitious elements are so well conceived that they cut seamlessly with interview footage of

Bernadette. What we hear on the soundtrack are buzzes, birds, and alarms. We then see a sequence of interview footage cut up, without Bernadette's spoken word. This section is the most challenging and experimental in the film, we are introduced to a mediated personality, and made aware of how words, and images are used to construct a particular persona. Bernadette is laid bare of meaning, and by reducing her vocal representations to the ridiculous sounds of birds and alarms, we begin to question what we know about Bernadette, and how integral her ideas are to the representation of a political activist.



*Bernadette* (Duncan Campbell, 2008, Scottish Arts Council, Scottish Screen, 38mins)

The second section of the film is more traditional, with archival footage pieced together, but the seams are exposed with hard cuts to black between the footage. The sound rarely bridges these cuts, and often the synchronous sound is replaced by other sound or silence. In this way we are made aware of the limitations of the archive.

The final section leads on from an interview in 1974 where Bernadette is describing her childhood. The footage cuts to a reading by an actor from Bernadette's autobiography *The Price of My Soul*.<sup>14</sup> We see mirrored images of Bernadette, and then we hear a scripted piece that is intertwined with this autobiography. A second narrative voice challenges the autobiography questioning, 'Christ! When did you start saying I to myself to yourself all the time...I...I...and all the time you'.<sup>15</sup> The imagery

moves through archival footage, to new segments shot by Campbell. We see the sky and a bird flying through the frame, but we sense this is merely a glimpse and the bird remains free. The ending is as experimental as the opening, bookending the film with the sense that Bernadette, or anyone in the public eye for that matter, is unknowable and is only briefly caught, as was the bird in the camera frame.

When asked why he wanted to make an artwork about Bernadette, Campbell suggested that he felt that the representation of Bernadette was key to how he would frame his film. It was through spending time in the archive that it became apparent to him how previous representations were so problematic:

I was very conscious from the start that what I was dealing with was the representation of politics, not the things themselves. The nature of the material I used, the archival material, I did a lot of research into People's Democracy and Bernadette Devlin, and with organisations she was affiliated to. When I first got sight of the archival material in a lot of cases the narration that came with it, or the inflection it had really skewed it. There were a lot of positives and negatives and prejudices embedded in the material itself. That took over that sense of representation of her because one of things that became very clear if you take the period of time I was looking at from 1969 to 1974, that period of her life, not life in the personal sense, but her political life, in terms of statements that she made, she was enormously irritated by the misrepresentation of her that went on, and the misconstruing of her and her politics from positive and negative ways, but the positive seemed to be more of an irritation I felt, a kind of "Joan of Arc" a "Cassandra", the epitome of Irish mythology of Nationalism and so on. That fed into what I was thinking about, looking at this material as representation.<sup>16</sup>

He spoke about the production period and the use of archival material in his film, and noted:

It was sporadic but it did take four years, in fits and starts, for example, I was able to get a certain amount of material as a screener copy from the various different archives. Which wasn't a bad thing in a way, it meant you could spend quite a lot of time with it. But more importantly you could go away from it and come back to it, which is the thing you never get to do. It did take about four years from when I first thought about it, to when it was finally completed, but a lot of that had to do with the fact that I knew I did not have the money to complete it in the way that I wanted to complete it.<sup>17</sup>

The lack of money enhanced his project by giving him a longer production and post-production process, allowing for more time and reflection to consider the material he was looking at and listening to. When asked about the cost of the film, Campbell stated:

I had an award of £16,000, which I massively over spent; I ended up having to get a loan. The first time it was shown it won a prize, it won another prize as well. I was able to pay back the loan pretty quickly, but it was pretty crazy doing it that way. Using archival footage since then I am much more realistic about the budget in advance, what it will cost.<sup>18</sup>

These loans financially paid off for Campbell and he was able to recoup his investment. His prize money also facilitated the completion of Doolan's later film. In an earlier interview I conducted with Doolan, she mentioned that Campbell had given her some money to help her finalise her project. I asked Campbell about this and he responded: 'Once I managed to pay off my debts, it did seem fitting because I met Lelia, and through Lelia I met Bernadette, it all came full circle'.<sup>19</sup> This assistance of another filmmaker's project is exceptionally generous and underpins the political ideals present in both subject matter and production process.

Discussing the politics of Bernadette and his Socialist sympathies I asked Campbell about how he set about representing this in his film. He stated:

Personally I do have sympathies with that [Socialist] political development. I think more than that I was kind of interested in the unfulfilled potential. It seemed to me that that had become possible again after a certain period of cooling off. For example in 1998 to make that film it still would have quite polarised responses to it. If you are making any kind of film about Northern Ireland, it is one thing or another, basically a sectarian one thing or other. Having a period when things are cooling off in between, it becomes possible to look at those nuances and look at the potential that was around.<sup>20</sup>

Campbell's politics, like Goldschmidt's, share some of the Socialist perspectives of Bernadette and are clearly anti-sectarian in sentiment. The need to address the unfulfilled potential of the revolutionary ideals of 1969 - 1974 clearly marks Campbell's film as being both a political and artistic work. I asked Campbell about his work being shown in the different exhibition spaces of the art gallery and the cinema and he explained the key differences for him:

I go along to cinema and a film exhibition space with a slightly different set of expectations. The whole architecture of the experience conditions



that to some extent, they are different contexts. There are advantages to showing things in the gallery space. First of all it allows the possibility to show things on a loop, it allows for repeated viewing if people want to do that. It doesn't feel like an exact fit either, especially if it is a narrative film that you have to sit down and watch from beginning to end as opposed to art installation, which is maybe more ambient and you can drift in and out. There is a sense of a slightly uncomfortable fit, but I think that can be productive. You are questioning what you are watching, where you are watching it, which maybe is not a bad thing. It does seem to be the way things are moving, art house cinemas have to adapt to survive. Galleries have become a refuge for cultural cinema.<sup>21</sup>

Campbell's work is most suited to the Gallery, with his experimental approach to structure and content. He discussed the future of Art House cinema and suggests that perhaps this will also move towards the art gallery allowing for two differing spaces to become more closely aligned. Campbell's documentary for the art gallery is the most challenging representation of Bernadette. We are tested as an audience, needing to interpret and reinterpret the audio-visual images and question how we assess Bernadette and the mediated images we are presented with. The representation of Bernadette through the extensive use of archive and fiction is unclear at times and requires repeated viewings. Thankfully, the art gallery space allows us such an approach.

### ***Bernadette: notes on a political journey (Lelia Doolan)***

The Irish language broadcaster TG4 funded Doolan's feature length documentary film, *Bernadette: notes on a political journey*. It played at film festivals and had a limited cinematic release. The film won the best documentary at the Galway Film Fleadh, and then went on to pick up the Paddy Hill Award, which is the audience prize at Document Nine: International Humanitarian Rights Documentary Film Festival, Glasgow; the Irish Film and Television Academy (IFTA) Award for the best feature length documentary film; and was nominated for the John Grierson Award at the London Film Festival. The film was screened on TG4 on January 31st 2012 to coincide with the fortieth anniversary of Bloody Sunday. During that week, the film was sold out for its week long run at the Queen's Film Theatre, Belfast. The film has subsequently been broadcast in January 2013 on TG4.

Two reviews of the film outline the central role of Bernadette in the framing of the documentary. Both acknowledge what Doolan set out to accomplish, which was to let Bernadette shape the discussion through

reflective commentary. Donald Clarke notes, ‘Doolan allows McAliskey to follow her own map through history’.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Jerry Whyte also stresses the skilful role of Doolan in weaving together an intricate portrait of a political era and revolutionary. He suggests, ‘The political journey of the film’s title is both Devlin’s and Ireland’s. Doolan elucidates some of the most complex and turbulent political events of the late 20th century without burying us in detail’.<sup>23</sup>



*Bernadette: notes on a political journey* (Lelia Doolan, 2011, TG4, 88 mins)

Doolan’s film weaves interviews with Bernadette shot over a nine-year period, with an extensive use of archival material to visually represent what Bernadette is discussing. The film closes with some contemporary shots of Belfast accompanied by poster images of Socialist political representatives, standing for the General Election in 2011. The film uses a limited amount of textual information, and contains no voice-over except for some narration from the archival footage. The music of Leonard Cohen punctuates the film in a number of places, commenting on the action, most notably with “Everybody Knows” in a montage sequence of the global Civil Rights movements in the late 1960s.

Reviewing Doolan’s film *Bernadette: notes on a political journey* Jeff Robson reaffirms the need to consider Bernadette’s opinions in relation to Northern Ireland. He suggests: ‘The close-up interviews with Devlin, older and calmer, but still passionate about politics and the rights of her community, form a vivid contrast, as well as illustrating that the

underlying problems of Northern Irish society have not simply vanished'.<sup>24</sup>

Doolan's film is most successful in representing Bernadette's voice and ideals, we are taken on Bernadette's political journey, and are allowed access to what Bernadette wants to discuss. We are offered some information about what she is doing now, however, Bernadette's marginal political positioning is not extensively referred to. It is in the concluding section of the film, when Bernadette discusses the "Peace Process" and post "Peace Process", that we witness her at her sharpest, denigrating the Sinn Féin and Republican leadership for selling out the struggle for what could have been achieved in the early 1970s. Bernadette critiques this period as a series of failures to deliver for ordinary working class people in Northern Ireland.

It is Bernadette's political perspective that keeps us engaged and enthralled throughout Doolan's feature length documentary. Doolan discussed the reasons why she made a documentary about Bernadette:

The idea of the documentary was to set a record into a history of that period, I felt that a lot of the events had at least been publicly photographed and I would use those as a basis for a portrait of Bernadette's public work and life, and ideas, it was always my intention to make this about her ideas, attitudes and political stand point, in a long life in the public eye.<sup>25</sup>

It is still uncommon to make a documentary film about political ideas and not focus on a personality. Doolan achieves a complex and rigorous testament of an evolving political perspective within a changing society. When asked about how she used the archival material to this end, and whether the archive shaped the final film, Doolan noted:

Actually it was more the narrative from the interviews with Bernadette, that decided it, I had done a lot beforehand - simply a chronological look at what had happened publicly, over her public career and pronouncements and so forth, and I had therefore a string of events in my mind, and when we began to talk which was in 2002, it didn't dictate anything. We talked it over. It really was up to Bernadette to decide what she wanted to say, and I was merely putting it into place as we went along.<sup>26</sup>

The fact that Bernadette led and shaped this documentary through her political voice indicates the collaborative and participatory methods that Doolan employed as a filmmaker. The film served that political ideal. Doolan made her film in order that new audiences would see it and be

exposed to Bernadette's ideas. I asked Doolan about the representation of politics in the film. She responded by saying: 'Her objective is to create or to be part of the creation of a Socialist republic, which she would regard, and I would agree, is a form of political arrangement, which enables people to thrive, to have a real sense of their own humanity'.<sup>27</sup>

Doolan's Socialist sympathies, like Goldschmidt's and Campbell's goes a significant step further in offering an overtly Socialist reading of history. How the film would be produced and exhibited was key to that framework. Over email correspondence I asked Doolan whether she conceived of the project for television or the cinema, given that the Irish language television station TG4 was the main funder, she replied:

Always thought of a theatrical release. Always thought of it as feature length. [...]The most important thing for me was to get the story told in a coherent, rounded way. And I generally think that 90 minutes is as much as most people can sustain on the trot. Maybe a remnant of my early cinema going. The features were always about 90 minutes. Maybe that idea got into my head.<sup>28</sup>

Doolan has had the film screened at film festivals, short runs in Art House cinemas and, as I previously mentioned, twice on TG4. Doolan discussed how she is now struggling to get the film released on DVD, as she could only financially secure cinematic and broadcasting rights for the archival material. Doolan stated that the archival footage cost in the region of forty thousand euros. This high cost is a frustration and significantly impacts on the exhibition and distribution rights for DVD release.

Doolan's feature length film allows the greatest access to Bernadette's ideas. The film's agenda, allowing Bernadette to chart the terrain of the documentary, hides a skilful and artful approach to the form. The use of music, archive, contemporary footage and interview are interwoven to such an extent that the construction appears invisible. The pacing and rhythm is effective and engaging in delivering a film about the development of political ideals over a forty-year period.

Goldschmidt, Campbell and Doolan have represented Bernadette as a protagonist in a political era under scrutiny and have challenged mainstream representations of her work and ideology. We are given a much greater sense of Bernadette as class organiser and revolutionary Socialist through Goldschmidt's cinema vérité documentary style, Campbell's reimagining and problematising of the archive with fictional

material, and Doolan's direct interviews with Bernadette and the chronological narrative placed around this archival material.

So what does Bernadette make of these representations? One film was made when Bernadette was young and at the height of her political career. Two subsequent films were made within the past five years. Bernadette had no prior knowledge of Campbell's film, but was an active participant in Doolan's feature. I asked Bernadette about these films and what she felt about the various forms of political representation at play here. On Goldschmidt's film she noted:

My only excuse for that was that I was young and innocent. That's embarrassing, that's what that is. I look at it and say, God Almighty, you look like one affected brat, posing and walking slow through snow, crossing roads and pondering, and all I can say is I was young, innocent and obviously compliant. No, it wasn't a bad film; it is a bit airbrushed, it has that airbrushed effect, and I've never seen that again.<sup>29</sup>

It is clear Bernadette was not overly keen on seeing herself on screen and has not gone back to look at Goldschmidt's work in the intervening forty-four years. Her memory of the film is supported by the re-appropriation of the material in other filmmakers' works. She spoke fondly of Goldschmidt and his project, but was uncomfortable looking at herself on screen from that earlier period. Bernadette was not aware of Campbell's subsequent film until it was completed. She noted:

With Duncan Campbell, I had no idea it was done until it was done. Duncan kind of got away with it. People are entitled to perceive me in whatever way they want. I am me and people are entitled to have their own perception, analysis and construction of that. It is not for me to say, "you are not entitled to your perception of me"... Duncan got away with that, he had put this very interesting footage of me, which was real, I couldn't say that is not me, this was real, that was my face, although I did say to him, "Those were not my feet, what the hell were they doing in there?" And to juxtapose them in a way so that he created his own piece and his own way of understanding and his own message of what he wanted to say to those people. I don't have a problem with that.<sup>30</sup>

The discussion on Campbell's film and the deconstructed images and meanings presented led on to a discussion of a fiction film that has been tabled on the life of Bernadette, the working title is *The Roaring Girl*. In 2008, the same year Campbell's film came out; Aisling Walsh announced that she would make *The Roaring Girl* starring Sally Hawkins. Bernadette

was unequivocal about how abhorrent she found the idea of this project, she stressed:

Where I have a real problem, if you go to Aisling Walsh, who is making a fictional film about a woman who is not me, but who is me. I am not an artefact for her to chisel, I'm not a lump of stone for her to shape and call me. That to me is abuse, absolute abuse for somebody to do that knowing the depth of objection I have in principle to it.<sup>31</sup>

I asked Bernadette did she think it would be possible that the film could open up new audiences to revolutionary Socialist ideas? She considers the making of the film as an abusive act:

No, that is like saying there is a positive side to slavery, that's like saying there is a positive side to a man beating his wife, she'll get used to it. I'm totally black and white on that. If somebody is willing to be used as an artefact in that way, that is a different question, and I would be saying to people think very carefully, because this is not you, this is some god created in your image and likeness, or some effigy but that's their business. If somebody is a willing, consenting participant in being an artefact in that way, I'm not saying they shouldn't do it. But I'm saying art is no excuse for the violation of my individual existence and integrity as a human being, to be turned into an artefact without my knowledge and consent...You cannot in the name of art or education fundamentally violate the right of somebody simply because you have decided they are public property, and I am not public property, I'm not even dead.<sup>32</sup>

However, she did play an active and participatory role in Doolan's feature documentary. There was much discussion between Doolan and Bernadette about how the documentary could be structured, she noted:

Now one of the things I said to Lelia was, and she artistically turned out to be right, "You can't take someone like me, Lelia, and have me talking about me without anybody else saying hold on a minute, I would like to challenge that particular-" and she said, "Yes you can, because it is not simply entertainment, it is education. You can show that piece of work and the conversation, which follows after it raises all those questions. Precisely because this was a self-reflexive piece on who you are and who you were, it makes no pretence to be an objective piece of work. It is a particular perspective which is yours, looking back on your life." Artistically she turned out to be right, I thought that would definitely not work, and I really didn't want to do it either... She went to a film festival for an exploratory grant, which would enable her to do the filming and it was a small grant...She moved on to a significant grant and a contract and I didn't know, and she was right, if I had have known, that film wouldn't have been made. I would have stopped her saying, "No that's all archive

material for under the bed, Lelia, that's not for TG4". She got away with it, because, she is Lelia, she is great. She has an integrity about her work and she had a good argument.<sup>33</sup>

In discussing the filmmaking process with Bernadette it is apparent that she found making a film, even with a friend like Doolan, a difficult task at various points. There were some discussions about what should go in and what should stay out of the documentary. There were moments that needed further clarification and emphases that needed to be stressed to reflect a developing political ideology.

I discussed with Bernadette the sympathetic treatment of her Socialist politics in all three films, and raised a question about the lack of detailed discussion around Republican Socialist perspectives. She suggested:

I'll tell you what I think it is about, it's a bit like a Rubik's cube, the people only see the face they are looking at and even when it is all mixed up they will pick out the bits they want and maybe it is from the perspective of the three people who are making the film come from. Also I think, and it is with a degree of respect to all of them, that they are filmmakers and artists, not political. They are artists with sympathy in a broad sense to the Left perspective, and it is probably easier for them then to do that. If they were artists coming from a Republican perspective, I think the end film would pose a challenge for the artist's politics, that would make it hard for them to make. So that an artist with a sympathy towards Republicanism rather than Socialism, Republicanism as in Nationalism, rather than Republican Socialism, that would be a harder thing for an artist, it would be a harder canvas for such an artist. Then if you were a Socialist trying to make a film that might be a hard canvas too.<sup>34</sup>

There are still questions to be raised about the role of Republicanism, the armed struggle and the political affiliations Bernadette held through the 1970s and 1980s. I questioned Bernadette about this gap in relation to her own Republican Socialist identity in the later documentaries and she responded:

The bits that you are asking about are on Lelia's editing floor. I think that is because she had to make one film, and that's what I am saying you have to make one film in a certain period of time or another. So you try maybe to find what is the most coherent way through here. Maybe it would be a more politically interesting film, all the contradictions in the other aspect of that, because if you were to look at, to follow the thread not the broad quest for freedom, if you were to follow that thread through I suppose national identity that would be quite interesting because it would be a

conflicted and tension ridden narrative, which might actually be a very interesting one to do.<sup>35</sup>

Bernadette is an experienced political representative, with many years of exposure in the media. She is hesitant to be put on film, even by her closest allies, and certainly is opposed to the idea of fictitious representations of her life on screen. She does see the merit in these documentary works being made and does value the skills of the filmmakers who have created these representations of her. She did contribute extensively over a nine-year period to Doolan's project, and although she does suggest she wouldn't have done it if she thought it would be a film for public consumption, that was both screened and broadcast, she does believe that Doolan was right to make the film in the way that she did. To suggest, 'that's all archive material for under the bed'<sup>36</sup> and to leave it there would be a disservice to the political ideals of Bernadette. There is scope for a fourth documentary, one that challenges and questions Bernadette further on the broader tensions between Republican Socialism and Socialism, but that filmmaker may need to access the archive material, and Doolan's footage as archival material, as Bernadette is adamant her 'job is done'.

In unpicking the use of the archive, Lev Manovich in his book *The Language of New Media*, outlines the key differences between the database and narrative, he notes:

As a cultural form, the database represents the world as a list of items, and it refuses to order this list. In contrast, a narrative creates a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items (events). Therefore, database and narrative are natural enemies. Competing for the same territory of human culture, each claims an exclusive right to make meaning out of the world.<sup>37</sup>

Here we can see how privileging the database, or for our purposes the archive, is oppositional to narrative structure. Campbell's film utilises the archival footage and presents it as a disjuncture, much like a database of material, it is not seamless, we are made aware of the apparatus at every turn, hard cuts to black, lacking sound bridges to suture the image, and at times, he utilises an asynchronous soundtrack. The archive/database is used to problematise a sense of narrative, and other people's constructions of Bernadette. He walks a tight line, while producing a gallery film that is all about representation, he offers no easy way into that representation, instead, bookending his film with new material he shot himself. Martin Herbert stresses the sutured quality of Campbell's film:



The central part of *Bernadette* is a patchwork of documentary, but the whole thirty seven-minute film is enacted at a kind of remove: at the same time as it recounts, it performs the idea of trying to understand the meaning of a life - and a time - based on existent materials relating to it. So we are reading in the dark.<sup>38</sup>

Campbell's film always shows us that the archive/database is incomplete; the archive is what it is, contradictory, biased and privileged. There is no narrative, or at least no overarching narrative that will bring us any closer to Bernadette. The archive is incomplete, and Bernadette is unknowable, and is impossible to know.

Doolan's film, made under her company, Digital Quilts, is also a patchwork of footage, but in this case chooses to make the stitching invisible to the audience. Bernadette represented in the present day, over a nine-year production process, tells us how her political development evolved. The archival material is chosen to reflect that era and visually tells her story; the interview and archive are stitched together in an elaborate quilt, which is manufactured into a cohesive whole.

It is in the archival search, in the process of making a documentary film that the filmmakers and artist are able to try and re-present and represent the re-imagined material. Numerous filmmakers have used Goldschmidt's documentary footage since it was first broadcast in 1969, which is a testament to the quality of the material, which was recorded at a time when Northern Ireland was on fire, both literally and politically.

Susan Yee in her article on the archive quotes Jacques Derrida specifying the returning need to investigate the archive:

[Because of] these radical and interminable turbulences, we must take stock today of the [archived] classical works...[C]lassical and extraordinary works move away from us at great speed, in a continually accelerated fashion. They burrow into the past at a distance more and more comparable to that which separates us from archaeological digs.<sup>39</sup>

Sometimes we need to look back, across and forward, but essentially through the archive, as Saïd has outlined, for 'urgent purposes in the present'.<sup>40</sup>

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> *Bernadette Devlin*, 1969, John Goldschmidt. England: ATV.
- <sup>2</sup> *Bernadette*, 2008, Duncan Campbell. Scotland: Scottish Arts Council, Scottish Screen.
- <sup>3</sup> *Bernadette: notes on a political journey*, 2011, Lelia Doolan. Ireland: TG4.
- <sup>4</sup> Edward Saïd, “Invention, Memory, Place”, *Critical Inquiry*, vol.26, iss.2, 2000, page 179.
- <sup>5</sup> Sean O’Hagan, “Belfast, divided in the name of peace”, *The Observer*, January 22 2012, [accessed January 7, 2013].  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2012/jan/22/peace-walls-troubles-belfast-feature>.
- <sup>6</sup> Saïd, op cit., page 185.
- <sup>7</sup> An Irish traditional ring representing love and friendship.
- <sup>8</sup> John Goldschmidt, Skype interview with author, February 27 2013.
- <sup>9</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>10</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>11</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>13</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>14</sup> Bernadette Devlin, *The Price of My Soul*, London: Pan Books, 1969.
- <sup>15</sup> For more on Campbell’s use of the fragmented voice, and the influence of Samuel Beckett in *Bernadette* see Paula Blair, “Old Borders, New Technologies: Visual Culture and Social Change in Contemporary Northern Ireland”, unpublished PhD manuscript, 2011.
- <sup>16</sup> Duncan Campbell, Telephone interview with author, March 6 2013.
- <sup>17</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>18</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> Donald Clarke, “Bernadette: Notes on a Political Journey”, *The Irish Times*, November 18 2011, [accessed January 23 2012],  
<http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/film/bernadette-notes-on-a-political-journey-1.13584>.
- <sup>23</sup> Jerry Whyte, “Free Radicals”, *Cineoutsider: beyond the mainstream*, December 11 2011, [accessed March 13 2012],  
[http://www.cineoutsider.com/articles/stories/f/free\\_radicals\\_1.html](http://www.cineoutsider.com/articles/stories/f/free_radicals_1.html).
- <sup>24</sup> Jeff Robson, “Bernadette: notes on a political journey – Film Review”, *Eye For Film*, October 14 2011, [accessed January 23 2012],  
[www.eyeforfilm.co.uk/review/bernadette-notes-on-a-political-journey-film-review-by-jeff-robson](http://www.eyeforfilm.co.uk/review/bernadette-notes-on-a-political-journey-film-review-by-jeff-robson).
- <sup>25</sup> Lelia Doolan, Telephone interview with author, February 25 2013.
- <sup>26</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>27</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>28</sup> Doolan, Email correspondence with author, March 6 2013.