

# On Broadway

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We will never find the sense of something...if we do not know the force which appropriates the thing, which exploits it, which takes possession of it or is expressed in it...The history of a thing...is the succession of forces which take possession of it and the co-existence of the forces which struggle for possession. The same object... changes sense depending on the force which appropriates it...Sense is therefore a complex notion; there is always a plurality of senses, a constellation, a complex of successions but also of coexistences which make interpretation an art.

Gilles Deleuze (1986) *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (London: Athlone), pp. 3-4.

### I

How can we make sense of a space like Broadway roundabout in Belfast? What could it mean to interpret what is going on in this space? It is important to understand that Broadway is an object, a thing, a constellation and succession of forces, forces which appropriate it, shape it, bend it and reshape it; that is, so many interpretations that force it this way and that... So the question of what it means to read a space, interpret it, negotiate it, can only be posed through its interpretation, through its negotiation, literally through a movement in the space, and through its forceful appropriation as this or that, this and then that... In this way, the interpretation and negotiation of the space not only seeks to trace the forces at play in it, it itself is a series of forces as such; that is, it forcefully plays through the space, bending, reshaping, appropriating it as it goes. Interpretations and negotiations of given spaces, then, (if they are to take on any significance beyond an abstracted or external commentary on the object under scrutiny) become worthy of critical consideration to the extent that they become immanent to the spaces that they play through, appropriate, shape and reshape.

The recent history of the Broadway area of Belfast is one of interpretations, forceful appropriations that have successively reconfigured the space. Perhaps the most dramatic (or at least, most obvious) example of this kind of interpretative reconfiguring of the space was the building of a dual carriageway (the 'Westlink') through the middle of it. The Westlink, a ring-road skirting the north and west of the city centre – all that remained of more ambitious 1960s plans for a 'Belfast Urban Motorway' – was begun in the late 1970s and was completed in February 1981.<sup>1</sup> Prior to this, Broadway was a small through road or avenue that flowed seamlessly between two working-class districts, the predominantly Protestant and loyalist 'Village' and the predominantly Catholic and republican 'Falls'. As political conflict and sectarian violence increased in Belfast in the 1970s Broadway became a flashpoint area, a space

of possible and actual antagonism and conflict (usually, youths from each area caught up in the banal repetition of stone throwing, rioting and fighting). The Westlink and Broadway intersected at a new roundabout, and what had previously been continuous, contiguous space was cleft in two; the distinct residential, commercial and leisure areas adjoining the roundabout became more sharply divided in use as well as in space, accessed by car, on foot or by bus depending on whether one was a resident, a shopper, or simply passing through on the way to somewhere else. In bisecting the Village and the Falls, the dual carriageway also performed a clear and effective function in dramatically reconfiguring the space, making it very difficult for it to continue playing host to the kind of sectarian antagonism and conflict by which it had previously been marked.<sup>2</sup>

While we can think of the development of the Westlink as a rather literal concretisation, even ideological reproduction, of the developing sectarianism in the Belfast of that particular time (that is, a form of segregationist ideology built in concrete), it is not just that, or it is not simply locatable in such historically-specific terms. For the development of the Westlink is also, we must remember, an interpretation and appropriation of the space that implies certain forces that enter into constellation and follow a certain succession through time. What do we mean? Well, we could say that the kind of reconfiguration of public space that was initiated at Broadway, through the building of the Westlink, brings into conjunction forces at once both political and economic, forces that, at the present time, succeed in shaping the image of *contemporary* Belfast as a ‘post-conflict’ city. Since its inception the Westlink has embodied concretely the idea (the normative promise, if you will) of a *depoliticisation* of public space, or at least the neutralisation of a space previously traversed by sectarian antagonism, by literally cutting off the flow through which it was expressed (namely, Broadway itself). This normative promise of the depoliticisation or neutralisation of public space is very much at the heart of government, media and commercial discourses that, since the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, have constructed Belfast as a post-conflict city.

What is significant about this widely circulated image of contemporary Belfast as a post-conflict city is not just that it masks or cloaks the reality of a city still deeply divided and segregated on ethno-political lines, for it also, more importantly, feeds

<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the building of the Westlink, and an analysis of some of the political opposition to its construction, see, M. Cinalli, ‘Socio-politically polarized contexts, urban mobilization and the environmental movement: a comparative study of two campaigns of protest in Northern Ireland’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 27, 1, (2003), pp. 158-177. Cinalli’s analysis of the success or failure of protest movements against the building of the road, at different periods, is based on thoroughly normative assumptions about the desirability of particular social formations; but his historical detail is useful nonetheless.

<sup>2</sup> Of course, the building of the Westlink did not completely obliterate the rioting, stone throwing and fighting, as many of those engaged in it continued in their efforts, and continued actively and concretely to maintain a memory and experience of space as it was prior to the building of the Westlink; this simultaneous persistence of mutually-exclusive experiences of the same space is what we shall explore in this chapter.

into a new kind of politics as such; what we could call *a moralising politics of social and economic development*.<sup>3</sup> By this we mean that there is a strong connection between the twin narratives of political progress and social-economic development in contemporary Belfast; that post-Agreement Belfast has, to a significant degree, become a story in which the twin moral goods of political progress and privatised, neo-liberal economic development are folded into one another.<sup>4</sup> It is hardly surprising in these circumstances that the built environment or urban geography of Belfast has become a site, perhaps *the* site, of this new politics of social-economic development. As we write, Broadway roundabout has recently been dramatically reconfigured, and is awaiting yet further redevelopment: the Westlink has been entirely regraded to flow beneath the roundabout in a new underpass, creating an 'idealised flow' through the space that is at once subterranean and transcendent (since it can be regarded, figuratively at least, and by road planners if not by those who actually have to use it, to be a corridor that transcends the physical constraints of the dense urban space that it passes through).<sup>5</sup>

It is clear that this current development of the Westlink is very much locked into the narrative of the political progress of Belfast as a post-conflict city; and that the idea of the post-conflict city can itself be aesthetically mediated and foregrounded in and through this newly built environment. In this regard, it is relevant to note that in 2005 Belfast City Council commissioned a public artwork for the middle of the redeveloped Broadway roundabout. Prior to the redevelopment, the site had been occupied by an electricity pylon, and some tall trees and shrubs. These had served to reinforce the separation of the various spaces adjoining the roundabout, augmenting the physical barrier of the Westlink with a further visual barrier. The redeveloped roundabout, prior to its being adorned with public art, already dramatises ideas about the post-conflict city, albeit inadvertently, since in addition to being easier to cross on foot it is also entirely bare of any planting except grass – totally open, permitting a gaze across the space rather than foreclosing the view. The new city, we are told, is similarly open; the structures of the new politics similarly transparent.

<sup>3</sup> For an extended analysis of the persistent and deep rooted nature of sectarian segregation in Belfast, see Peter Shirlow and Brendan Murtagh (2006) *Belfast: segregation, violence and the city* (London: Pluto Press): 'Belfast is far from being the post-conflictual city that is dreamed of by planners [and] investors...' (p. 2). Particularly relevant are chapters one, three and four. See also Liam O'Ruairc (2007) 'The agreed truth and the real truth: the new Northern Ireland', in *Variant* issue 29, pp. 14-17, available at <http://www.variant.org.uk/pdfs/issue29/7Variant29Liam.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> One of the most striking examples of this kind of narrative folding occurred when the Swedish company IKEA opened a huge store in Belfast in December 2007. Coverage of the store's opening was very much anchored in the political notion that inward investment by such a huge global player was clear evidence of Northern Ireland's transition to a post-conflict era. Indeed, one of the most illuminating images to emerge from this coverage was that of the then First and Deputy First Ministers of the Northern Ireland Executive (Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness) sitting together, smiling happily on an IKEA sofa. Clearly by design, prominent on the wall behind Paisley and McGuinness (erstwhile unionist and republican antagonists) was the motto of the company: 'home is the most important place in the world'.

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/roads/a12westlinkupgradedetails.html>.



Idealised flow: an artist's impression of the Broadway interchange, as envisaged in 2005. Courtesy of Roads Service, Department of Regional Development Northern Ireland.



Artist's impression of the proposed Trillian sculpture.

The competition to design a public artwork for this space was initially won by an artist from California, Ed Carpenter, with a design that he entitled Trillian, a 45-metre high stainless steel structure supposedly representing a wild flower. Carpenter said that the design symbolised “germination for the future... it represents growth, transformation, evolution, and these are all subjects which are universal and which we can identify with and particularly in a city which has had some negative press around the world, this can be a very positive symbol both internally and externally.”<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately for Carpenter and Belfast, a rise in the price of steel after 2005 meant that the project was no longer deliverable to budget (costs reportedly went from £400,000 to £600,000), and it was scrapped in 2008.<sup>7</sup> A further competition was announced, from which was selected a 35-metre aluminum sphere called Rise, designed by sculptor Wolfgang Buttress. This was due to have been completed in summer 2009, but at the time of writing work has yet to commence.<sup>8</sup>

The phenomenon of public sculpture being reinvented as colossal spectacle is now so commonplace for it hardly to warrant further comment. All the criticisms that

<sup>6</sup> BBC News (2005) 'Belfast to bloom with new artwork', [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern\\_ireland/4329710.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/4329710.stm), 11th October 2005. See also <http://www.edcarpenter.net/portfolio/0211.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Gráinne McWilliams (2008) 'Broadway sculpture scrapped amid escalating steel costs', *Belfast Telegraph*, 23rd July 2008.

<sup>8</sup> See BBC News (2008) 'New landmark rises from rubble', [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern\\_ireland/7727575.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/7727575.stm); and BBC News (2009) 'Council to rule on sculpture cash', [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern\\_ireland/8387572.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/8387572.stm).



Wolfgang Buttress with a model of his Rise sculpture. Courtesy of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

might be aimed at similar grandiose schemes elsewhere could be directed at the Broadway project: its gross scale, its attempted evacuation of pre-existing place, and of course its embeddedness in crass, simplistic ‘boosterism’.<sup>9</sup> Such boosterism is a ubiquitous and obligatory aspect of the perpetual regeneration and privatisation of contemporary European cities; it’s hardly peculiar to Belfast. What is noteworthy about public art in Belfast, and particularly the ‘landmark’, ‘gateway’ project to be built at Broadway roundabout, is not just the crystallisation of neo-liberal ideology into aesthetic form that it undoubtedly represents, but a further ‘naturalisation’ that its commissioners invariably seek: that whereby ‘peace’ itself is made synonymous with, or at least utterly dependent on, neo-liberalism.<sup>10</sup> Thanks to the intricate interdependence of public and private interest at all levels of ‘public’ administration in Northern Ireland, boosterism in Belfast accomplishes a rare feat: it makes regeneration (with all that that word now entails) into a *moral* good – a precondition of sustainable peace. Public art, as a key means of reinscribing already existing urban space, is a crucial element of this ideological practice.

## II

At this juncture it makes sense to briefly consider what we would call the ‘history of the geographies’ of Broadway roundabout. That is to say, it makes sense to

<sup>9</sup> An interesting critique of ‘public’ art, itself delivered as an artistic intervention in public space, is the practice of Andy Hewitt and Mel Jordan, particularly their billboard project ‘Three Functions’, which consists of three short dictums: ‘The economic function of public art is to increase the value of private property’; ‘The social function of public art is to subject us to civic behaviour’; ‘The aesthetic function of public art is to codify social distinctions as natural ones’. See <http://www.hewittandjordan.com/work.html>. See also their ongoing collaboration with Dave Beech, <http://www.freee.org.uk>.

foreground the ways in which successive interpretations, descriptions *and habitations* of this space, physically or ideologically, have each come to construct it anew, demanding further interpretations and habitations, so that the space itself becomes a palimpsest, in which these preceding forces and flows can still be made visible and occasionally reassert themselves.

The area now occupied by Broadway roundabout was developed only relatively recently: there are no buildings in the area that predate the last years of the 19th century. Until the start of the nineteenth century, this area, the flood plain of the Blackstaff river, consisted of water meadows. These had adjoined strip farms that ran uphill to the Old Dublin Road on the Malone ridge (today's Malone Road). Changes in land ownership patterns in the first half of that century culminated in the final sale of lands, from around 1850 onwards, from the chronically encumbered and massively indebted estate of the Marquess of Donegall, which enabled the gradual suburbanisation of the district, and by the 1910s nearly all the residential streets in the Broadway area had been laid out.<sup>10</sup>

The first development to cut across the old farmlands was the Lisburn Road, laid out between 1817 and 1819. In 1839 the Ulster Railway followed the same course, a little further westwards. Together these were the first hard boundaries that separated the Bog Meadows from the big houses on the high ground of south Belfast.

Broadway had begun its life as a side street of the Falls Road, with a large damask works and a school. At the close of the 19th century the Donegall Road had been laid out, leading westwards from the southern edge of the city centre. Broadway extended south and east to meet and cross it; on the edges of the flood plain, terraced streets of red-brick two-up-two-down houses (known as 'scullery houses') were laid out around it in the pattern that still exists today.

This is how the area stayed until the first section of the long-planned M1 opened in 1962, running on a course parallel with the Blackstaff and the railway line from a small roundabout on the Donegall Road, a little southwest of the contemporary roundabout. The draining of part of the Bog Meadows for the M1 made it possible to lay out a new industrial estate on the eastern side of the motorway, between it and the railway line. The Blackstaff river was culverted, and the Boucher Road industrial estate developed. The Boucher Road has developed into a major out-of-town retail park and industrial estate, bordered by substantial goods yards running from the railway line.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the influence of neo-liberal ideology on the 'peace process', see Steve Baker & Greg McLaughlin (2010) *The Propaganda of Peace: The Role of Media and Culture in the Northern Ireland Peace Process* (London: Intellect).

<sup>11</sup> All historical information is from Trevor Carleton (1976) 'Aspects of local history in Malone, Belfast', in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 39; Carleton (1978) 'Malone, Belfast: the early history of a suburb', in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 41; W. A. Maguire (1976) 'Lord Donegall and the sale of Belfast: a case history from the Encumbered Estates Court', in *Economic History Review*, vol. 29 no. 4.



Broadway Roundabout 1980  
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On the west of the Broadway / Donegall Road intersection there were a number of suburban and light industrial landmarks that have now disappeared: the damask works already mentioned, a small reservoir, some allotments and Celtic Park, the home until 1949 of Belfast Celtic Football Club, one of the leading clubs in Europe until they were forced to withdraw from the Irish League.<sup>12</sup> Celtic Park was a greyhound stadium until the 1980s, when it closed and was replaced by a shopping centre.

As we have already noted, the point where Broadway crossed the Donegall Road was a place where sectarian conflict was enacted throughout the 20th century; in fact it became a 'trouble spot' almost as soon as the first houses were first built here. The Village, hemmed in by the railway line to the east, the Donegall Road to the north, the 19th century flyover at Tate's Avenue to the south and the Bog Meadows to the west, quickly developed a distinctive identity, in opposition to the more established Catholic, republican Falls area that neighboured it.

These are some of the forces, tensions and flows that intersect, or that have intersected, at Broadway roundabout. The point of this survey is not somehow to try and 'recuperate' something supposedly 'lost' but to try and suggest that a multiplicity of such geographical histories are all still present in the site, even those which would seem to have no physical, material existence any longer. Again, this is not simply a case of paying one's respects to hazily-defined or undifferentiated oral histories or 'community memories'; rather, it's an attempt to establish an alternative understanding of the potential meanings of place to the reductive, homogenising evacuation of urban space that the normative agenda of the market (moralised in Belfast as 'peace') otherwise dictates.

### III

In my opinion, you were the first to teach us something absolutely fundamental: the indignity of speaking for others. We...failed...to appreciate...that only those directly concerned can speak in a practical way on their own behalf.

Gilles Deleuze in conversation with Michel Foucault (1977) 'Intellectuals and Power'  
(New York: Cornell University Press), p. 209.

The interpretation of the Broadway area in light of the normative promise that it may be part of a post-conflict city implies, or brings into conjunction and succession, forces both political and economic – from the depoliticisation or neutralisation of the space effected by the construction of the Westlink, to the contemporary use of the entire built

<sup>12</sup> Celtic's local rivals were Distillery and Linfield; Linfield's Windsor Park ground is only streets away from Broadway roundabout. On Boxing Day 1948 Celtic and Linfield met in a derby at Celtic Park; there had always been sectarian antagonisms between the respectively Catholic and Protestant followers of the teams, but at the end of this match Linfield fans invaded the pitch and broke the leg of one of the Celtic players. The club closed at the end of that season. See <http://www.belfastceltic.org>.

environment of Belfast as a huge sandwich board, monumentalising its ‘normalisation’ and transition to a supposedly peaceful political dispensation. This interpretation of Broadway has indeed been a forceful one, one that has moved through the space, appropriated it and reconfigured it quite dramatically, violently even.<sup>13</sup>

In a way, we can think of the interpretative reconfiguration and appropriation of space as a kind of mapping. Mapping is not simply a means of finding a way through a space, it is something that happens as we move through a space; it is an activity co-emergent with movement itself. Let us be clear: if the spaces we move through can, as we suggest, be understood as objects, this is not simply because of their brutality and muteness, because they somehow impersonally and autonomously stand apart from those subjects who traverse them. On the contrary, the movement of subjects or bodies in a space effects the objectification of the space, where ‘objectification’ precisely means embodiment, an appropriation of the space into a body or particular mode of subjectivity. The idea of Belfast as a post-conflict city is a body in this sense, an embodied appropriation of the space which implies certain modes of subjectivity (‘Wouldn’t it be great if it was like this all the time’; ‘Isn’t it great that my city is no longer ravaged by sectarian violence’).<sup>14</sup> We argue below that, in considering the ways in which space is objectified, it becomes difficult to make a value-distinction between physical habitations of space (as a resident, or shopper, or motorist) and ideological interpretation or description of that space (in maps, development plans, zoning schemes and so on): each comes to bear on the materiality of the space itself.

Of course, to interpret Broadway through its appropriation to the norms of the post-conflict city is to engage in but one interpretation (a forceful one, we should remember, and one that we believe enjoys a particular hegemony or political legitimacy in the current conjuncture). But, of course, there are other interpretations, other appropriations, other bodies or modes of subjectivity that can be spoken of here. One expected way might be to talk about the ‘locals’, the people who have lived

<sup>13</sup> We reiterate here the earlier points about the place of public art in the large-scale advertisement of normalization, and note that the iteration to arise at Broadway is only the latest and largest of a series of such appropriations of urban space in Belfast. Elsewhere, ‘public’ art commissioned by private landowners and trustees has been erected on private land; its designation as ‘public’ calls into question what might be understood by that word. We conclude that in these instances, the word ‘public’ simply means that it can be seen ‘in public’.

<sup>14</sup> On the ‘violence’ concomitant with the creeping privatisation of the city, see Slavoj Žižek (2008) *Violence* (London: Profile Books). The ‘objective violence’ that Žižek describes is precisely the mundane, indirect, exclusionary violence that is executed not by individuals or by insurgent groups, but by states and private interests, using legal instruments and the ownership and transfer of land as its vehicle. It is also the violence that Christy Malry, the hero of B. S. Johnson’s 1973 novel *Christie Malry’s own double-entry*, identifies as he walks along a street in Hammersmith, and wonders who has decided that there should be a large office block in his way. Christie’s small epiphany is that nothing, in the modern city, is the way it is by accident, even if ‘the decision’ to make it so was taken many years ago, or very far away; all such decisions have been taken at someone else’s expense. Belfast’s true transition is not from violence to peace, but from the direct violence of the Troubles to the ordinary, objective violence of private capital.

and continue to live in and around Broadway, interpreting and negotiating the space as a locale. We accept that this kind of talk is problematic; there is an obvious danger here in engaging in the worst kind of pop anthropology; that is, in effecting the reification or unreflexive *legitimation* of the 'locals' who (for instance) come to be depicted as standing heroically against the instrumentality of the economic and political forces that have appropriated their environment.

The fundamental indignity of speaking for others inevitably means that arguments on behalf of the 'other' end in abstraction. This entails an unavoidable danger, but also raises an interesting problem. The danger is obvious to the point of banality (namely that the well-meaning, socially and politically engaged academic-activist parachutes into a 'community', arrogantly assuming the right to speak on their behalf; or, which is almost the same, to 'give them a voice'). The problem of who speaks, and for whom, though, becomes politically interesting as soon as it becomes embodied as such; the moment speech assumes an embodied form precisely as a *right* to speak in public space.<sup>15</sup>

We could, for example, assume a right to speak for ourselves as 'locals'. We have both lived in the Broadway area of Belfast, experienced and negotiated the space first-hand, a negotiation of the space that has given each of us a particular experience of dwelling in it, and a persisting memory of it. For us living in and around Broadway meant experiencing the street as a flow, a flow that is cut off, yet persistent, that persists even though it has been cut off. How so? This is a simple matter of perspective, of interpretation, of appropriating and using the space *in a way that maintains the flow, embodies the flow*. A simple example will suffice here. We both lived (at different times) on the Village side of Broadway, but both shopped at a supermarket towards the Falls side. So, as 'locals' or 'shoppers' we had to maintain the Broadway flow by going against, that is, rather precariously cutting across the significant flows of traffic that the Westlink carried in and out of the city. For although a safer walk from the Village side to the Falls side of Broadway was possible, this necessitated a peculiarly involved negotiation of a number of crossings, and the circumnavigation of the huge roundabout that carried all the

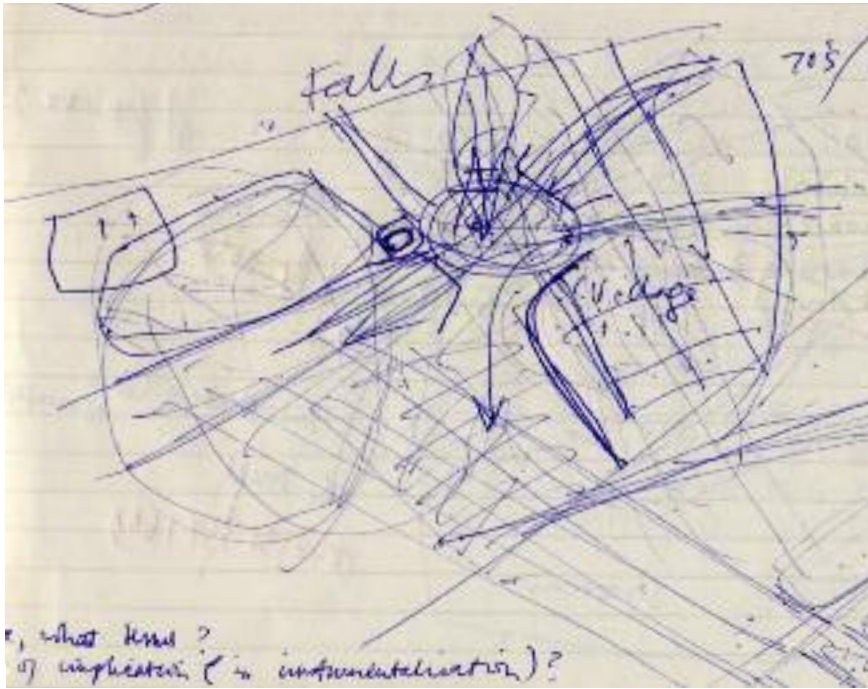
<sup>14</sup> 'Wouldn't it be great if it was like this all the time' is the last line of the Van Morrison song 'Coney Island' (1989); it was used as the strapline on a billboard promoting a 'Yes' vote in the referendum on the Good Friday Agreement. For statistics on sectarian violence in the decade since the Agreement, see O'Ruairc.

<sup>15</sup> Here we are following the logic mapped out by Jacques Rancière, particularly when he stresses how politics emerges through the formation of a mode of subjectivity that begins to speak for itself, through a call to be heard and seen in public space. Politics, then, is antagonism, the disruption of the hitherto constituted political order (Rancière pointedly refers to this as the order of police, an order of administration, the politics of maintaining order) by a subject who emerges and demands a role and a part to play in a reconfigured public sphere. Rancière often talks about this emergent mode of subjectivity as a 'part with no part' in the given, as that part of society with as yet no properly defined place. For his classical statement or articulation of this thesis, see Jacques Rancière (1999) *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press). For an excellent consideration of ethnographic methodology, and of the possibility of 'knowing' the other, written in the context of a long-term participant observation in Belfast, see Frank Burton (1978) *The politics of legitimacy: struggles in a Belfast community* (London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul), Appendix 1.

traffic south of the city into the city centre and all the traffic north of the city to the south. In order to avoid this deliberately indirect way of getting across, we would each run directly across the dual carriageway when a lull in the flow of traffic permitted it. This route, the most obvious to anyone living in the area, was further discouraged by the use of disruptive paving at various points around the roundabout (of the type that is composed of a series of small concrete pyramids, and which makes walking across difficult, particularly with heavy shopping).<sup>16</sup>

Having an experience of a place, maintaining a memory of a place, is an active gesture, a material and bodily gesture that entails a mode of subjectivity, a kind of consumption of sorts. As 'local shoppers' living in the Village we obviously would use the space differently to the 'motorist' driving on the dual carriageway to get to shops in Belfast city centre, or the 'sales executive' going to work at one of the upscale car dealerships located nearby. This concept of 'different uses' of the same space is not merely some self-evident by-product of the way pedestrians and motorists are thrown together in this awkwardly, inadvertently 'shared space', it actually defines, delineates, the geography of the area: for if an object's history is the succession of forces that appropriate or exploit it, one after the other, then its geography may be understood as a kind of vertiginous, simultaneous overwriting of all these forces, such that they are now visible, now invisible, bursting through and competing with one another, even – perhaps, most particularly – at the sites of the most total, hegemonic, explicit re-inscription of space. The pedestrian, the motorist, the shopper, the resident, the commuter, the citizen, the visitor – in each of them are the different memories and denotations that mean that an apparently 'benign' or insignificant or 'neutral' piece of waste ground, or wall, or pavement, or tree can summon into being the existence of the entire space in an alternative or previous (and yet always persistent) version of itself: different experiences of the space, different ways of moving through the space, different forms of consumption of and in the space, different interpretations and appropriations of the space. Broadway as a roundabout one passes through to get the city centre, to get to work, a space consumed at speed and with a feel only for the facilitation of such passage; Broadway as a site of memory, a space to be negotiated for the purposes of shopping locally, a space experienced as a site of sectarian antagonism, a space whose flow persists in spite of being suddenly truncated or rerouted; Broadway as a 'public space' (of sorts), used to monumentalise and legitimise Belfast as a 'post-conflict' city, depoliticised and purged of the sectarianism that had hitherto blighted it. And the many apparently extinct-yet-resurgent 'uses' and experiences of the space: before the retail parks (only 15 years ago); before the Westlink (only 30 years ago); before the industrial estate and the

<sup>16</sup> As we've already noted, the redeveloped Broadway roundabout is much more open, physically and visually; it is also easier to negotiate on foot, with safer pedestrian crossings at more convenient points. However, the apparent confidence on the part of urban planners that it will no longer be a site of sectarian confrontation is misplaced, and local residents' representatives to whom we spoke pointed out that the new 'openness' makes some residents feel more exposed and vulnerable.



motorway that adjoins it, before the Troubles, even – a space only recently developed, the edge of the city, the last street before a marshy floodplain.

Furthermore we can see in the different ‘re-creations’ of Broadway (not just over the last 30 or 40 years but over two centuries) a re-inscription of the geography of the city as a whole, since at different times, according to the manner in which the space has been physically contained, Broadway and the Village have been described as being located in both south and west Belfast. This strange fluidity of the area, in a city notorious for its rigid boundaries and calcified, over-signified geography (such that the ideological symbolism of the term ‘west Belfast’ radically exceeds the mere descriptiveness of a term like ‘west London’), has come about because successive ‘interruptions’ have each cut off a series of different flows, every time forcing the area to face in a different direction. The building of the Dublin railway line, and the planning of the Lisburn Road, in the nineteenth century, both of which severed connections with south Belfast higher up the hill; the initial construction of the Village; the development of part of the marshlands as an industrial estate and then a series of retail parks; the Westlink, the new boundary of west Belfast; the motorway – all have served to disconnect or re-connect the area to one or other part of the city, turn and turn about, so that its very *placeness*, its meaning-as-place, is fluid, has *always* been fluid – even whilst it may have appeared to stay in the same place.<sup>17</sup>

We want now to turn again to the monumental function of public art (to paraphrase Hewitt and Jordan). We have already described the normative reinscription of space that much public art in Belfast facilitates. We could also examine the way in which certain works seek to introduce a theme of continuity or history in spaces which have been entirely reconfigured; in Belfast this often takes the form of murals memorialising old streets or areas, a sanitised, heritage-orientated recuperation that naturalises the ‘objective violence’ of urban planning and private development, as if it were a simple law that the ‘old’ must always make way for the new. Collectively these murals, mosaics, tiled panels and so on turn the city into a vast, open-air memorial garden; ironically, a rather plaintive, even pathetic, nostalgia comes to permeate the city undergoing regeneration, but clearly it is felt that this recuperative gesture is a paradoxical necessity, for only once conflictual social, political and economic processes have been reinvented as ‘heritage’ is it possible to construct the new projects required for urban space to be turned into a profitable, exchangeable commodity. So the economic processes that led to the closure of the shipyards, and made redundant a massive industrial workforce in just a few years, must *necessarily* be obscured, and this specific history must be reinvented as heritage; in this way, the moribund shipyards can be turned into the Titanic Quarter. Public art is thus effective in ‘decommissioning’ inconvenient histories, by sanitising them and regurgitating them for ‘public’ consumption.

Against such recuperative and normative functions of the ‘monument’, we clearly need to propose an alternative, critical relationship between art and the ‘perpetually regenerating space’ of the contemporary city. There is no shortage of precedents for the dematerialisation of public art practice, particularly in Belfast, but this is not just a question of *form* but also of *conception*.<sup>18</sup> That’s to say, it’s not simply a matter of posing against the spectacularised and monumental a less bombastic, but essentially reactive ‘intervention’ (particularly if ‘intervention’ is reified as an end

<sup>17</sup> Of course, particular meanings or affects can also be unceremoniously emptied out of a space; it can become what Marc Augé would call a ‘non-place’. (Augé (1995) *Non-places: an introduction to supermodernity* (London: Verso)). It is worth noting that in our recent discussion with representatives of local residents, the perceived threat of Broadway becoming a ‘non-place’ was particularly significant. In the context of Broadway, the notion of a ‘non-place’ immediately brings to mind the Westlink itself, and its placeless transcendence of the space that it interrupts, or at least the promise of such; that is, a space merely of ‘passing through’, a frictionless, smooth space that is defined only by what Ian Buchanan would call ‘hypermobility’ (Buchanan (2005) ‘Space in the age of non-place’, in Ian Buchanan and Greg Lambert, eds., *Deleuze and Space* (Edinburgh: EUP) pp. 16-35). For us, though, thinking about Broadway (or the Westlink) as a ‘non-place’ is inherently problematic precisely because it coexists with a series of forces that immanently express themselves in the space, forces that always have the potential to interrupt and render problematic the frictionless transcendence promised by the Westlink.

<sup>18</sup> Since the early 1980s a succession of artist-run groups (Art Research Exchange, Catalyst Arts, Grassy Knoll, Bbeyond, Factotum and others) have employed temporary, site-specific, performative and interventionist practices in the city. These projects have often successfully integrated sophisticated critiques of the ‘urban’ into their activities. An MA course in ‘Art in Public’ has also recently been established at the art college in Belfast.

in itself, or valorised as somehow always-already ‘radical’, and beyond criticism). What is necessary is a practice that operates within – that ‘operationalises’ – an entirely different conception of urban space, and of the *possibility* and *potentiality* of the urban as a set of relations and an ‘embodied object’. This involves an expanded concept of the ‘event’ in urban space, into which a *non-autonomous, non-transcendent* public art practice can be nested – a concept of event that thoroughly rethinks the objectifications of monumentalised art.

Some of our thinking on the ‘event’ can be sketched out against the backcloth of the work of Alain Badiou and Gilles Deleuze, two influential philosophers of the event. While Deleuze and Badiou clearly differ in the way they think the event, we can perhaps more generally speak of their shared concern to render problematic any unreflexive positivism that may creep into our discourses around ‘events’.<sup>19</sup> For both Badiou and Deleuze it is not sufficient to speak of ‘events’ merely as actual occurrences. ‘The event’, says Deleuze in *The Logic of Sense*, ‘is not what occurs, it is rather inside what occurs’.<sup>20</sup> The significance of Deleuze’s thinking here for us is anchored in the intuition that the event is always-already expressed in that which occurs; or, to favour the more Deleuze-Nietzschean terminology we have been using, the event is a particular and immanent expression of forces that are brought into conjunction at a certain point, at a certain time, in a certain space. In this way, the normative reinscription of Belfast immanently expressed through its built environment and public art can be thought of as an event. What is important is that we remain vigilant and critically sensitive to how these forces appropriate or take hold of the space in question. For us, the crucial task is in identifying, connecting with, and understanding the functioning of these forces, and the modes of spatialisation expressed through them.

If there is a logic to the event, then it is a logic of immanence and specificity. The event is expressed *in* things, but is expressed in a very specific way or in accordance with a particular conjunction and succession of forces. Further, the possibility of identifying, connecting with, and understanding the functioning of these forces importantly implies a critical capacity, a mode of subjectivity appropriate to them. Therefore, the event (as immanently expressed in a particular conjunction and succession of forces) also implies this mode of subjectivity that is appropriate to it. Indeed, and appropriating Badiou’s terminology from *Being and Event*, we could say that modes of subjectivity can imply a ‘fidelity’ to the events that subjects retroactively determine. What is significant about Badiou’s notion of the subject’s fidelity to the event is the political logic that he sees operating in it. ‘There is always’, says Badiou, ‘something institutional in a fidelity, if institution is understood...as what is found in the space of representation’.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> For a good discussion and critical evaluation of Deleuze and Badiou’s respective concepts of the event, see Iain Mackenzie (2008) ‘What is a political event?’, *Theory and Event*, vol. 11 no. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Gilles Deleuze (1990) *The Logic of Sense* (London: Athlone), p. 149.

The event is in things that occur (in Deleuze's ontological intuition), and things that occur become events when rendered significant by subjects that retroactively determine them or give them shape and form in a 'space of representation' (according to Badiou's political definition). We, of course, are interested in how the built environment and public art of contemporary Belfast functions as a space in and through which the normative reinscription of cityscape is 'represented', but also in the modes of subjectivity that are appropriate to this 'representation'. The *significance* of the fact that this normative reinscription has actually occurred, that which make this actual occurrence *significant as an event* as such, is both the forces (social, economic, political...) that are immanently expressed through it *and* the modes of subjectivity appropriate to it.<sup>22</sup>

So how does this concept of the event connect to our notion of a *non-autonomous, non-transcendent* public art practice; that is, an art practice which can help us rethink the objectifications of monumentalised art? A critical public art practice, we suggest, needs to respond not just to the dull fact of these monuments, but to the *events* that produce them – and which reinscribe the contemporary city as a normative space, a perpetually-regenerating 'promised' space; and this response needs to be immanent and specific to the space in question. It must foreground both sides of the event in public space, the forces that appropriate public space and the modes of subjectivity that it announces and demands, and that retroactively determine it and reproduce it in a 'space of representation' (the built environment; public art).

So that we might soon take a step closer to defining the public art practice that we propose, we want to take a momentary sidestep, and to refer in passing to other 'responses' that counter the processes expressed in and the subjectivities invoked by our 'first order event' (which we could call 'the rhetoric of peace', or 'the logic of regeneration' but which in fact is itself the container for and product of such ideas). These responses themselves have an 'evental' character, but the processes that are expressed through them and the subjectivities they invoke are perceived as a direct threat to the smooth space promised by regeneration. Almost since it was first built, Broadway roundabout, as a buffer zone between two politically-opposed working-class communities, has been a venue for intermittent, anomic rioting (what in Belfast is called 'recreational rioting'). This rioting usually has no direct political focus or particular trigger, and serves mainly to reproduce sectarian rivalries (and hatred of the police) in younger generations (the rioters are usually young teenagers and pre-teenagers). The latest redevelopment of the roundabout, which cleared away significant physical and visual barriers (including some tall trees and an electricity

<sup>21</sup> Alain Badiou (2006) *Being and Event* (London: Continuum), p. 233.

<sup>22</sup> We are aware that the event, as a category, can quickly be rendered banal if one fails to delimit or define it meaningfully; hence our insistence on differentiating in some detail the 'actual occurrence' that has no especial significance from the 'event' (whose significance, to reiterate, lies *both* in the forces expressed through it *and* in the mode of subjectivity that retroactively determines it).





Non-ideal flow: the flood at Broadway underpass, 16th August 2008. Photograph Daniel Jewesbury.

pylon) and which left the space far more open, seems inadvertently to have facilitated this rioting. Clearly a very different subjectivity to that which might help to construct and consume the promised normative city is invoked by rioting; and very different processes are expressed in it than the economic and political impulses guiding regeneration. A pedestrian, local, geographically-bounded mode of subjectivity, performing a fear of 'smooth' space, reasserting borders and boundaries and dramatising insecurity is revealed; one thoroughly antithetical to the promise of normative, post-conflict Belfast.

A further interruptive event (which might conceivably strain our definition of the event, but which might also give it some greater value) which 'took place' recently was the spectacular flooding of the newly-opened Westlink-M1 underpass on the 16th August 2008. The flooding occurred when exceptionally high rainfall led to one of the two culverted rivers flowing next to the roundabout bursting its banks; approximately 90 million litres of water flowed upward through the drains and filled the underpass to a depth of seven metres in under 45 minutes. The flooding of an underpass by a river known periodically to burst its banks, in an area known as the 'Bog Meadows', could perhaps be seen as a violent counter-historical corrective, a sudden and dramatic restatement of an 'other' geography, and perhaps, more tellingly, it could even reveal an 'other' subjectivity (one that 'knew' the locale, and that was not surprised by the flood).<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> For further information, see [www.wesleyjohnston.com/roads/a12westlinkupgradepress.html](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/roads/a12westlinkupgradepress.html).

We conclude, then, by taking this analysis of the event and proposing through it our model of a critical public art practice. This practice is one which, through the development of its own 'space of representation', becomes itself a kind of 'second-order', or indexical event, one that by looking to other events and the manner in which they seize space, seeks to 'insert' into its surroundings histories, geographies and subjectivities that may appear to be absent, or to have been suppressed. In this way, it both reflexively foregrounds the event of normative reinscription and *announces the possibility* of 'other' events: events that express, invoke and explore identitarian insecurity, or which dramatise the bathos occasioned by an underpass in a floodplain, or which bring into being any number of moments incommensurate with the 'promise' of the space (and which reveal it, therefore, as a 'broken promise'). This idea of public art not just as 'intervention' but as the *announcement of a possibility* points us, finally, toward the 'doing' of an actual project, which we outline here as a speculative proposal.

## Speculative notes for an art intervention at Broadway roundabout



1. Broadway roundabout is a site experiencing an attempt to neutralise, reconfigure and reinscribe it physically, partly through the imposition of monumental public art.



2. Despite this, Broadway is a site of sporadic but persistent sectarian antagonism, mainly stone-throwing and low-level rioting.



3. Radio is an immaterial medium, opposing the monument with the event. FM radio waves transgress the physical barriers of the built environment. Low-power FM transmissions travel only a short distance through space before the signal becomes too weak to receive.



4. On English motorways, road signs publicise the frequencies of local radio stations, so that motorists may tune in and hear traffic bulletins.



5. The brown motorway sign, meanwhile, is also used on the entire UK motorway system to mark 'heritage' sites.



6. Traffic at Broadway underpass travels at speeds up to 70 mph; it sits stationary at traffic lights on the roundabout itself. In a car, one's passage through the area may take a moment, or a few minutes, or, at rush hour, substantially longer.



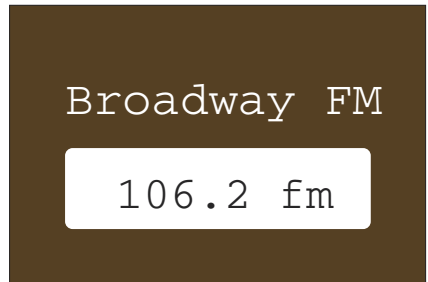
7. Motorways are placeless, transcendent of the space that they interrupt. A motorist on a motorway is often unsure where, exactly, they are in space even though they know that they are a little before or after a known landmark, or a particular junction.



8. Motorways thus perform the homogenisation and neutralisation of space extremely effectively. Space becomes even on a motorway, translated into time and distance.



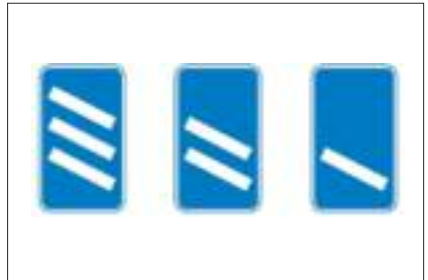
9. Motorways are systems governed by mathematical models of flow; a problem at one point in the system can have complex repercussions throughout the whole system.



10. A radio station will be set up at Broadway roundabout, broadcasting on an FM frequency that will be publicised on brown road signs to be erected on roads leading to the roundabout. The station will be a low-power broadcast that covers only the immediate area of the roundabout.



11. The transmitter site will be the centre of the roundabout itself (where the public artwork commissioned by Belfast City Council will eventually stand). A motorist on the free-flowing Westlink / M1 may travel through the area of coverage of the radio station in less than a minute. Someone sitting in traffic will be within its radius for a longer time.



12. The radio station will broadcast sounds drawn from the site: residents talking about their neighbourhood, a monumental sculptor whose premises sit beside the roundabout describing his work, ambient sound recorded in the Bog Meadows, or at the construction site for the new artwork, or of shoppers at the retail park or the supermarket, and so on.