

Entitlement, Empathy and the Ethics of Representation: contemporary art and the appropriation of trauma.

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Almost every day for a period in the early autumn of 2006 the face of Angelika Kluk peered out from the pages of Scottish newspapers. The 23-year-old student from Skoczow, Poland, was murdered and her body concealed beneath the floorboards of a Glasgow church. In the spring of 2008 the story of Angelika returned to the newspapers, but this time it was a controversy about an artwork, *The Other Church*, that commemorated her. In this paper I will explore the debate surrounding the exhibition of Wilhelm Sasnal's 16mm film, *The Other Church*, as part of the GI (Glasgow International) Festival. The film depicted a naked young woman miming to a song. The lyrics were drawn from statements posted on Polish websites where her murder was discussed. Before the exhibition opened a controversy arose in the press about the appropriateness of a work that focused on the death of Angelika Kluk. On 29 March 2008, the *Sunday Herald* printed an article entitled 'Fury over tribute to Angelika'.

In *Writing History, Writing Trauma* Dominick La Capra argues that the after effects of traumatic events are 'not fully owned by anyone, and in various ways, affect everyone' (2001, xi) he also cautions against the conflation of the status of victim and bystander in the representation of trauma (2001, 79). I will focus specifically on the ownership of grief as a consequence of traumatic events and who is entitled to portray that grief. In commemoration there is the possibility that a work of art can be perceived as appropriating trauma and exposing old wounds as well as having the potential to aid healing.

Biography

Mary O' Neill is currently Senior Lecturer in Critical and Contextual Studies in the School of Art & Design at the University of Lincoln, U.K. Her research is interdisciplinary and focuses on contemporary artworks as a means of discussing significant cultural issues. From an original interest in ephemeral art and notions of mortality and immortality she has published academic texts and short stories on a diverse range of subjects including attitudes towards images of the dead, boredom, loss, mourning, and contemporary art and ethics. Recent publications include 'Ephemeral Art: Telling Stories to the Dead' In *The Story of Things: reading narrative in the visual, Image and Narrative*, (2011) 'Speaking to the Dead: Images of the dead in contemporary art' *Health: Sage* Volume 15 Issue 3, May (2011), 'April is the Cruellest Month' *New Writing: International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*, 'Telling Stories: Criticism and Theory' in Tormey, J. and G. Whiteley (eds.) *Telling Stories* Cambridge Scholars Press and 'Ephemeral Art: The Art of Being Lost' in Davidson Joyce, Liz Bondi, Mick Smith and Laura Cameron (Eds.) *Emotion, Place and Culture* Ashgate.

She has been awarded several international residencies, most notable at the House of Creativity, Moscow, Banff Art Center and the Grace exhibition space New York with Angela Bartram.