In this paper, I discuss two different processes for the collective negotiation of narrative histories of ‘The Troubles’ era in Belfast. The first is a tour of the International Wall and Peace Wall murals, entitled ‘Conflict Tours’. The second is my own collective map of British Army observation posts at the Shankill Falls Divide in 1972. Each process uses the material culture of architecture and art to produce memory prompts, designed to absorb and disseminate a variety of voices and political perspectives. Both processes engage artifacts to construct written, visual, and oral cultures of communication.

The initiatives for generating a collective history are experienced differently: the walking tour guide recounts history while moving through urban spaces; the collective map communicates through a coded representation. Each process differs in terms of goals, means, and how it seeks to disseminate this history to its’ public. By participating as a consumer in the tour process, and as a producer in the mapping process, I investigate how narratives are performed and received. My research explores the mechanisms by which group narratives are adapted, whilst mobilising a variety of collective spaces. Member roles are articulated differently in each group. At the International Wall, visitors are passive participants, whilst the collective map is an active participatory process. This paper considers how both informal styles of participation through architecture affect the performance, negotiation, and dissemination of historical narratives.

Keywords: Architecture, Postmodernism, Collective histories, Spatial pedagogies, Signs and semiotics

Introduction

The areas around the Shankill and Falls roads share geographical proximity but strongly contested political ideologies. Historically, this led to some of the worst conflict of the Troubles, resulting in segregation, and the construction of a dividing wall, or ‘Peace Wall’, at the ‘Shankill Falls Divide’. Social studies problematise how working-class Protestants and Catholics ‘remember the past differently’, which results in mutually contested group histories (O’Dochartaigh 2007; McAttackney 2011, 2017; Hocking, 2015; Bryan 2012, 2018; Bollens 2000; Gourley 2012). Others explore the nuances around how victims and perpetrators are perceived by the ‘other community’ in the post conflict era since the Good Friday / Belfast Agreement (Brewer and Hayes 2011; Smyth 2000; Byrne 2014; Jarman 1997,
In this literature, some anxiety centres on how group histories are represented in symbolic spaces using material culture (Hocking 2015; Bryan 2012), but the historic role of British Army Observation Posts in establishing symbolic urban networks is not discussed.

By contrast, tours conducted by taxi, by bus, and on foot do refer to them. Tourists are shown dividing walls and engaging murals, accompanied by former prisoners, on ‘Conflict tours’ (Bollens 2000; Gourley 2012). Here, paramilitary actions are presented as a grass roots form of political resistance to colonial subjugation (in the case of Catholic Nationalist Republicans), or as an honorable and necessary vigilantism (in the case of Protestant Unionist Loyalists). Both representations are deeply controversial amongst local inhabitants and scholars (Gourley 2012; Hocking 2015). Rather than view tourists as gullible outsiders, and tour guides as impartial propagandists, I consider both as participants in a constructive process of negotiating collective history.

The ‘Conflict Tours’ give former prisoners a voice, whether loyalist or nationalistic. Multiple voices are a manifestation of global post-colonial culture. Research has shown that the voices of subaltern groups are excluded from the public narrative (Green 2011; Spivak 1988; Said 1978, 1994). Inclusion offers diverse individuals and social groups the opportunity for self-representation, giving future generations access to multiple subjective experiences of the conflict. It sets up a process by which collective histories can be overtly negotiated by individuals. Some argue that the inclusion of diverse and conflicted groups ‘in play’ across the divide offers a form of participatory engagement that is curative for those afflicted by societal trauma (Villanueva Brandt 1998), and that this will lead to eventual consensus in Belfast in the long term.

In the ‘Conflict Tour’, tourists received a range of critical commentaries about the past. A similar process emerged when I sought the participation of older citizens in locating historical British Army Observation Posts. My aim was to construct a collective map of the architecture of military surveillance. In both cases, the investigation concerned how in-groups and out-groups in Belfast re-negotiated difficult collective histories. ‘Don’t listen to a word he says’, a resident told us as the tour group assembled outside Divis Flats. Between local citizens and former prisoners, a moral hierarchy was evident, with citizens effectively ‘othering’ the former prisoner (Said 1978). Significantly, this demonstrates that the occupant was not afraid to criticise the prisoner publicly, nor did he feel ‘terrorised’ by him (Sluka 1989).

My experiences with both the tour group and the map elicitation group revealed how a series of social spaces and architectural structures negotiated representations of conflict within the same space. My collective map of historical observation posts aimed to identify how urban networks of control were constructed. Intended as a benign process, it caused unanticipated controversy, even though the military installations had been dismantled 22 years ago. Perhaps it was considered provocative because it appropriated and subverted official spatial mappings, depicting alternative urban pedagogies.

In mapping the locations of the military structures, I noticed that they coincided with the historical spatial context for today’s mural scenography. Tourists flock to see the colourful artworks and political messages, and hear the accompanying narratives, leading locals to feel that they are being observed as if they are ‘wildlife on a safari’, another process of ‘othering’ (Said 1978). The conflict was most severe in working class areas of Belfast (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006). Middle class citizens generally distance themselves from the conflict, explaining that their area wasn’t particularly affected or refer to ‘dark tourism’ (Jenkins 2012, Lawther 2017). In negotiating a collective map of observation posts,
the spatial, physical, and social effects of historical military surveillance practices can thus be reviewed through the lens of these present-day narratives. Questions of class, agency, othering, and territorialisation led me to focus on the role of observation posts in articulating hierarchies of power, achieved through the appropriation, subversion, and invisibility of spaces and structures.

My research focuses on artistic, social, cultural, and political interpretations of observation posts in Belfast. Political murals communicate such themes in great detail. These iconographic structures invite us to critically engage with how individuals collaborate in the construction of group narratives from individual histories. Material architectural objects and physical spaces are used as props to disseminate political ideology. These architectures are deployed as spaces of representation and as a repository for collective memory. I examine a process whereby narrative histories are constructed around gender, post-colonial themes, and post-modern geographies.

Postmodern Theory

Using the key elements characteristic of postmodernism, I decided first to map postmodernist strategies and tactics evident in the conflicted walls. They are postmodern in the sense that they embody appropriations of spatial, social, and cultural territories, while enlisting practices of subversion (Rolston 1992, 1995; Craft 2013). They take a position on proxy geographical political contexts, thus articulating a ‘spatial turn’ in line with postmodern geographies (Soja 1989). This allows their authors to extrapolate postcolonial arguments rehearsed elsewhere, assimilating them into this context, as simulations (Baudrillard 1983; Bhabha 1990; Said 1978, 1994). They enact historical re-inventions of cultural heritage, conjure rituals and traditions, and emphasise the value of place (Sennet 1994; Norburg Schulz 1980; Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour 1977; Jencks 1977). They perform languages of dissent, enlist politics of resistance, and demonstrate fluid identities (Sparke 2008, 2017; Bhabha 1994; Said 1978, 1994). They embrace commercialism, engage the use of signs and semiotics and embellish iconography in the display of emblematic figures. They thus engage postmodern languages of architectural quotation, deploying techniques of montage and collage (Sparke 2008, 2017; Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour 1977; Jencks 1977). In adopting fluid attitudes to history, they use irony to resist the society of the spectacle (Venturi 1977; Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour 1977; Jencks 1977; Debord 1994). And finally, their position is postmodern in that they reject modern state institutions, while appropriating and subverting elements of those very same modernist institutions (Wigley 1995; Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour 1977).

Method

I am a female Irish architect and academic undertaking research into the architectural history of British Army observation posts in the Shankill Falls area of Belfast in 1972. I use mixed methods: archival research, architectural drawing, mapping, map elicitation interviews, oral histories, theoretical analysis, and participant observation (Becher and Geer 1957; Till 2005; Spradley 1980). I lived in Belfast for over two years, attended seminars in anthropology, and went on a series of tours led by local inhabitants. The ‘Conflict Tour’ was one such tour. My aim was to create a map and architectural drawings of observation posts in their historical context. For each of the four key observation posts, I needed to locate it, collect photographs and information on it, and then draw it. Due to the severe restrictions on access to archive information, I conducted a series of informal map elicitation interviews
to determine the location and appearance of observation posts. These took the form of participatory engagement (Till 2005) with at least seventy inhabitants of the area, aged over 50. Respondents were asked to identify themselves as either Catholic, Protestant, Nationalist, Unionist, Republican or Loyalist and sign a consent form. Few chose to identify themselves in these ways (5%). 50% identified as having a ‘Catholic background’ and 27% as having a ‘Protestant background’. Respondents discussed the messages transmitted via murals and military observation posts so frequently that I began to see these as related forms of postmodern urban scenography (V and A Museum Exhibition Catalogue 2011). The area of the Shankill Falls ‘Divide’ that I am researching is either side of the physical wall on Cupar Way, up to the Shankill Road on one side, and Falls Road / Springfield Road on the other. Although there are now gates in the wall, the symbolic divide persists, with local inhabitants tending to stay on one side or the other.

Process 1: The Conflict Tour

The walking tour is three hours long, with equal time spent on each side of the ‘peace wall’: half in what is perceived as the Catholic Nationalist Republican side, and half in what is perceived as the Protestant Unionist Loyalist side. The symbolic landscape of Northern Ireland is complex, and includes a multi-faced range of different actors, both pre and post-Troubles, but this simplification is used. A former IRA prisoner hands us over at the peace wall gates to a former Loyalist prisoner. They shake hands and the tourists applaud them. Apart from a Cork man, I am the only person identifying as Irish on the tour. Others are English, Swiss, French, Canadian, American, and Chinese.

The former prisoners share their stories, while the walls and outdoor gallery spaces communicate in tandem. The spaces of the interface offer the tour group two very different critical pedagogies of political and historical topics. Complex events are often compacted into one painted surface. Comprehensive tableaux provide visual historical sequences, and imagery of the conflict. Tourists are fascinated. Two diametrically opposed explanations of the same conflict are compellingly authentic. The painted walls, animated by the discourse of prisoners, become strangely exotic and spectacular. Tourists experience them in sequence and in combination (Ockman 2005).

The visual analysis of press photography, political media, and architecture has engaged art historians as well as media and cultural theorists throughout the last century (Benjamin 2008; Barthes 1972, 1981; Chomsky 1988; McLuhan 1964; Williams 2003). It is also an increasingly significant topic in anthropological literature (Rose 2007; Sontag 2008; Taylor 1998). Lefebvre (1991) analyses architectural spaces, arguing that not only do we produce spaces, but also that these spaces simultaneously produce us. He invites us to consider cities as both spaces of representation, and as representational spaces, connecting the social with the spatial. Lefebvre analyses urban spaces as a three-part dialectic between everyday practices and perceptions (le percu), representations or theories of space (le concu), and the spatial imaginary of the time (le vecu).

It is a useful explanation to account for how viewers engage with tourist spaces, murals, and observation posts, by combining the simultaneous effects of lived experiences and their representation. The conflict tour guides provide a simulation of historical everyday practices and perceptions by walking us through the very spaces of conflict (le percu). They convey their representations and theories of space through the visible murals (le concu). And they communicate the spatial imaginary of the time (le vecu) by sharing their individual and collective narratives.
A flock of doves completes the quasi-religious homage. It is an image of peace and suffering, with Bobby Sands’s smiling face reifying the subjugation of a colonised population. The hunger strikes of real prisoners in a slow extended battle between mind and body, hunger and food, subjugation and authority offered a republican platform at a time of media censorship that resulted in greater IRA support. It’s easy to forget that the IRA was engaged in violent conflict, and that public support for their campaign was rather limited before the hunger strike. It’s also easy to forget that censorship by the Irish media denied prisoners such as Sands a public voice. Here, 37 years after Sands’s words of resistance were first penned, tourists exchange looks that I interpret as pity. Irish people as a whole are identified with Sands, as victimhood personified (Ravenscroft 2010).

The appropriation and subversion of visual imagery is the modus operandi of the International Wall. At one point, the International Wall exhibited an artist’s take on ‘Guernica’, Picasso’s emotive response to the brutality of a massacre during the Spanish Civil War (Figure 1). A similar appropriation of Guernica was painted on the Berlin Wall (Figure 2). Other appropriations include a series of repeat portraits, using the faces of hunger strikers to replace those of Warhol’s Marilyn Monroe (Figure 3), and a colourful pop Belfast Che Guevara.

At one point, the tour group is asked to contemplate a mural on which is inscribed the poetic final thoughts of hunger striker Bobby Sands: ‘Our revenge will be the laughter of our children’. Bobby Sands was one of ten hunger strikers that died in 1981. Viewers are aware that, despite his desperate situation, Sands had the foresight to shape the narrative that is visible on the wall. In the moments approaching his death, he is negotiating a collective history from his individual situation. His death therefore represents a collectivity, and that collectivity, he insinuates, is further representing a larger subjugated population of Catholic Nationalist Republicans in Ireland. This is the narrative that tourists are shown.

Picasso’s ‘Guernica’ exposed the brutality of warfare during the modernist period of art. Guernica’s Belfast appropriation permits the viewer an alternative reading of the Northern Irish conflict. It borrows from the authority of another conflict that is now distant chronologically and spatially. The subtext is that the Northern Irish Parliament was an oppressive dictatorship, and that socialist resistance was therefore a necessary evil. ‘Guernica’ is a transnational appropriation and subversion, and therefore a postmodern tactic.

In replicating press photographs of John F. Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe, Andy Warhol was concerned with capturing the media construction of celebrities by literally reproducing photographs of them (Gingeras, 2020). Warhol then repeated the images, and applied coloured surfaces to them, referring to mass media printing processes. By re-appropriating Warhols’ appropriations, and aligning the hunger strikers with such popular and colourful figures, the murals are knowingly ironic (Figure 3). They are culturally engaged, postmodern humour in action. The hunger strikers may have turned a tide of sympathy towards the IRA, but, according to my respondents, they were not embraced with the same level of enthusiasm as Marilyn Monroe or JFK: ‘My mother refused to hang a black flag on our house for Bobby Sands’.

By aligning the Irish Republican struggle with that of Che Guevara, the artist draws a parallel between the political roots of the IRA and the popular Marxist politics of the Cuban Resistance. In this narrative, viewers are asked to equate Cuban and IRA resistance fighters. The imagery infers that both campaigns were in place to permit the creation of a socialist society. The artwork is thus appropriated, and with
it a violent political agenda. The artwork seeks to validate the IRA’s actions as a social cause, through transnational appropriation and subversion in line with postmodern artistry (V and A Museum Exhibition Catalogue 2011).

In the daunting tone of the TV presenters during the Troubles, the viewing public was informed about incendiary devices, death tolls, and admissions of responsibility. Murals present other versions of the conflict to those that were broadcast during the Troubles era, representing certain voices that had been silenced during the broadcasting bans.\(^4\)

\[\text{Figure 1: Picasso Guernica Belfast Appropriation. Painted by local artists with Conrad Atkinson and Robert Ballagh, 2009, International Wall, Belfast. © Peter Moloney Collection and Extramural Activity. Image courtesy of Extramural Activity.}\]

\[\text{Figure 2: Berlin Wall Appropriation, in Homage to Picasso’s ‘Guernica’, East Side Gallery. © Eq Roy, Dreamstime. Image courtesy of Dreamstime.}\]
The debate in postcolonial theory about whether or not the ‘subaltern’ group can speak seems pertinent (Spivak 1988). The tour group learns about how our guide was tortured and beaten in prison. He was ‘on the blanket’, and was regularly hosed down naked in a cold yard. He tells us that his flesh was scraped raw with scrubbing brushes. He also lived for a time in a prison ship that was rat infested. He stammers and stutters his way through his story, each interruption a reflection of the psychological trauma he suffered.

Freud has explained how individual trauma, and experiences such as war and imprisonment, affects the subconscious. But psychoanalysis has not yet adequately explained societal trauma.5

Anthropologists have progressed in explaining societal trauma, following Freud. ‘Narrative Theory’ accounts for the process of formulating and refining collective memories through intersubjective groups. Jacksons’s ‘The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression and Intersubjectivity’ (2006) is a pertinent example. The process of intersubjective negotiation of societal trauma in such a long conflict involves dialogue over generations. This process of commemoration thus allows for the intergenerational communication of personal experiences and political ideologies.

Older generations instill caution. In subsequent conversations with elderly inhabitants, I am advised not to be taken in by the former paramilitary tour guides. ‘They are not impartial,’ I am told.6 I am warned of the coercive and persuasive architectural effects of Interface Walls and Murals, by locals and by academics (McAtackney 2011; O’Dochartaigh 2007). Despite this, I continue to look at them. In the social, spatial, and urban context of Belfast, walls operate as memorials to communicate
intergenerational urban pedagogies. This is how walls in Belfast have retrieved a symbolic and narrative architectural function, while deploying postmodern strategies and tactics. The didactic messages of resistance that they convey offer compelling examples of a post-colonial kind of postmodernism.

Figure 4: At the International Wall on the Falls Road, Belfast, sheds are disconnected from decorated walls. Photo by Karin Reenie Elliott.

Political Representation and Outsider Art

The authenticity of the narrative communicated by the International wall is more frequently questioned from the position of political representation, rather than on the basis of their execution or artistic originality. Many feel that the International Wall Murals don’t adequately articulate the views of Catholic Nationalists. ‘They only represent 5% of the population’ I am told.

Rarely is such criticism levelled at ‘outsider’ artworks in contemporary shows that purport to reflect the concerns of other minority groups. Should viewers have to articulate what they don’t like about art using statistics, as if only percentages mattered? The Guerilla Girls campaign to bring womens’ art into public galleries has been active since the 1970s, and informed us: ‘Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female’ (Guerilla Girls 2018).

Should Anne Frank’s museum be required to articulate the limits to its representation and carry a disclaimer about the minority population that it represented? Clearly, it should not.
When our group of tourists are handed over to the former loyalist prisoner, and the former nationalist prisoner is out of earshot, he asks:

*Did he try telling you that the Troubles were about discrimination? Was he well educated, like most nationalist republicans? Did you know that the Shankill Road population has the highest levels of illiteracy and poverty in the UK? Did you know they employ professional artists to paint their murals? Our community paints ours…*

Denigrating the former nationalist prisoners’ narrative was at the forefront of the former loyalist prisoners’ narrative. His negation of the nationalist perspective seemed more convincing to the tourists than it was to me (RTE 2020). His compelling narrative gave them a sense of finding something authentic: a fragment of the conflict played out in the tourist gaze.

An exhibition entitled ‘The Museum of Everything’ displaying ‘outsider art’ was shown in Primrose Hill, to great acclaim in 2011 (GuildfordGhost 2011). Artworks made by prisoners, the insane, murderers, rapists, and even a paedophile were on display. The exhibition offered glimpses into hidden worlds, emotions, rationales, and subjective experiences that would otherwise remain concealed from view. If International critics can embrace work this controversial, why should they be persuaded to turn their backs on the political murals of Belfast by the left-wing press (Jenkins 2012)? It appears that political murals operate as ‘outsider art’ for some, and as elitist propaganda for others. Shouldn’t viewers acknowledge art that champions the cause of a minority group, thus giving them a voice, and thereby agency? Shouldn’t historians attempt to negotiate an inclusive collective history?

**Postmodern and Postcolonial Tactics**

The lack of artistic originality of these artworks is significant. What does it mean to appropriate and subvert the work of another artist? It is a widely recognised postmodern tactic (Craft 2013; Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour 1977; Jencks 1977; Sparke 2008, 2017) at work within a postcolonial strategy. Mimicry is a recognised form of cultural appropriation in postcolonial societies (Bhabha 1994). Ironically, this mimicry occurs at the very site of postcolonial resistance. The wall murals embody the emergence of postmodernism in their depiction of a series of reversals of power and visibility. For tourist audiences, wall murals are used to convey messages of resistance in increasingly elaborate postmodern displays of ornamentation. They are also exotic because they are outsider art, at a point in time when postcolonial artwork is flourishing.

The recent extension to the Tate Modern in London is attempting to redress the former absence of postcolonial and political artworks by devoting entire floors to them. On display are artworks from Beirut, Tirana, and Morocco, alongside nostalgic photos from the former USSR. British portraits of the aristocracy, by contrast, are nowhere to be seen. For International tourists, Belfast walls and murals are taking postcolonial themes in art outside of institutions and siting them in an authentic and engaging spatial context. They are retrieving a lost symbolic and civic narrative function in public spaces on architectural surfaces.
Contested Space

Some argue that the urban landscapes occupied by the International Wall Murals perform an elaborate role in escalating the contestation of space and territory (Jenkins 2012), through the further display of signs, the semiotics of language, and the use of theatrical spectacle. However, not only do they construct narratives of violence, but they also offer compelling rationales for peaceful reconciliation. On the one hand, political art represents the conflict as historical rather than current. Lawther (2017), on the other, argues that the freedom of expression of political viewpoints can lead to the understanding of opposing discourses and thus, reconciliation.

The positive effects of economic growth, globalisation, tourism, regeneration, and urban development can be felt more in some areas of the city than in others. Despite efforts to regenerate both the Falls and Shankill areas, around these walls the effects of the conflict and deprivation persist. Wall murals continue to exhibit polarised semiotics of territory, history, and place (Norburg Schulz 1974, 1980). In the context of community initiatives and government policies that encourage integration, shared spaces, and re-imaging (Hocking 2015; Bryan 2012, 2018), wall tourism offers an alternative form of media representation (McAtackney 2011, 2017). The walls are used to represent and contest dominant ideologies and histories of the conflict spatially, for tourist and media consumption.

Figure 5: Robert Rauschenberg
Erased de Kooning Drawing, 1953
Traces of drawing media on paper with label hand-lettered in ink, and gilded frame
25 1/4 x 21 3/4 x 1/2 inches (64.1 x 55.2 x 1.3 cm)
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Purchase through a gift of Phyllis C. Wattis
©Robert Rauschenberg Foundation
Image courtesy of Robert Rauschenberg Foundation
Architecture is deployed as a form of media, recuperating its’ narrative role. As the tourist is guided through the public spaces of the city, architectural spaces and structures are mobilised to support a didactic reading of history, conflict, drama and violence. In a truly postmodern manifestation, the architectural media acquires an international dimension: public platforms, memorials and commemorations refer to political allegiances and geographical affiliations with a plethora of similar places elsewhere.

An Intersection of the Postcolonial and the Postmodern

Within the postmodern condition of Belfast murals discussed above, I have also clearly identified a postcolonial agenda. In the following section, postcolonial theory is used as a series of concepts that critique how architectural structures communicate symbolic messages and spatial hierarchies (King 2003; Said 1978, 1984). Such postcolonial effects are evident in the spatial configurations and surfaces of wall structures. By interrogating key elements that are characteristic of postcolonialism, and aligning them with conditions at the International Wall, I found the following evidence of an intersection of the postcolonial within the postmodern.

The multiple critiques of the contested state, one might argue, are a form of anti-modernism (Foucault 1977, 2009; Said 1978, 1994). Both nationalists and loyalists use murals to contest narratives of nationhood (Rolston 1992, 1995; Said 1978, 1994; Bhabha 1990, 1994; Spivak 1988). Cultural narratives of imperialism and resistance are evoked through symbolic postcolonial figures (Said 1978, 1994), deployed to polarise contested constructions of identity (Rolston 1992, 1995). References to cultures distant in time and space mobilise ethnocentrism, constructing diverse formulations of identity and voice, in an attempt to recuperate lost historical traditions, languages and rituals (Said 1978, 1994; Bhabha 1990, 1994; Spivak 1988). This has the effect of ‘othering’ ethno-religious identities across the divide, but also of exoticising them (Said 1978, 1994). Diverse formulations of identity and voice are thus palimpsests, layering territorial claims with historical perceptions of subalternity, dislocation, exile, and migration upon conceptions of space and ethnicity (Spivak 1988; Bhabha 1990, 1994).

The Shankill Falls Divide manifestly fits the postcolonial conception of a space where liminality and interstice give rise to hybridity (Bhabha 1994). It is a spatial condition that engenders subversion and mimicry. The writing on the wall is an example of abrogation, a rhetorical device in which the colonised population appropriates the language of the coloniser in order to critique it (Bhabha 1990, 1994; Spivak 1988), resulting in a postmodern pastiche in narratives of coloniser and colonised. The tour gives voice to those who could not speak, which typifies the subaltern condition (Spivak 1988). Thus both Unionist Loyalist and Nationalist Republican former prisoners embody postcolonial figures, despite the obvious distinctions between them, and the conflicting narratives of statecraft that they convey.

I realise that the theory of the postcolonial public intellectual fits the stuttering former IRA prisoner. Empowered by tourists, he is the subaltern using a voice silenced during years of incarceration, now mobilising art to explain, politicise, and gain empathy. He is recognised by an international audience at the international wall. The same can be said of the former loyalist prisoner, although his speech is more articulate. He shows us a range of open-air galleries, bombsites, and memorial gardens. Here, architectural structures of commemoration are mobilised to validate territorial claims and establish a political justification for unpopular battles in the Roman tradition, establishing historical narrative through symbolic representation (Figure 11).
The above postmodern and postcolonial mappings reveal visual, political, and social complexities, played out through attempts to reclaim graphic territories, languages, signs, and iconography. In Catholic murals, whether they are referring to conflicts in Palestine or Cuba, Basque separatists or Colombian Sandinistas, political opinions are expressed through parallel geographies. In Protestant murals, by contrast, it is history that takes centre stage (Figures 6-9). Portraits of King William on horseback, on the Shankill side, refer to a 1690 victory of Protestants over Catholics at the Battle of the Boyne. They seem to be disappearing in recent years only to be ‘re-imaged’ by murals portraying the Battle of the Somme, poppies, and ‘brothers in arms’ (Bryan 2012, 2018). According to official literature advertising a World War One commemorative tour of the history of the UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force) at the Shankill Falls ‘Divide’, these iconographies claim to depict a shared history, in which both Catholics and Protestants can find unity (Living Legacies 2019). A British Academic led the tour. Tellingly, on the Falls Road side, he became confused about street locations. Few participants were convinced that World War One history could be described as a ‘shared experience’. One joked to a latecomer ‘You missed it – it’s been a bloodbath!’

The position of the interface at the Shankill Falls Divide reflects a disciplinary divide: between postmodern geography and postmodern history / heritage (Soja 1989; Sparke 2008, 2017), a divide between spatial and temporal perception. In both cases, a context is created: geographical primarily on the Falls side, and historical primarily on the Shankill side.

When discussing murals, my respondents explain how biased and well-funded the artwork on the Catholic side is. ‘The Republican murals are funded by donations from American IRA sympathisers’, one respondent asserts, clarifying that ‘It is only propaganda’. I’m told so often that the murals don’t represent a consensus about the history of this conflicted city, that I wonder if I should explore other more authentic ways of recording it.

Figures 6 (above) and 7 (below): Unionist and Loyalist Paramilitary Murals painted on houses in Belfast demonstrate affinities to a complex array of nationhoods, with Scotland, Great Britain, the United Kingdom, and Ulster allegiances declared simultaneously. Claims of authority and authenticity are made by the use of shields, insignia, heritage symbols and emblems. Photos by Karin Reenie Elliott.
Figure 8: Decorated buildings in East Belfast align Loyalist Paramilitaries with heritage of the shipyard (cranes in background), where the Titanic was built. Photo by Karin Reenie Elliott.

Figure 9: Unionist Loyalist Paramilitary Mural – the public aspect of the sign overwhelms the privacy of the modest dwelling, exemplifying a Venturi-esque postmodern ‘decorated shed’. Photo by Karin Reenie Elliott.
Figure 10: Nationalist Republican Murals in the Falls Road area of West Belfast demonstrate political affiliations and identification with the Palestine Liberation struggle. Photo by Karin Reenie Elliott.

Figure 11: Triumphal Arch of the Emperor Constantine in the Great Roman Forum. Inscriptions offer a glorification of history in their revisionist depiction of a controversial and unpopular battle. ID 140144652 © Arne Beruldsen, Dreamstime.com. Image courtesy of Dreamstime.
Process 2: A Collective Map of Observation Architecture

An old memory of this space materialises. As students, two of us had persuaded a friend to drive us to the Falls Road back in the 1980s. We were looking towards Divis Flats. She explained to us what the word ‘internment’ meant (the imprisonment without trial of suspected paramilitaries, usually Catholic men). Many internees were taken from these buildings. Suddenly, an armoured car turned the corner and a British soldier pointed a gun directly at us from the roof. He shouted: ‘Get the f… out of here’. When we recounted this to others at the time, there was consensus about his instruction. ‘Yes, you should stay away from that area’, they advised.

Palimpsest

Fast forward 35 years, and a map on the Falls Road tells me that I am in a ‘Gaeltacht’, complete with its’ own public institutions. A ‘Gaeltacht’ is an area where the Irish language is predominantly spoken. This information is presented on a piece of street furniture. It’s difficult to reconcile these two identical places: the militarised space of 1985, and the Falls ‘Gaeltacht’ of today (Carden 2011). Fragments of a language I once knew return sporadically. Signs for Aras Ui Chongaille (Connolly’s House) and Saoirse (Freedom) are more ‘Tiochaidh ar La’ (the Republican call that ‘our day will come’) than Buntus Cainte (the Irish version of ‘Linguaphone’).

The Gaeltacht is a mythological place with ceili dances, games, and summer idling on dry stone walls. It is a rural arcadia where music, movement, language and landscape are intertwined. To superimpose a Gaeltacht on the urban territory of conflict that was the Falls Road requires hope and imagination. Here, nationalists use language to claim territory and reclaim identity.

Illustrations depicting ‘armoured cars and tanks and guns’ that ‘came to take away our sons’ (McGuigan 1982) are gradually being replaced by a charming pedagogy of jigs, reels, and celtic mythologies. A shop selling ‘Atlantic brogues’ (dancing shoes) sits opposite the International wall. These mild forms of 21st cultural pedagogy have replaced earlier, and far more threatening, lessons in street conduct. This shift can be partially attributed to ‘re-imaging’, as part of an ongoing ‘peace process’ (McAtackney 2011, 2017; Hocking 2015; O’Dochartaigh 2007). It is a lesson in postmodern geographical re-appropriation through the imagination.

Invisibility

These postmodern maps and tours motivate me to undertake research into the pre-existing urban scenography of surveillance architecture. Could the pedagogy of military observation posts in the urban space have spawned a pedagogy of murals, or vice versa? Not only were army observation posts an essential aspect of the architectural history of this place, but they also conditioned behaviour and embodied meanings too (Olley 2007; Wylie 2007). Did occupants see observation posts as ‘strategic weapons in the service of the state, which has sought to secure national and geopolitical objectives through the organisation of space and the redistribution of its’ population’, as architectural theorists claim (Rotbard 2003; Weizman 2007)? The current urban scenography combines green and orange murals with a range of general political commentaries in graphic form. Little reference is made to the dismantled British Army observation posts – as though they’d never existed. Archival material is non-
existent, so I initiate informal interviews and discussions (Aull Davies 1998; Jackson 2006), as all other research methods have led nowhere. My aim is to locate, accurately visualise, and record the military viewing regimes that preceded the current tourist ones.

**Method**

Local respondents guide me through the former street names, and the typologies of sanger and watchtower. Disorientated by the disappearance of entire streets, the destruction of whole enclaves, and the adjustments of road layouts between maps, I’m told that cul de sacs have replaced many of the historical streets. The Ministry of Defence hoped these would be easier to police (Hackett 2018). Through maps, I navigate the complex geographical history of the place.

Respondents tell me where observation positions were, and what they looked like. Then I draw these on my collaborative map in an ever-expanding mapping exercise. I start with two pieces of paper onto which I transcribe each observation position I am told about: one for Shankill and one for Falls (Figures 12 and 13). A process of interview, map elicitation, google searches, and drawing is followed by feedback sessions. Archives are checked. I return to my respondents for verification and adjustment.9

*Figure 12: Initial Collective Map of Observation Posts at the Shankill Falls Divide, Falls Rd, by Karin Reenie Elliott.*
Figure 13: Initial Collective Map of Observation Posts on the Shankill Road Side of the Divide, by Karin Reenie Elliott.

Asymmetrical Surveillance

Most of the observation posts are clustered on the Falls (Catholic) side of the map (Figure 12). The only observation posts that I have found so far on the Shankill (Protestant) side were at the Tennent St Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) station, at Silvio St, Flax St Barracks, and at Crumlin Road Gaol (Figure 13). A Nationalist Republican would argue that this kind of inequality was the root cause of the problem in the first place. Contemporary surveillance theorists describe this condition as ‘asymmetrical surveillance’, where an imbalance of power exists between the dominant state structures conducting the surveillance and minority groups they are watching (Haggerty and Ericson 2005).

I ask my respondents why there were more observation positions on the Falls side than on the Shankill side. The responses are varied. ‘The British Army were fighting Catholic Nationalist Republicans’, I am told by one respondent, ‘and they were supporting the RUC and Loyalist paramilitaries’.10 ‘They didn’t need to watch us’, a member of the Shankill Area Social History Group (S.A.S.H.) tells me.11 Another respondent explains to me that ‘Loyalists were not paramilitaries, they were vigilantes’.12 ‘They were in collusion with loyalists’ a further respondent tells me, ‘so, why would they need observation posts when they could just talk to them?’.13
A British Army Commanders Diary from 1972 supports these analyses. He describes Catholics as ‘the enemy’ and refers to new loyalist roadblocks as a rather enterprising initiative by some young protestant men that he finds impressive (Commanders Diary 1972). He seems unaware of the pogroms that had happened three years earlier in the Falls area, when hundreds of Catholic homes were burnt out by rioting loyalist protestant men from the Shankill area (CAIN 2019).

Having read so many encouraging narratives about shared spaces and sensitivity to contested histories during my fieldwork, I had incorrectly assumed that the surveillance would be evenly distributed across the two sides of the Divide (Jarman 2002; McDowell, S., Braniff, M., and Murphy, J., 2017). I had assumed that the British Army or the RUC would have treated both Republican and Loyalist paramilitary groups with an equal degree of caution. My preconceptions did not reflect the politics of the military installation in 1972.

**Strategic Positioning of the Surveillance Network**

I discover a Riot Area map that depicted the degree of destruction caused in 1969 by loyalist rioters to buildings inhabited by Catholics (Scarman 1972). The map was published as part of the Scarman Report into ‘Disturbances’ in which thousands of people lost their homes, and was described by Catholics as a ‘pogrom’. The map is the most accurate record I have found of street and site geometries in 1972. I trace over it in sections, using it as a base map. I then superimpose measured drawings of observation positions onto my tracing of the 1972 map (Figure 14). I realise that the 1972 map is a snapshot, depicting a moment in time of extreme conflict and distress. This is how I construct my map of surveillance architecture.

There is a strong correlation between the positions of the observation posts and the burnt out buildings on the Catholic side of the interface, which pre-date them. Could the strategy for locating observation posts be linked to the positions of burnt buildings? This coincidence suggests that observation posts may originally have been intended as a protective measure to prevent further pogroms and protect the vulnerable catholic population. But a note on the map informs us that ‘Deputy Commissioner Bradley’ advised the Ministry of Defence, in ‘police headquarters’, to create a dividing line to separate the two sides of Cupar Street along ethno-religious lines. So the observation were clearly designed to further penetrate an area perceived by the security forces to be Catholic Nationalist Republican. Thus an intrusive form of surveillance was put in place by the security forces in an attempt to control and monitor the Catholic population.

The network of surveillance was designed as a mechanism for spatial control. It is the physical manifestation of a functioning ‘State Apparatus’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986) based on the Riot Area Map. Ultimately, military surveillance had the effect of alienating everyone. One respondent recalls a ‘Troops Out’ tour of the area, which navigated the observation posts, and was led by a group of left wing activists from London.14 The ultimate removal of these military structures was one of the key planks in negotiating the Peace Agreement in 1998.

Most of the observation posts I map change shape and position many times during the Troubles. Histories and geographies of observation positions appear in random orders. I organise them in a sequence. My diagrammatic map becomes a participatory tool (Villanueva Brandt 1998) for assembling a hidden spatial history. I use the riot area map to identify the underlying geometry of the surveillance
strategy. I speculate on its’ spatial rules, codes and regulating arrangements (Figure 14). As I uncover the surveillance strategy and its tactical layout, I understand this as a work of functionalist urbanism (Kohlrausch 2019).

Figure 14: Provisional Map of Covert Observation Posts at Lower Falls Road by Karin Reenie Elliott.

Figure 15: Surveillance Architecture: RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary) station, Springfield Rd, drawing by Karin Reenie Elliott.
Appropriation and Subversion

Through the participatory process, and my subsequent drawings (Figure 15), I learn how the British Army appropriated existing mill buildings, hospitals, housing, schools, shops, and police stations as observation posts. Over time, observation posts were perceived by respondents as both signs and actions of military suppression. They were understood as a way to exert power over the public space in tandem with military patrols, displays, and rituals. Iconographic observation posts acquired symbolic meaning in their surroundings (Sennet 1994; Norburg Schulz 1980), in a colonial context of violent conflict and postcolonial resistance.

By discussing photographs, respondents assist me to identify strategies which embraced tactics of camouflage; employed eclectic techniques of bricolage and montage; assimilated a variety of stylistic influences and subverted them with contested rules in appropriated spaces (Figure 16). Observation posts blocked streets and disconnected urban spaces, created disjunctions, disrupted journeys and, along with interface walls, fragmented urban experiences.

The collective map is challenging notions of authorship, and offers individual contributors the opportunity to critically engage with a series of spatial analyses. Some show me additional photographs, drawings, maps, and texts. One photograph shows a group of women assembling an impromptu event, by appropriating a set of steps as an auditorium in a sit down protest. A resident tells me:
I’m not sure what that protest was about. They were always protesting about something…and there was also a British Army post on the roof of this building.

Their next photograph shows the buildings around us, burnt out in 1969. My respondents reveal that these spaces were gendered. Male soldiers occupied observation posts. Men and women occupied streets. Women often protested.

The map invites participants to critically engage in the construction of group narratives from individual histories (Jackson 2006) using architectural objects and physical spaces. I investigate how architecture - and the map itself - is becoming a repository for collective memory, constructing narrative histories around gender, post-colonialism, and spaces of representation. Collectively, participants are exploring the complex networks of meaning constructed in public spaces by observation positions (Sennet 1994; Norburg Schulz 1980). As each participant shares his/her experience, he/she is negotiating his/her own individual history within a collective narrative (Jackson 2006). The focus on a material culture of architecture allows them to reflect on how physical networks of psychological control over the urban spaces were established by the British Army, with the advice of the (predominately Protestant) RUC.

Covert Surveillance and the Postmodern ‘Turn’

Combining ethnography (Aull Davies 2008) with archival research, I begin to decode how the army monitored the movements of citizens, reporting intelligence summaries through a chain of command. By August 1972, this was neither neutral nor benign. The installation of covert observation posts and thousands of house searches exacerbated already tense relations, and frequently resulted in shootings, death and injury, as can be seen in an OP log (War Diary 2013). I map these military actions onto the 1972 Riot Area Map. This gives me a spatial comparison between reported conflict and the tactical positioning of observation posts. It becomes clear from this exercise that the military were reporting most accurately in the vicinity of OPs. Elsewhere, they were frequently lost.

The locals used to remove street signs to ensure that soldiers would be disorientated. It also meant that when they were given lists of streets and houses to search, it would be difficult to find them.  

Putting the Politics Back into Postmodernism

The shift from overt to covert surveillance in Belfast coincides with the date postmodernism is purported to have begun. In ‘The Language of Post-Modern Architecture’, Charles Jencks states:

Modern Architecture died in St Louis, Missouri on July 15, 1972...when the infamous Pruitt-Igoe scheme, or rather several of its’ slab blocks, were given the final coup de grace by dynamite (Haddad 2009).

I contend that Jencks (1977) de-politicised postmodernism, showing greater concern for the male architect than for the predominantly African American occupants of the project. Had he confronted the racial and the political context of Civil Rights activism, or had he claimed that modernism died with the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, postmodernism may have fared differently. The
introduction of covert surveillance in Belfast in 1972 also had a political and a racial dimension. These new surveillance practices were part of British Army Commander Kitsons’ radical new intelligence gathering strategy. Using information gathered, they ‘turned’ local militants into informers, as outlined in his handbook ‘Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency and Peacekeeping’ (1971). This provides a convincing example of the breakdown in transparent, modern functionalist urbanism. The army mobilised a series of subversive tactics of infiltration and manipulation ‘successfully’ tested by Kitson in other colonial theatres of conflict in Kenya and the Far East. These strategies dealt subversively with race and space, architecture and imperialism, power and control, domination and resistance. I argue that the construction of an extensive network of covert surveillance structures in Northern Ireland were therefore geo-politically more significant than the demolition of modernist flats in Missouri, the demise of the modernist architectural style.

The Reciprocal Gaze: Audiences in the Urban Scenography

Observation positions produced meaning for both occupants and audiences (Sennet 1994; Norburg Schulz 1980). They acted as forms of architectural media in public spaces. My respondents reveal other hidden and sensory dimensions of surveillance:

*The helicopters hovered in a grid for surveillance purposes. They would hover for ages. Listening devices and directional microphones were everywhere. Sometimes ham radio enthusiasts would tune in to their radio signals and listen in, just for entertainment.*

In ‘Learning from Las Vegas’, Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour (1977) used architectural drawings and spatial mappings to decode the signage configurations and spatial arrangements of the iconographic structures that lined the Las Vegas Strip (Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour 1977). Their graphic techniques included message maps, audiencing diagrams, and scaled drawings that analysed architectural spaces as an urban setting. Architectural structures and signs became interchangeable; photographic studies were explorations rather than illustrations; accurate measured drawings were investigative tools to examine spatial relationships. This was a radical departure from the text based spatial analyses used by Jencks (1977), Foucault (1977), Baudrillard (1983), and Deleuze (1986, 1992).

By elevating the architectural merits of the modest parking lot and the roadside billboard, Venturi Scott Brown (check that this is right and then needs to be formatted correctly) attended to a neglected aspect of urban analysis. It was one that combined class, or ‘low art’, speed, and space. By adopting mapping techniques used by Venturi and Scott Brown to critically analyse the reception of signs and surfaces, I similarly explore the symbolism and iconography of architectural spaces of surveillance. I consider the positions and viewpoints of spectators from a variety of mobile and fixed observation positions: from windows, while walking, cycling, driving, on public transport, from tourist buses, from taxis, and on navigational maps. British Army Observation Posts, similarly, had to be perceived by modern audiences in fluid, mobile situations. Their coercive message was neither to buy nor to linger. They were disciplinary structures that codified behaviour through passive surveillance (Olley 2007; Wylie 2007). Spatial mappings allow us to analyse them in the manner of Venturi Scott Brown, at an urban scale.

By contrast, drawings of individual observation posts reveal how these structures operated spatially, as urban forms of Foucauldian panopticism. In Bentham’s Panopticon, the jailer exerted control over
prisoners by remaining invisible, while they were contained ‘docile bodies’ (Foucault 1977). In its urban transposition at the Shankill Falls Divide, the panoptic system of control devised by Bentham became a ‘leaky container’ (Lyon 2001). Back alleys provided escape routes and soldiers were visible. Nonetheless a form of imprisonment existed. Men were encouraged to stay indoors for safety sake, and remain invisible, aware of their status as ‘docile bodies’ vulnerable to the gaze of British soldiers. None of my respondents exposed subversive tactics of resistance in relation to observation posts. However, newspaper articles from 1972 reveal that a significant number of soldiers and civilians were shot in and from observation posts. It is beyond the scope of this paper to develop this comparison, but a forthcoming paper does explore it in more detail (Elliott 2020).

Figure 17: Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, controversially treat architecture as semiotic and iconographic signs, codifying all buildings as either ‘Duck’ or ‘Decorated Shed’. © Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form, revised edition, by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, reprinted courtesy of The MIT Press.
Iconography: Political Ducks and Decorated Sheds

An architectural theorist can discern instances of Venturi’s ‘Decorated Shed’ in political murals, and their iconographic ‘Ducks’ in observation posts (Figure 17). This allows us to consider how both citizens and the military appropriated spaces for diverse audiences. Together, they form an urban scenography over time.

For Venturi Scott Brown (check that this is right.. is Izenhour supposed to be included?), the ‘Decorated Shed’ was a structure in which the façade assimilated all the narrative function of the architecture, while the shed behind performed a utilitarian role in accommodating the prescribed purpose of the building. In murals, even the narrative purpose of a domestic façade has been appropriated to perform a political role (Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour 1977), and one that exceeds the functional requirements of a dwelling. They are also putting the political back into postmodernism.

The ‘Duck’, on the other hand, for Venturi Scott Brown (same as above) was a structure whose iconographic purpose exceeded its practical functioning. The same might be said of British Army observation posts. Rarely used to actually punish anyone, the threat that they might do so was enough to condition behaviour in the urban space. Thus, their emblematic function (to be seen to observe and control) exceeded their actual function (to discipline and punish misbehaviour). They thus embody a Foucauldian twist on Venturi’s ‘Duck’.

An Example of Negotiation: The Knit and Natter Club

I consult with a knit and natter club about my map. Taylor (2003) argues that you define yourself through your conversations with others. The implication for history is that the definition of selfhood is a process from which collective memories are constructed. A range of individual memories is collected to form a group history. Collecting oral histories of observation posts is a fragile process.

One knitter tells me not to pay any attention to the black taxi guides, one of whom is talking to tourists outside on the street. ‘They don’t tell you the real history of the Troubles, you know?’ As she speaks, a ray of sun appears, and I am aware of the Bobby Sands mural just outside the window. Inside, in the shadow of Sands, knitters shed light on the most elusive observation positions on my map.

‘And do you think that there was a British Army observation post in the lantern of this building?’ I ask, showing them my sketch map.

‘Not in the lantern, no. But we think that they were in the attic during the Troubles’, another replies.19

Invisibility was also important in mobile surveillance operations. ‘Did you hear about Operation Motorman in 1972?’ yet another asks. ‘They came in under clouds of coloured smoke, to obscure our view’.20

The stories continue, played out in different spaces, public and private across a network of places, past and present. A former nurse was trapped in the conflict during the Falls Curfew of 1971. ‘My father let me stay out all night to give first aid’ she said smiling. A friend of another knitter was giving evidence.
at the Ballymurphy Trial the previous week. The trial included controversy over an innocent victim allegedly shot from an observation post. The uncle of one of the knitters was also shot by the British Army. He had been changing the battery of his van in his garage. He was getting ready to drive some disabled children, as he did every Sunday. He had no connection to any paramilitary group. Historical events from 50 years ago intrude painfully into the present day.

The quietest knitter lays her cloth over the table and concentrates on the connections. She has crocheted small circles inside larger circles, and then stitched them together to connect to each other. I realise that participants are collectively knitting an invisible and fragile fabric of memories. Visual signals, masks and decoys, formal and informal contested histories - individual and collective - coalesce in my mind as the fabric is smoothed out on the table and the knitting comes to a close.

‘We have to get going now’, says the knitter, ‘Call ahead before you come next time’, she adds cautiously. I feel like an intruder, bringing up bad memories. Perhaps I shouldn’t have come here with my maps and histories, when all they wanted to do was to knit. I wonder if I should knit the map rather than draw it. I hope that I can come back and get my map checked properly by the knitters. The quietest knitter squeezes my hand on the way out, so I know that it’s okay with her anyway.

Findings:

1. **Asymmetrical Surveillance**: Both the tour and the map group reveal that there were hardly any British Army observation posts on the Shankill side, whereas there was a high concentration of them on the Falls side. Official files that could confirm this have been embargoed until 2050 or later.

2. **Conflicting Interpretations**: This points to the preferential treatment of loyalist paramilitaries by the British Army (respondents from all backgrounds recorded this interpretation). Explanations of the asymmetrical surveillance varied, depending on the ethno-religious background of respondents. Respondents of Protestant background asserted that Catholic Nationalist Republicans posed a greater threat in the public spaces, whereas respondents of Catholic background strongly opposed this view.

3. **Territoriality**: In both tour and map groups, limits are placed on the geographical extent of the space being observed, and on the duration of time spent in it.

4. **Architecture as Prop**: At the Shankill Falls Divide, architecture is used as a prop for the negotiation of collective histories.

5. Tours are a form of **Mobile Spatial Commemoration** engaging oral and written cultures, vantage points, horizons, strategies, tactics, and viewing regimes.

6. **Subjective Histories** are in a fluid process of negotiation, and there is no consensus over collective memory.

7. **Limits of Shared History**: Both tour groups and map groups are self-monitored, and externally monitored. Both groups recognise that histories are conflicted, rather than shared.
8. **Contributory Process**: The map group is more reflective than the tour group about how individuals contribute to the collective history that is being constructed through the group’s actions.

9. **Need for Collective History**: Both groups articulate why they feel a collective history is needed. For both groups, it is important not to forget the militarised space that once curtailed movement. An objective for both groups is to negotiate the history of a politicised space of conflict. Both groups speculate on how histories are being used to construct narratives in the present, leading to a continuing cultural territorialisation of the city.

10. **Hidden Gendered, Class, and Age Narratives**: The tour guides are all older men. The map participants and knitters are mostly older women. Respondents and tour guides alike reveal hidden histories around conflict, class, gender, unemployment, deprivation, and restrictions on movement. Both offer new perspectives on mainstream narratives of ‘resistance’, ‘terrorism’ and ‘sectarianism’.

11. **Collective and Individual Narratives**: In individual narratives, participants portray themselves and society as impacted in this. The collective history emerges as an accumulation of individual narratives that require adjustment, negotiation, and debate. Sharing individual narratives allows individuals to talk about culture and society as well as how they remember the conflict.

12. **Observing the Observers**: There appears to be more consensus over the collective map than over the tours and murals. Participation in the map group is active, as I ask for contributions, comments, critique, advice, corrections, and omissions from an outsider position. Participation in the tour group is passive, with the leader speaking from an insider position.

13. **Mobile and Fixed Observation**: The groups differ greatly in terms of mobility, visibility, and the extent to which they interact with the urban spaces around them. The tour groups are very visible in the public spaces, and known to each other, while the map elicitation participants are dispersed, and their identities better protected.

14. **Mapping as Representation**: My architectural map of vanished structures locates, assembles, and clarifies hidden material traces of conflict. The collective map is thus an archaeological and a psychological landscape subject to adjustment, correction and embellishment.

**Conclusion**

In this paper, I have tried to establish that the specific conflict of cultures that I encountered at the Shankill Falls Divide was part of a larger postcolonial / postmodern condition. In this conclusion, I situate my findings within that larger postcolonial condition, as articulated by seminal postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha, in order to demonstrate how closely they align.
Architecture as Language, Voice, Identity and Liminality

Both processes for the negotiation of collective history explore gendered postcolonial spaces. Both architectural spaces use visual signs as metaphors to construct collective identities, shared histories, and group narratives. These have operated as political signs ‘at the site of cultural enunciation’ and as ‘cultural signs spoken at the margins of social identity, and antagonism’ in line with postcolonial theory (Bhabha 1994: 257). I have briefly explored ‘the paradoxes of the language metaphor’ (ibid.), which, as Homi Bhabha, a seminal postcolonial theorist explains:

> Opens up a space where...a form of cultural experience and identity is envisaged...This ‘beyond theory’ (of language) is itself a liminal form of signification that creates a space for the contingent, indeterminate articulation of social experience that is particularly important for envisaging emergent cultural identities...It is a representation of social experience as the contingency of history – the indeterminacy that makes subversion and revision possible – that is profoundly concerned with questions of cultural authorization (ibid.).

The ‘Conflict Tour’ of the Shankill Falls Divide purports to offer two alternative collective histories: one of a ‘Catholic Nationalist Republican Area’ and one of a ‘Loyalist Unionist Protestant Area’. While it acknowledges that there is no consensus between the two areas, it does not recognise the lack of consensus within each of the two areas. The tour is performed using murals as architectural props. In comparison, the map elicitation process is less formal and reveals hidden complexities in the collective negotiation of both shared and contested histories. This condition at the Shankill Falls Divide exemplifies the intersection of the postcolonial and the postmodern, in that it:

> Attempts to institutionalise a range of transgressive discourses whose strategies are elaborated around non-equivalent sites of representation where a history of discrimination, and misrepresentation is common...However, the ‘signs’ that construct such histories and identities – gender, race...often produce incompatible systems of signification and engage distinct forms of social subjectivity. To provide a social imaginary that is based on the articulation of differential, even disjunctive moments of history and culture, contemporary critics resort to the peculiar temporality of the language metaphor. It is as if the arbitrariness of the sign, the indeterminacy of the writing, the splitting of the subject of enunciation, these theoretical concepts, produce the most useful descriptions of the formation of ‘postmodern’ cultural subjects (Bhabha 1994: 252).

The conflict tours, the map of observation posts, and the international wall itself are, like Bhabha’s text:

> Writing from the perspective of the fragmented, marginalised, racially discriminated against members of a post Thatcherite underclass’ and similarly using the ‘linguistic sign as a metaphor for a more differential and contingent political logic of ideology (ibid.: 253).
Cultural Difference and Gendered Spaces:

For Bhabha,

_The language metaphor raises the question of cultural difference and incommensurability, not the consensual, ethnocentric notion of the pluralistic existence of cultural diversity. Increasingly, the issue of cultural difference emerges at points of social crises, and the questions of identity that it raises are agonistic; identity is claimed either from a position of marginality or in an attempt at gaining the centre: in both senses, ex-centric_ (1994: 253-254).

The knit and natter group, being 100% female when I met them, represents a marginalised voice within the minority population. They do not recognise the contingent political logic of the ideology offered to international tourists as either expressing their lived experiences or as a consensus Catholic Nationalist Republican view. The gendered narratives of conflict sometimes present women from a male postcolonial perspective, disrupting _their_ authenticity of voice, and further fragmenting conceptions of the postcolonial subject.

Thus it is wholly apt that both processes require continuous negotiation to: ‘revise the known, to rename the postmodern from the position of the postcolonial,’ and that this endeavour should similarly be ‘driven by the subaltern history of the margins of modernity’ (ibid.: 252). Thus, gendered narratives can also be recognised in divergent histories of conflict and within and around this conception of cultural difference. Male identities can be constructed around the architecture of the rifle or the observation post, female identities around a knitting space, hidden as Bhabha would have it, ‘outside the sentence’, a double disappearance.

The Postcolonial Perspective

_The very language of cultural community needs to be rethought from a postcolonial perspective, in a move similar to the profound shift in the language of sexuality, the self, and cultural community effected by feminists in the 1970s_ (Bhabha 1994: 251).

These profound shifts must continue a process of negotiation and should not be treated as a fait accompli, nor indeed should the feminist perspective.

_The postcolonial perspective forces us to rethink the profound limitations of a consensual and collusive ‘liberal’ sense of cultural community,’ argues Bhabha. It insists that cultural and political identity is constructed through a process of alterity [othering – my explanation]. Questions of race and cultural difference overlay issues of sexuality and gender and overdetermine the social alliances of class and democratic socialism_ (ibid., my emphasis).

My research identifies the liminal spaces and contingent identities of the Shankill Falls Divide as significant sites for the construction and fragmentation of collective postmodern identities and postcolonial histories. As Bhabha asserts:
Postcolonial critiques propose forms of contestatory subjectivities that are empowered in the act of erasing the politics of binary opposition – the inverted polarities of a counter-politics (ibid.: 256).

What is needed is an

*Attempt to construct a theory of the social imaginary that requires no subject expressing originary anguish, no singular self image, no necessary or eternal belongingness. The contingent and the liminal become the times and the spaces for the historical representations of the subjects of cultural difference in a postcolonial criticism* (ibid.).

My research has recognised how signs and languages are used to construct and challenge spatial performances of cultural imperialism and resistance. This opens up the question as to how dialogue about cultural difference and hybrid identities may enrich social relations rather than reinforce division. How might new forms of architectural and spatial codification establish this postcolonial hybridity recognised through architectural languages?

And finally, Bhabha proposes a ‘shift from the cultural as an epistemological subject to culture as an enactive, enunciatory site’, which

*Opens up possibilities for...other narrative spaces (fantasmic, metaphorical)...to provide a process by which objectified others may be turned into subjects of their history and experience* (ibid.: 255).

Such mechanisms, groups, initiatives, languages, texts and performances, which contest and negotiate marginalised identities, genders, geographies and histories can flourish;

*Empowering cultural and textual strategies precisely because the critical position they occupy is free of the ‘inverted’ polarities of a counter – politics of exclusion* (ibid.: 256).

References


CAIN, Conflict Archive in Northern Ireland, [accessed 2019]


**Notes**

1 Interview with Protestant psychoanalyst, Belfast 2017.

2 Interviews with local historians, Belfast 2018, 2019.

3 Interview with Catholic Nationalist, Belfast, 2019.

4 The censorship of paramilitaries in the Republic of Ireland began in the 1970s, while in the UK, the broadcasting ban was much shorter.

5 Interview with Protestant psychoanalyst, Belfast, 2019.
6 Interview with resident, Belfast, 2018.

7 Participant in workshop, Belfast, 2019.

8 Interview, Belfast, 2018.

9 Although many respondents identified themselves either as Catholic or Protestant, Unionist or Nationalist, Republican or Loyalist, this has not always been noted.

10 Interview with Catholic Nationalist Republican, Belfast, 2018.

11 Interview with Protestant Unionist Loyalist, 2018.

12 Conversation with Protestant woman, Belfast, 2018.

13 Interview, Belfast, 2018.

14 Interview with Catholic Nationalist Republican, Belfast, 2019; interview with librarian, Dublin, 2019.

15 Interview, Belfast, 2019.

16 Interview, Belfast, 2019.

17 Interview, Belfast, 2019.

18 Conversation with knitters, Belfast, 2019.

19 Conversation with knitters, Belfast, 2019.

20 Conversation with knitters, Belfast, 2019.

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