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Creative Writing

Author Statement

‘Additional Features: Moving Target, Mobile Witness’

Claudia Firth



I TRAINED AS A VISUAL ARTIST AND STILL WORK WITH BOTH IMAGES AND TEXT. In terms of written work, I see my practice as based mostly around the essay form and am interested in how this might be played with across disciplines and media. I am very interested in the crossovers between text, technology, image and object both as a writer and a visual artist and how these crossovers might allow spaces to discuss politics, power and affect.

Although not an essay as such, this piece was based on real-life events and lies on the borders between fact and fiction. I was very moved by the death of Neda Agha-Soltan in Tehran in 2009, which haunted me for some time. I was intrigued by the idea that the object of the mobile phone was able to play multiple roles: a desired object, one that triggered violence and one of agency through its ability to record and transmit images.

Birkbeck, University of London

Additional Features: Moving Target, Mobile Witness

Scene one: Day

A woman in a head scarf lies on the ground in a street in Tehran. She has been shot in the chest. There is panic around her as several people try to do something. A demonstration continues with crowds of people shouting. The woman's eyes are open and she looks calm. A man in the crowd films the woman with the camera on his mobile phone. A pool of blood starts to form around her.

Scene two: Night, 10:23pm

A white woman walks down a South London street taking a short cut to meet her boyfriend. He is mixed race. The woman walks past a playing field bounded by tower blocks. She is wearing a red coat. The woman sees a young man sitting on a bench. He gets up and starts walking towards a tower block in front of them. He dances along the street trying out a few moves. The woman watches from a distance as she walks behind him. The man reaches the driveway to one of the blocks. He swings round, sees the woman and pauses. They make eye contact. A moment later the woman sees the man disappear around a corner.

Scene three: Night, 10:28pm

Just as the woman is approaching the junction with the main road her mobile phone rings. The woman takes it out of her embroidered shoulder bag and continues walking. She puts it to her ear. From the phone, her boyfriend asks her where she is and just as she is beginning to describe the situation, a hand grabs her round the mouth and pulls her head backwards. Another hand closes around the one she is holding her phone with.

Scene four: Night, 10:29pm

There is a moment of shock. The hand that was clasping her face moves down to pull at her shoulder bag. In her mind, the woman runs through all her possible responses. She thinks about whether she should fight for her bag and whether to make a noise. The hands are tugging at her bag and her phone. The woman screams. She releases her bag but continues to hold firmly on to the phone until the hand around hers lets go. She turns and sees white trainers disappear down the street and round a corner. Turning again she sees a car pulled up on the opposite side of the road. Still in shock, she looks directly at the driver. The lights change and the car pulls off.

Scene five: Day, Tehran

A woman gets out of a car that has been stuck in traffic and walks through a crowded street. She is wearing jeans, a navy blue headscarf and white trainers. The woman and some friends walk towards a demonstration ahead of them. There are lots of people milling around. Some are shouting. The woman picks up her mobile phone and puts it to her ear. Whilst talking on the phone a gunshot is heard. It is unclear where it came from. The woman crumples and falls to the ground.

Scene six: Night, 10:46pm

A woman and her boyfriend have been reunited and after a few emotional moments go back to look for the shoulder bag. They don't find it and back on the main road a car pulls up beside them. Two white plainclothes police ask them to get in. The couple get into the car and the woman is asked questions about what happened. After describing the incident, the woman leans uneasily into the back seat.

Scene seven: Night, 11:05pm

The car turns a corner and starts to crawl the streets behind the playing field. The police ask the woman if the black man they pass on the street is the one who attacked her. She says no. The car turns a corner. The police ask the woman if the black man they pass on the street is the one who attacked her. She says no. The car turns onto the grass of the playing field and drives towards the scene of the crime. There are several black youths walking across the field. One is wearing a striped top. The woman starts. A fragment of memory flashes into her mind: stripes; and she starts to wonder if this is the attacker. The police car stops.

Scene eight: Night, 11:12pm

A policewoman gets out of the car and corners the young man in the striped top. He is wearing white trainers. The police manoeuvre the car so that the young man is straight ahead of it. They turn on the headlights so that the woman sitting in the backseat can see him. The police ask the woman if this young man is the one who attacked her. The woman says that she didn't see the attacker's face and cannot be 100% sure. The police ask her if this is the man who attacked her. Each time the woman runs through the momentary fragments of images and sounds that are left in her mind. The police ask what the percentage is. There is a definite impression of stripes. Eventually the woman affirms that this is probably the right man. The police put him in a van and drive him to a nearby police station. The police car follows behind. From her seat the woman is able to see the young man slumped in the back of the police van. He looks dejected.

Scene nine: Night, 11:43pm

They arrive at the police station. The van turns into the building and the young man is lead inside. The car parks on the other side of the road and the woman, her boyfriend and the police get out of the car. As the woman steps onto the pavement she notices stripes on her boyfriend's top through the gap in his jacket. She feels uneasy and confused.

Scene ten: Night

A woman in a London apartment clicks a mouse and watches eight seconds of shaky video footage on her computer. A woman in Iran is shot with a bullet while talking on her mobile phone. The camera on a mobile phone shoots her dying. She is doubly shot. Phones accompany both target and witness (moving target, mobile witness). The woman at the computer replays in her mind fragmentary images of hands, trainers and darkness, a mobile phone held tightly in her right hand, a young black man sullenly slumped against the inside of a police van. In her mind, the woman rewrites the replay. She turns the phone to camera mode. As witness, it captures a man running away with an embroidered bag. He is wearing white trainers. He is not wearing a striped top.