Eimear Walshe, *Free State Pangs*, 2025, video

the use of the facility as a stopover by US military aircraft. Accused of trespass, Walshe is due in court later this year, the incident highlighting the contradiction that, while Ireland proclaims solidarity with Palestinians and is supportive of a Palestinian State, this politically neutral country has, since 2003, allowed US military carriers to refuel there on their way to outsourced war zones. While definitions of Ireland's neutrality have been reformulated a few times since 1922, it remains intrinsic to the republic's identity, though this is once again in question following the EU's recently increased defence spending commitments.

'Sometimes I wonder if this is a real country,' the protagonist muses, possibly referring to the division of the country's internal territorial borders, as exemplified by the film's locations of Connaught and Ulster, but it could equally refer to the lack of an embodied native language, another transgenerational 'pang'. Two intertitles follow one another, one in Irish (Gaeilge) reads: '*Tír gan teanga / Tír gan anam*', while the other in Welsh (Cymraeg) reads: '*Cenedl heb iaith, cenedl heb galon*'. They are not translated into English but followed by the intertitle: 'The Irish say without a soul. The Welsh say without a heart.' Walshe makes a link between the two countries and their different relations to their native languages. (The Irish phrase was famously proclaimed by Pádraig Pearse, one of the leading figures of the 1916 Easter Rebellion against British imperialism, while the Welsh phrase is a traditional proverb.)

Unlike the Welsh language, the Irish language has never recovered from its decimation during the modern colonial era when speaking it was a punishable offence. Preserved by Irishians (scholars of the language) in the Gaeltacht regions of the country, its enforced relearning for the rest of the population after the institution of the Free State has prevented the language from being transmitted as a mother tongue. *Free State Pangs* looks to other tongues.

In its concluding moments, the alternation between images and intertitles speeds up while the soundtrack becomes louder. Through these audio-visual rhythms, it's almost as if the lichens in the forest, the bullocks in the paddock, and the rough-hewn stones are themselves speaking of a conflicted heritage that is both irreal and all too real.

Free State Pangs was at Chapter Gallery, Cardiff from 1 March to 25 May. It is at Luan Gallery, Athlone until 22 June.

Maria Walsh is a writer and researcher based in London and Cork.

Berwick Film and Media Arts Festival

Initiated in 1977 by artist Wendy Clarke, *Endless Love Tapes* is a self-taping project and perpetually expanding archive, where people are encouraged to submit a three-minute tape of themselves talking to the camera about what love means to them. Housed in the Burr of Berwick for the duration of the programme, visitors could view previous recordings before submitting their own ruminations. Now in its 20th year, the Berwick Film and Media Arts Festival foregrounded similar encounters with the archive – as someone in the audience aptly put it, the festival 'stretched the archive' – allowing visitors to interrogate how histories are narrativised, how archival evidence shapes public memory, and how such recordings can be disrupted through interventionist tools.

In the same era that Clarke approached the video format as an apparatus to explore subjects of intimacy, the video artist and AIDS community activist Stuart Marshall exercised video as an educational tool – evident in the festival's showcase of his film *Kaposi's Sarcoma* (*A Plague and Its Symptoms*), 1983. The work was deemed lost for 40 years before artist and *AM* contributor Conal McStravick located it in an archive in Poland last year while pursuing doctoral research. Kaposi's sarcoma, an otherwise rare type of skin cancer, became a symptom associated with untreated HIV/AIDS during the initial health crisis in the early 1980s. It was this irruption into public consciousness that Marshall responded to, making particular reference to an article published in UK medical journal *The Lancet* at the time, whose language perpetuated homophobic narratives that, in turn, generated sex panic and scapegoating. The post-screening Q&A between Stravick and historian (and *AM* contributor) Theo Gordon threw light on the network of alliances that facilitated the film's discovery as well as the radical potential of the 'cruising gaze' to combat the invasive nature of the medical gaze.

The cruising gaze reappears in Brooklyn-based Ayanna Dozier's work, her analogue films explore transactional intimacies in public spaces. She is one of this year's filmmakers in focus and her exploration of public cruising brought to mind Marshall's insistence that in order to dismantle the social text of the marginalised body, its own conditions of visibility must be asserted. Also in the 'In Focus' strand was Tokyo-based d/Deaf filmmaker Eri Makihara, whose work responds

Ayanna Dozier, *It's Just Business*, *Baby*, 2023, film

filmmakers for Palestine and Berwick Trade Council protest

to the sense of lack implied in the social label of the 'disabled' body, capturing it in relation to the visual index of music. She encapsulates the deaf experience by subtracting sound from the cinematic universe to convey stories through the intersectional registers of image, sign language and subtitles – effectively decentring modes of correspondence made normative by the hearing world. Makihara's screenings further underlined the festival's admirable commitment to accessibility through its use of two British sign language interpreters, one Japanese sign language interpreter as well as English live-captioning for an in-conversation with the filmmaker.

Among the festival's attempts at re-envisaging canonical works was the UK premiere of Robina Rose's *Nightshift*, 1981, which was recently restored in 4K resolution by Lightbox Film Center and Cinenova after they were granted access to the original film elements by the BFI National Archive. Shot in the transitive spaces of the Portobello Hotel in West London, the film mirrored the red fabric drapings of the Maltings Theatre where it screened; the hotel seemed to thus poetically mobilise another interim venue – the cinema. The grainy 16mm film follows visitors in the liminal hours of night when disparate lives converge in perpetually shifting tableaux. Amid this restlessness, we are anchored by the gaze of the hotel receptionist – played by punk icon Jordan, star of Derek Jarman's *Jubilee*, 1978 (the surviving networks of this period made evident by the surprise attendance of his friend and muse Tilda Swinton). While Rose regrettably did not live to see the premiere of this restoration, these intersecting incidents seemed to affirm her renewed recognition in British film historiography of the avant garde.

The festival repurposed various locations throughout the town as sites for video installations, which brought the history of Berwick into contact with the festival programme. Among them, St Aidan's Peace Church – set up by a local socialist minister – hosted an anthology project titled *Some Strings*, which comprised over 100 shorts made by filmmakers around the world in response to poet and teacher Refaat Alareer's recent death caused by Israeli military action in Gaza. Evolving through additive participation, the film is another example of a living archive – one that takes shape through transnational solidarities. The rhetoric of solidarity further spilled into the streets of Berwick during the festival in the form of a demonstration at the Town Hall, organised by the Berwick Trades Council and Film Workers for Palestine and attended by the festival programmers and visitors.

Berwick-upon-Tweed is a fortified town with military residues that stand as a reminder of the town's contested past. The festival appropriately created space for a critique of neocolonial legacies in its programming this year through its focus on militant thinker Frantz Fanon. As part of a series of events on Fanon's politics, programmer Abiba Coulibaly delivered an insightful lecture-performance on Black and Arab representation in Maghreb cinema, including the convergences and divergences between these politicised identities on screen. This strand also included a screening of *The Zerda, and the Songs of Forgetting*, 1982, by Algerian filmmaker Assia Djebar, which recuts archival newsreels shot in the French colonies in the Maghreb region (especially that of the indigenous Zerda festival) and overlays it with music, poetry and chanting as a way to disrupt the colonial gaze that once framed it. The film gestures at the collective impulse for radical decolonisation, as if to provoke what might otherwise be visually dormant.

However, the festival also highlighted the punitive function of the archive, and how it might erase colonial horrors and distort public memory. Staged at The Gymnasium at the Barracks (one of said military remnants), Adam Piron's *Black Glass* followed the author's discovery of early motion-picture pioneer Eadweard Muybridge's photographs taken during the war in 1872 between the US Army and the indigenous Modoc tribe in Northern California. Piron studied the images and concluded that they were meticulously staged with the aim of overturning waning public support for an increasingly costly war. Partly as a result of public pressure, there was an unjust trial of Modoc leaders that ultimately altered history in favour of US imperial powers. Piron juxtaposes contemporary shots of the indigenous (and unceded) Modoc and Nüümü lands with Muybridge's stereographs, prompting critical reflection on archival veracity, omission and 'forensic time'. In the process, he recalls an uncomfortable truth: that the origin of all cinema is rooted in violence.

With a small scale and an internationalist focus, the festival stands apart for its progressive, radical politics. It recognises the entanglements of history and technology, and uses its programme to reframe the image as a medium of transmission. It is perhaps this constant probing and restless energy that has helped it endure in the face of budget-cuts that have hit hard across the moving-image sector and retain public support – evident in how visitors return to the town for almost every iteration of the festival. One of the ways in which the festival has structurally aligned with its equitable ambitions amid this uncertainty is through scrapping the erstwhile New Cinema Competition and replacing it with the New Cinema Awards, whereby all the participating filmmakers receive a substantial screening fee. This is also, perhaps, what accounts for the festival's abiding allure – it tangibly evinces the labour and passion that underlie all independent work.

The 20th Berwick Film & Media Arts Festival took place 27–30 March.

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