

Firework abstractions: mementoes of a public event; honouring the past, embracing the future

Beneath a Sturgeon Moon, on the clear skied Saturday night of August 25th last, a celebration of summer's end culminated in a mesmerising, civic fireworks display.

Spectators amiably gathered and settled at vantage points, smiles played on lips; gleeful anticipation evident in glistening eyes.

Cacophonous bangs, followed by whizzing, hissy, shrill rackets, pre-empted impatient star buds transforming to brilliant streaks, slicing the night sky into splendid patterns named chrysanthemum, willow, peony, palm, spider and more.

Brilliantly impossible, chemically produced hues of violets, magentas, reds, blues, greens, golds and the brightest luminous whites, outshone our usual RGB optics and heightened the surreal experience of bearing witness to those giant, ostensibly organic phenomena, suspended in the exaggerated blackness, before they extinguished in the cool night air. **Sublime.**

Throughout the explosive flashes, startled gasps at abrupt bangs, followed by enchanting giggles and delighted screeches from the children. Oohs and aahs, whistles and cheers, and spontaneous ripples of applause erupted from young and old, troubles momentarily parked.

Reminiscences of previous happy gatherings around fires stirred within: millennium celebrations, Special Olympics openings, eastern travels. Invisible emotional stirrings, like balm.

Strangers to this artist, that crowd of thousands felt like a cosy cocoon. An intimate gathering. A rare sense of peaceful community. That fleeting primal sense of something omniscient at work.

A thrilling finale, and then, en mass, people dispersed through gun powder tintured air, to return to their individual realities, less jaded, to re-join personal and societal concerns, refreshed. Images captured by lenses or in minds, to act as time travel vessels, stored up for future enjoyment, to keep or to share.

Abstracted fragments as remembrances of an intimate, yet public experience, constitute the attached images. Captures of randomness created by chance, the outliers and stragglers, rather than envisioned perfect forms. Shreds of positive phenomena, curiously familiar yet strange.

Logically, a skilled pyrotechnician, an alchemist, set alight gunpowder with various compounds derived from earth sourced metals, along with chemicals such as sulphur, oxygen, carbon, chlorine and zinc, to create explosions. There are so many variables - a breeze, humidity, an aircraft flying high above, that each explosion, while creating patterns and trails within accepted parameters, is unique.

In our stressful, ultra-mediated world, it is intriguing that watching fire remains so important to our health, well-being and comfort. It goes back to our parents, their parents' great grand-parents and so on, to early humans and will extend forward ad infinitum (if we survive Trump and global warming).

Neuroscientists argue that we like fireworks because they frighten us. The initial flash activates the amygdala, a fear detecting brain nerve cluster. After the anticipation of a threat, the crack of the firework confirms the perception in our brains, causing a surge of dopamine—a pleasure regulating chemical, followed by a pleasing display. Dogs do not receive this visual cue so are alarmed.

Fire, discovered by our ancestors up to a million years ago, according to recent archaeological discoveries, still enthral us. Anthropologists have concluded that modern humans' response to fire is evolutionary. It has been proven by Biological Anthropologists that the act of looking at fire and hearing its sounds, reduces human blood pressure to optimum rates.

Early hominines learned how to control fire to cook, used it as protection from predators, to extend their day and to keep warm. Research proves that the ability to cook with fire advanced human evolution (reduction in gut and tooth sizes, less loss of time and energy to digestion and chewing = time for more cerebral activities, no need for fur as insulation, detoxification of some foods and killing off parasites and bacteria through cooking, ability to sleep on the ground, leading to bipedalism).

Dancing light, crackling sounds, warmth and the characteristic smells of fire would have been associated by early humans with relaxation and friendship. Gathering people in one place and time to eat, keep warm and make friends, gave them a survival advantage through social nexus, laying the foundations for pair bonding, hence organised human society.

What would those ancestors think about society today? Of Ireland's current political, market economy, inducing high rents and homelessness, dependent upon continued inequality?

Change is possible I believe, in part by using photographic images as evidence but also as purveyors of a narrative of hope. With consistent social and political inclusion of perceived outliers, inclusion is possible. These images are about not simply seeing and believing that there is merit in difference, but a celebration of diversity, hope for our future.