

*Shrouded Consciousness*

by

Cora Burke

*Shrouded Consciousness* Maureen Consideine's 2013 Digital Print is embedded within this text, so that in some ways the image has left a transfer on this literary work. The photograph has left a mark so that it is here; it exists now in this text. Having said that, the reader will not find a description of *Shrouded Consciousness* within this text in the sense of any conveyed second hand experience on the part of the writer. This sort of listing of composition at best would be highly mundane and at worst would butcher the piece itself as it exists in its own right and here, its existence as it is in the text. *Shrouded Consciousness* outside of this text, is in a certain way a necessary stand-alone piece, in as much as it can be (in as much as anything can be, which is hardly at all, in that nothing is without context, everything is situated). The photographic piece creates and speaks on its own terms and by extension the Artist through it. Neither will the reader be allocated the admittedly convenient, but dubious privilege of the addition of a photograph of the piece *Shrouded Consciousness* to this text. That would be a very serious injustice. To transmit and thereby change the image into a weakened imitation of what it purports to be as a stand-alone experience, of a quality very much intended by the Artist. Although admittedly, experiencing *Shrouded Consciousness* in conjunction with this text, would of course further open up both the image and this writing. The part of *Shrouded Consciousness* that is here and is visible through the text is a commentary that comes from that image.

The viewer arrives at the Artists' piece and sees that it has been given a title, *Shrouded Consciousness*. The Artist has left a clear mark over the image; it has a name put on it by the Artist. The name as all names does not absolutely constitute the body of that which is named, it does not make up that which it is, it is a mark made over it and that mark is to some degree transient. In the sense that the mark is a word and all words are inherently metaphorical. The mark is transient but it is also residual, in that it leaves something behind, an impression and perhaps a more lasting impression than other words due to the level of intent, deliberateness and perhaps deliberation involved in naming, in entitling a work. The title is a placed mark, by the Artist who allowed this image to happen with a great deal of work involved. The title lends a sort of precision to the work, in a way it sets the scene for the image. It's the first response (available to the viewer) of the Artist's eye that has been on their own work and so forms a direct alphabetically lettered print of the Artists eye. It situates the work as being part of lexis, the associated strings of words that make up those particular title words while still being part of the work, forming it partially, but still holding enough distance to simultaneously give it context. It's a type of semi-permanent suspension in any persons given lexicon as a title and a name. The photograph also comes with an Artist's statement that although it comes along with the digital image, exists also apart from the image, independently as a piece of writing in its own right. A piece of writing that deserves follow on texts perhaps more far

reaching, more outside of this writing and consequently more adequate. The title is a very deliberate act which forms part of the work and is the overarching mark of the work. It is as meaningful as the non-alphabetical part of the work and therefore is worth consideration. It's likely that the title of the photograph is easier to acknowledge for the reader as part of an alphabetical text. This is due to its immediacy in the text as a piece of information at least initially, as opposed to viewing the title set together with the photograph. The title here is given greater capacity to stand alone for consideration due to its physical placing within the text as the first piece of information that the reader is provided with. As such, it has greater capacity to hang directly over the work which may be what the Artist intended by giving a title to their work instead of leaving it untitled, which could have been the case but it is not. In a way, the words *Shrouded Consciousness* is the Artist formally introducing us to the work.

At the juncture of Artist here, it's important that no singular possessive apostrophe is used because the image has been released, it has been offered up to the viewer. It does not solely belong to the Artist, as it is no longer in and of the Artist wholly. It has become an act of communication and anything communicative can only have a degree of possession. The photograph has joined the intertextually related range of artistic texts that form society. The work has been positioned societally; it is derived of society and

forms a part of society. A compositional listing (which is widely used), of what the work is made of, if you will, is a dismembering, a taking apart. It's an attempt, whether intentional or not at de-positioning the work. It's a sort of methodological approach, or more accurately, forms the first step in a scientific methodology. A scientific methodology based on a Positivistic paradigm that is derived from what Derrida would call a legacy of philosophical presence. This momentary removal, this detraction of the Art work from society can only happen via an assumed degree of objectivity allocated by the Positivistic paradigm that is not possible due to the level of subjectivity we all possess. This type of listing is not conducive to anything meaningful, it is reductive and in the succinct words of Northrop Frye "all dissected things are uniformly hideous" (Frye 56) probably because of at least some of the reasons outlined here. Not only is this widely used approach not conducive to meaningful communication but it actually stifles it via the setting out of terms of communication, by demanding that a specific set of communicative criteria is used. This is by nature essentially non communicative as communication itself is dependent entirely on a lack of these kinds of set restraints, of notions of predication. The variables of the viewer (too many in fact to reasonably account for) or how the viewer is situated in those given moments in time, will depend on the outcome, on how that person perceives the work and the response that ensues. The viewer and the reader through their actions move the photograph, they move the writing.

The viewer and reader make the text through their actions; they necessarily create and extend the intertextual process by means of their own imaginative perception. These are human beings, interactive with the world, not mere subjects or participants (a semantic change in Psychological terminology only but not in practice) directed to act in a specific confined way (this is a subject, someone who is subjugated) .The resulting commentary or conversation (here or otherwise) is open to change but the process is not, in order for the communication to be of value, that is meaningful and expansive. *Shrouded Consciousness* as a deliberate Art work is a communicative undertaking; it is a communicative act and towards these ends the process will always be a creative act and an opening up, as is this one.

The more time that the viewer spends with the photograph, the more likely it is that they will become struck with an increasing apparentness. The realisation (or possibly the reminder) that, that which is most obvious in society is not being discussed in any meaningful way in Ireland. Or perhaps it is, in certain locations yet to be unearthed, but it is certainly not a widespread discussion or one that exists prominently in society. Yet there is nothing obvious about the process of socialisation. The slow absorption of an environment constituted of symbols, an internalisation. It's the obvious in the hidden under everyone's shared skin. Symbols form a large part of society. Symbols understood as that which form a more

directed, more pointed and consequentially a faster narrower (circular) referent link in the chain of signifier to signified and visa versa. Such are the confines of the symbol that they form specific little bits of rhetoric. Simulacra also prevail in society. Simulacra of the Bauilldriardian type may be understood of as a symbol with a false depth, as a sort of symbol hyperlink. The current endemic saturation point of simulacra in society in a way belies its significance. Meaningfulness (that which is of ontological value) is not something that can be derived from that which is directly allocated in society, from symbols. Even the most cursory glance, most fleeting of looks at this photograph is likely to allow this societal aspect to arise. Or having seen the photograph, it may resurface continually for consideration in a way that's difficult or impossible to disregard what is hidden in plain sight.

It's easy to see that Socialisation forms a prerequisite for most of humanity. After all, almost everyone is born into a group setting to varying degrees. This can cause the concept of Socialisation to appear as a relatively innocuous one. But in societies laden with symbols (which are most if not all) this is not the case. One of the objects in particular in this piece was imbued with a narration long before the moment that created the photograph. It was given; it inherited a narration long before the moment of this piece came into being. The object exists with all its intensity of meaning due to a

specific, highly systemised method of communication known as myth (Barthes 131). Aside from the object slightly to the forefront of the lens there is also a person in this photograph, a woman. Physically she takes up most of the space but curiously she does not dominate it, the significantly smaller object does. This is only a little thing in the Photograph, this object, the ornament, the little plaster prop, the non-human, the non-person. The object is without real life, the one that's not a living, breathing, feeling person. Yet we know more about the object, further to that, we know more about the object as a sort of pseudo person. This is bound to strike the viewer who has spent enough time with this photograph on some level as grotesque, as a perversion of the natural order of being. Barthes points out that the function of myth is to transform history into nature (Barthes 154). This accounts for (in terms of a level of understanding) the insidiousness of the relatively banal and yet quite bizarre situation which we are faced with when we look at this photograph. The mythology that was invented for this object serves to enforce and perpetuate further a fairly mundane (but no less damaging) mythology. It's a kind of redundant traditionalism, fundamentalism, ideology, culturalism, fatalism, predeterminism. It's the story of how it was always so and because it was always so, it will be always so. By comparison and it is by necessary comparison (as there is the person, a piece of material, the ornament, a wooden floor and a plaster wall in the photograph) we know very little about the human being here. In some very

disturbing way the actual person has managed to become Othered in a Derridian manner by an ornament. The viewer is in a situation where they are comparing an object with a person on a level of comparison which equates an object with a person and a person with an object. Clearly this is damaging to have such an equivalence on this level. It is widely accepted psychologically and otherwise that the first step towards doing someone harm is in dehumanising them on some level, essentially in objectifying (or animalising) them. The photograph shows us that this aspect of our particular Socialisation is not innocent.

The photograph itself becomes a sort of icon. By forming a reflection on iconography the image becomes part icon. The piece is a monotone flattening out; there is no room for questions. The photograph does not allow for anything, weary flatness kills everything. Yet the stillness is a request to speak in a way, the muteness of it, the iconography. The statue in this photograph is a three dimensional icon replicated widely in varying sizes with the same costume and colour. Although it would not be difficult to date this particular item the statue has been lent the illusion of pre and post manufacture lastingness. At some point this plaster cast item was given longevity, a notion of timelessness. The inherited flatness that this statue has does not precisely refer to the physicality of the manner of icon or icon painting but to the idea of unchangingness that it produces, further to that the notion of never changing,

of a world of absolutes. The manner of icon painting, no shadows, no variation of brush stroke, no movement creates something that looks like the image of an object in stasis, static and immovable. The extremity of projecting and reproducing an image cloaked in the notion of the absolute very obviously directs the viewer to entertain a world where purposeful questions do not happen. Where additions, detractions, new formations, reconfigurations, creativity and the imagination not only do not happen but, as if by force of sheer will, never in fact existed at all. The invention of iconography stifles even the minutest of movements through its sheer insistence on the absolute. The woman in the photograph with her body partially revealed, arms partially raised at her sides palms facing outwards acts upon the plaster statue. She is the active force in the photograph. Through her presence and mimesis she changes and transfigures the otherwise static icon. The photograph has all the often presumed timelessness of an icon, which in actuality is only some time. We don't have access to a working concept of timelessness. The woman is not merely imitating the statue she is engaged in an active process of reconfiguration. Her presence as it is in the photograph is an extended invitation to the viewer to move also in some manner, to act, to respond or to speak.

Mythological Icons present as all-encompassing objects where the “meaning is already complete” (Barthes 140). Myths may create enclosed false systems

of communication (false by their very nature. Their actual non-communicativeness, one dimensionality and thus inauthenticity) but they are not situated in such a constricting system. Barthes demonstrates this understanding by writing his essay, aside from any specific content within it. Accepting these pre-packaged ideals could (and quite possibly does) lead to a very facile understanding of society. Myth described as such, appears to be very much the emanation of a transcendental phenomenology which translates to a type of enclosed loop of endless narcissistic subjectivism, which of course is determined by the singular, the solitary and the stationary. People do not live in isolation; we are situated by the people we live with in proximity of varying degrees societally. Mythological icons, one type of physical manifestation of specific set of ideologies are strategically put in place by people with view to a specific type of functionality within society. These monuments to the concept of fixed ideas are not unshakable solely by virtue of the fact that they do not exist in isolation but with the realisation that accompanies this, that the conditioned façade of a fixed, static type of meaning is unsustainable. Meaningful and purposeful existential change cancels out the notion of fixed ideas and movement is the necessary primary feature of this. So much so, that what has been described as the turn of Classical to the Modern era is often expressed in terms of nonlinear movement such as the early impressionism of Turner, or the motion of Saussureian Structuralism to Post-Structuralism. The regime of the mythological Icon resists any challenge,

meaningful change, or any movement, as this would effectively remove the grounds on which the idea of the icon itself rests. In this photographic piece the presence of the woman forces a reconsideration of the statue and the woman to some degree at least, as a whole. The plaster cast statue is in the presence of a real (living) woman and they must be considered in conjunction with each other.

Perhaps one of the most striking things about this photograph is the vulnerability of the woman in it, the partial nudity of the woman who is draped with a piece of semi-transparent material. She has effectively set herself up for comparison largely undressed, against a mythological item that still manages to weigh heavy in society. It's the human simplicity of this action which exhibits little pre-emptive artifice. She has removed to a large extent the theatricality of robes and performance. She has all the imperfection of a human body, she is real and she is alive. This is someone who has the capacity to feel greatly but not someone who has powers beyond human ability. She could not for example, abstain from sexual intimacy, grow and then manage to bring a child into the world. The painted plaster statue is apparently, the cast image of a real life girl who did just that. Although the language used around this supposed event is not nearly so generous. The woman in the photograph is imitating the overall pose of the statue and they are faced in the same way. There is a type of unity there, they are in unison to some degree and they are faced

in the same direction. But the imitation is only in part as her hands are angled slightly differently and her head is not angled down. The woman is also set behind the statue of the girl, for consideration in the background of the photograph. This placing is an affirmation of what the viewer already knows that the statue (and its accompanying ideology) is put literally to the forefront of society in terms of existence instead of real living women. The woman's partial imitation also shows a degree of identification with the statue, it's a confirmation of the partial transference of that ideology. Imitation says "I understand you, I am replicating to confirm this and here I am showing you this". Mimesis says all the things imitation say but allows for some change, a contribution beyond mere imitation. The woman's pose in the photograph is not the sum of the communication but it looms large against the spectre of the icon. The simplicity of her expression of vulnerability through her partial nudity and admission of the effects of the ideology through her stance comes through this photograph with forceful impact.

Stance aside, as the only other figure in the photograph the woman is set together with the statue and consequently invites the viewer to draw direct comparisons. The statue can be described as a figure as loosely it is the outline of a person, although it is painted over almost entirely with robes. As viewers the two figures are only comparable at any length due to the somewhat extensive mythological narration that the statue arrives with. This sort

of initial (and in this case unbalanced) direct comparison is based along lines of enquiry that involve oppositions which take the shape of similarities and dissimilarities. It allows for questioning but this is a specific type of questioning. It's a questioning of equivalence and a set up that already implies a relationship between the woman and object. Aside from the narration that the statue carries, this questioning is only perceived as somewhat permissible in this manner as the statue is a female figurine. As adults we know that this type of relational comparison between a person and an object is a negative one. It will not yield anything conducive to positive existential human existence, so that as adults we know that this comparison is not really possible on any meaningful level. It also means that the woman in the photograph is defined from the outset solely along lines of anatomic sexuality. Scientifically, we have yet to locate the human mind. We tend to operate on an assumption that it is linked to the brain. Additionally lack of any convincing research that the mind is gendered very much removes the grounds that the biological comparison is set out on. In any case, even a strong correlation is not causation so this excludes conclusivity. Even this line of enquiry could unintentionally divert the reader towards a redundant (and now tired) nature versus nurture dichotomy. All dichotomies, although they exist and are of course necessary towards some type of movement of thought, are inherently false. Viewing these dichotomies as oppositional can essentially (albeit erroneously) appear to force a position of singular choice. Autonomy to a large degree is

removed, it may be a choice but it is an allocated choice and a very restricted one at that, one that does not allow for any real (meaningful) progression of thought. This manner of questioning has been widely recognised as ineffectual in the shape of Barthes “Neither-Nor Criticism” (Barthes 93) and Tzara’s proclamation that “The way people have of looking hurriedly at things from the opposite point of view, so as to impose their opinions indirectly, is called dialectic, in other words, heads I win and tails you lose, dressed up to look scholarly” (Tzara 8). Derrida furthers this line of enquiry and extends it to individual words pointing out that this type of questioning aspect is inherently found in individual words, that it is always already at work but that a systemised way of approaching these questions is not. It’s reasonable at this point to state that the figures in the photograph together may draw comparisons but these comparisons cannot be entirely with each other as exclusivity in this regard is not possible. It could be more fortuitous for the viewer to engage with the conditions that have caused this positioning to materialise and enable it.

The woman in the photograph creates the manner of alignment with the statue that gives the photograph its shape. She is just behind the statue to the left, asymmetrically positioned “the traditional sign of disorder, asymmetry” (Barthes 16). As already pointed out an entirely symmetrical linear questioning is not conducive to anything meaningful or worthwhile. Here instead, there

is an intersection of possible enquiry at each line that the photograph creates; the direction that the woman appears to be looking, her weight rested on her back foot, the exposed left side of her body. These multidirectional threads available for examination have distinct possibilities and are not exhaustive. This approach, what could be termed as chaotic, is instead a type of extensive careful intricacy. The order of thinking that emerges from this perception does not allow for inertia. The viewer can see through the material to the darker areas that give the impression of eyes. Staring straight ahead she manages to look blank and almost eyeless. It gives the photograph a seer like quality that pierces the idea of time and other closed possibilities. The viewer sees the photograph through glass, in a frame, in a location with all the individuality specific to the viewer. Combined with the photograph this allows for an expansion of subject matter. The space in the photograph is of interest, what's not there. There is not obvious physical male biological presence in the photograph. Yet ironically the statue (that's supposed to be physically shaped like a girl) embodies a patriarchal societal ideology and so at the same time the camera is a phallogocentric lens. In this case to a great extent the statue takes up the frame with its accompanying mythology momentarily detracting from the woman. But she mobilises herself, the photographic shape is not determined by the closed perfection of symmetry. The woman's positioning, the alignment is significant as the actual person in the piece.

There could be an obligation to say something about the medium when focusing on an art work. There is some noticeable concern of classification involved in this. Initially in *Camera Lucida* Barthes writes “From the first step, that of classification (we must surely classify, verify by examples, if we want to constitute a corpus), Photography evades us” (Barthes, 4). A type of corpus can be reconstituted through classification but it appears to be more corpse like. Incidentally Barthes quickly abandons this beginning, he appears to bring the matter up in order to dispense with it. Classification is purposeful; it has utility in mind from the outset. This is not as damaging when confined to an initial convenience so as to bring about a conversation, to initiate pluralities together. However, it’s likely that if these classifications are then allowed to run conversationally that they may be in danger of some atrophy unless they are very self-aware and reflexive. They may become set terms and reside in the domain that shuts down conversation. Conversations of classification are more often than not conversations of definition, to pin discursive topics down towards neat conclusive and more often than not closed ends. Conversations of definition, aside from being highly uninteresting are of dubious ontological value. Definition can be what comes out the other side of an extended unaware classification. Classification is dependent on systematisation. Definitions are finite, the word definition itself is a description of the finite which is given an impression of lastingness. A type of maddening insistence “everywhere on the suppression

of the D's, eat Aa, brush yourself with Aa toothpaste, buy your clothes at Aa." (Tzara,25). Classification assumes the guise of authority, if only temporarily and so seemingly gives some validation to these classifications to join the chain of etymology. In any case, mere recognition of the multitude of mediums involved in this piece is more fruitful in terms of the argument, the camera, the viewer, the object, the woman and the specific intersection of all these. The intersectional point specific to each viewer is a medium, is conductive, it transmits and facilitates movement. For the viewer of the digital photograph there can be no assumptions of definition. Was the woman in the photograph there at the time the photograph was taken or was she added afterwards? The concern of classifying expressed here is not as much in the act of classification (after all it's a necessary convenience) but in the concept involved in classification itself.

In terms of classification, it's likely that this photograph could be considered as having a Surrealist aspect. It goes past an understanding of what might loosely be considered real, our day to day experiences. This notion of the real involves a steady level of presumed consciousness that outweighs states of subconsciousness or a serious consideration of liminality regarding these separate states of being. The image as a whole in the photograph is perhaps something that we may not encounter with any frequency in our daily experiences.

The title *Shrouded Consciousness* makes an allusion to the unconscious. At the very least Surrealism allows for a duplicity of being which does not cancel out a multiplicity of being, if anything it makes it more possible having breached conceptual monography. That which the “philosophy of presence” is built on and what Breton points out in the opening of his manifesto, “We are still living under the reign of logic” (Breton, 1). The person’s partial undress, shades of blue and title express a liminality of thought. The blue grey colour casts the whole photograph into twilight of being. There are no warm tones and everything is dormant. It has a sort of dream like quality that indicates more scope of being. It implies a certain level of interpretation, of ability to present cognition and re-cognition spectrum. Although its unlikely that photographs of this type will be encountered with any regularity it is almost certain that aspects of this photograph will be. Such as the ornament itself, which can be found proliferate on almost every road corner, in schools, books, hospitals, shops, pubs and houses. There can be a certain type of felt resistance towards entertaining notions that this object represents, such as linking female sexual behaviour and bodily rights to morality. They can appear as pitfalls that could lead to believe that there is a possibility of worthwhile discourse. However Ideology takes preventative measures towards any discourse usually in the shape of some sort of repetitious rhetorical insistence, which is the form of ideology itself. Amoeba like it spreads out but does not grow. It is damaging. It attempts to transfer

an unliveable life schemata, it effectively removes or restricts efficacy. The material partially covering the woman looks like a net curtain. This combines to give a Valley of the Squinting Windows (Brinsley Mc Namara) hue of grotesque paranoia to the piece. This work is Surrealist in how it goes past popular given ideals but it also goes past them in a certain way. It transcends these ideals through transfiguration and consequently transformation. *Shrouded Consciousness* as a Surrealist piece is profoundly real. Maybe work becomes Surreal when it's a bit too close, when it's a bit too real, belief is suspended it hangs there and reality is in the not too far distance.

The part of *Shrouded Consciousness* that carried over to this text brought with it its spaces and shadows. The Artist's process and approach was an active one which formed their finished piece. Active in the sense that it effectively demonstrates and illuminates modes of meaningful authentic expansive communication, (authenticity understood as that which is not derived from a direct etymological lineage). It can be read as and forms a window to a theoretical exposition. It's not possible for an art work to be without a concept (concept understood as thought) or further, the conceptual (thoughts in there plurality presented as ideas). It's foreseeable that simulacra, mythology and other sociological content work through individuals with some sub liminality, if you will and can be communicated with a large degree of latency. It's not

the part-theoretical or theoretical that should be addressed but the specific type and angle that is of more prominent interest towards anything progressive. This art work is evidenced and realised in the ontological. Ontology as an aspect is dependent on the societal and the concept of the Sociological. These modes of communications are divorced from the essentially non-communicative weary Positivistic paradigm and its predecessors, perpetrators of a philosophical presence. These latter stylised ideals prevail as evidenced by the art work and by extension this text. The photograph exhibits a disturbing propensity on the part of the viewer (and the woman in the photograph) to conduct a relational transfer from the mythological imbued object to the person in the photograph. It points to our own possibility of spreading this harmful sociological conditioning which is very much tied to classical Philosophical thinking. Equally we can become conduits for the Artists work. The former is dependent on a debilitating passivity or chronic lethargy (which is not the same thing, although the means by which both are induced probably is). From the inverse of these effects a type of strength and resilience appears to come which can only be described adequately as conscious vulnerability. In summation *Shrouded Consciousness* is of interest, content specify aside as Barthes points out. “Ultimately, Photography is subversive not when it frightens, repels or even stigmatizes, but when it is *pensive*, when it thinks (Barthes 38).

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