'Every Passer-by a Culprit?'

Colin Graham

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Archive Fever, Photography and the Peace in Belfast

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1. Walter Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography', in *Selected Writings: Volume 2, 1927–1934*, general ed Michael W Jennings, Belknap, Cambridge, MA, 1999, p 527.

2. The most prominent manifestation of this cultural thinking was the Cultural Traditions Group, part of the Community Relations Council. For examples of their thought see Maurice Hayes, *Whither Cultural Diversity*, Community Relations Council, Belfast, 1991, and the proceedings of various Cultural Traditions Group Conferences, such as Maurna Crozier, ed, *Cultural Traditions in Northern Ireland: Varieties of Irishness*, Institute of Irish Studies, Belfast, 1989.

3. See the use of the idea of overcoming 'the legacy of history' as expressed in Paragraph 1 of the Joint Declaration on Peace (Downing Street Declaration), 15 December 1993.

4. *The Agreement: Agreement Reached in the Multi-party Negotiations* (Good Friday Agreement), 'Declaration of Support', Paragraph 2

For more than a decade before the Good Friday Agreement (1998), 'culture', in a particular guise, was the arena in which utopian politics were played out in Northern Ireland.[2] The Downing Street Declaration of 1993 had held out the hope that the cultural complexities of Northern Ireland would figure in, and maybe even dictate, the shape of the future.[3] But, by the time of the Agreement, a different political imperative had taken hold. 'Culture' had been reduced to the issues of minority languages and the need to curtail the display of sectarian symbols (as defined in the Agreement, under 'Economic, Social and Cultural Issues', Paragraphs 3–5). In Paragraph 2 of the opening Declaration of Support of the Agreement, history was quickly shuffled into the past:

> The tragedies of the past have left a deep and profoundly regrettable legacy of suffering. We must never forget those who have died or been injured, and their families. But we can best honour them through a fresh start, in which we firmly dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all.[4]

In leaving aside the recurrent debate on whether Northern Irish culture was reflective of sectarian politics or could be an ameliorative force for liberal change, this switch in strategy gambled on consigning the past to the rubbish-bin of history. It accepts that 'identity' – or rather 'identities' in the shape of two 'communities' – was the irreducible elemental stuff of life in the North of Ireland. For the two governments this was a necessary step in the institutionalisation of Northern politics. It allowed for the entanglements of everyday existence to remain outside the dominant political discourse, in the same way as the consociational model of negotiation meant that the difficult mass of constituents who voted for their political leaders could be gently set aside while the 'elites' came to an agreed conclusion.[5] This radical separation of high politics from living ideology has dogged the Peace Process. The subsequent cultural effect has been to fill the cultural receptacles of the past, to cram all that

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John Duncan, 'Berry Street, Smithfield', from the series *Trees from Germany*, 2003. Courtesy of the artist

(text available at: http://
cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/
peace/docs/
agreement.htm).

5. The consociational model
for conflict resolution is
derived from the political
writings of Arend Lijpart
and was explicitly used in
the Northern talks. See
Rick Wilford,
'Introduction' in *Aspects of
the Belfast Agreement*, ed
Rick Wilford, Oxford
University Press, Oxford,
2001, who describes the
initial stages of Lijpart's
methodology thus: 'In the
shorter run, a heavy
premium is placed on
mutual trust and
confidence, initially among
the relevant elites, which …
descend to envelop
contending communities',
p 4.

6. Robert Adam, 'The
Docks', Belfast Exposed

glistens with the not-so-gold of the Troubles into a memory bank of material culture and traumatic non-recall. A recurrent trope in post-Ceasefire Northern Irish culture has been an ache which notices, knows, but can barely comment on the cauterisation of the dark complexity of the past, since to point to, or even test out, the fragile post-consociational consensus would be to remember a future that is now consigned to history. For the last decade or so, Northern Ireland has been strangely without any significant utopian cultural coordinates. Meanwhile the political scene has asked for all else to wait for it. Part of that waiting process has been to filter out that which does not fit into or attend on the present moment, as if it were driftwood on an eddy that pulls away the awkward, the recalcitrant and the stubborn into a place where it is transformed into the stuff which memories are made of. Thus the difficult and the embarrassingly recent past, or the irritatingly non-conforming present, is archived.

Over the past few years photography in Northern Ireland has reflected this archival tendency. Projects by Robert Adam, John Davies, Kai-Olaf Hesse, John Duncan, Claudio Hils, Ursula Burke and Daniel Jewesbury, and Donovan Wylie consciously tap photography's archival possibilities.[6] Each of these projects is self-conscious about its own potential existence *as* the mechanics of the archival structure into which its subjects are falling. And, in their singular ways, these photographers draw on those very

Gallery, November 2000;
John Davies, 'Metropoli',
Belfast Exposed Gallery,
November 2002; Ursula
Burke, 'Routes', Belfast
Exposed Gallery, May
2002; Kai-Olaf Hesse,
'Topography of Titanic',
Belfast Exposed Gallery,
August 2003; John
Duncan, *Trees from
Germany*, Belfast Exposed
Photography, Belfast,
2003; Claudio Hils, *Red
Land Blue Land*, Hatje
Cantz, Ostfildern-Ruit,
2000, and *Archive_Belfast*,
Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern-
Ruit, 2004; Ursula Burke
and Daniel Jewesbury,
Archive: Lisburn Road,
Belfast Exposed, Belfast,
2004, and Donovan Wylie,
The Maze, Granta,
London, 2004.

7. For a more expansive
   version of this argument,
   see Colin Graham, 'Belfast
   in Photographs', in *The
   Cities of Belfast*, eds
   Nicholas Allen and Aaron
   Kelly, Four Courts, Dublin,
   2003, pp 152–67.

8. Brian McAveara, *Marking
   the North: The Work of
   Victor Sloan*, Open Air,
   Dublin, 1990, p 13.

9. Ibid, p 13.

10. John Tagg, 'The Currency
    of the Photograph', in
    Thinking Photography, ed
    Victor Burgin, Macmillan,
    London, 1982, p 114.

features of photography that constitute its archival promise (the documentary, the photo-essay, the anthropological and the photo-journalistic) as generic backdrops to their interest in Northern Ireland's changing, sometimes disappearing, cultural and social structures. Deploying this imbricated generic consciousness, recent photography in Northern Ireland has been able to shadow the archival moment in culture because it formally understands that archive fever. These photographers, participating in a potentially archival process, resist this process in their desire to keep their subject matter alive and relevant. They do so by filling the archival frame with subjects that undermine the archive's capacity to hold the past, or by ironising and questioning the archive itself. What is most compelling about post-Agreement photography in Northern Ireland is that it has recognised an archival ideology at work and, despite the temptations to photography as a form, has not replicated but instead examined it. This response is not simply a form of political dissent in a time dominated by quiet conformity. Rather it is a deeply ethical way of seeing a specific historical place that tries to take account of the full weight of memory which the archive attempts to lighten.

That Northern photography could see its spaces with such intensity in the past few years is no accident. Northern Irish photography has a genealogy that runs back through the period of the Troubles. For example, the grounds for an interventionist anger, or an insistence on returning to the scene of the crime in order not to forget, are found respectively in the work of Victor Sloan and Paul Seawright, photographers still working whose influence can be seen in the photography of Claudio Hils, John Duncan and others.[7] Victor Sloan's early work especially reveals how a claustrophobic yet allergic relationship can exist between a photographic genre and its nemesis, a kind of closed critical distance which is also evident in the 'archival' photography of new millennium Northern Ireland. Explaining the background to Sloan's work, Brian McAveara notes: 'In the North, twenty year of photojournalism and television pictures have reinforced the truism that photography lies.'[8] Sloan's response to this monocular media saturation was to intervene in the images he made, both ideologically and through his aesthetic practice, by scoring and marking either his negatives or his prints. Yet Sloan's images were still functionally capable of retaining the compositional norms of the photojournalism that he was repelled by. McAveara writes:

> What Sloan offers is a complexity of response. The manipulated image is the method by which he bypasses the soiled coinage of photographic 'honesty', 'truth' and 'authenticity'; the method by which he introduces a complex personal response into a seemingly documentary photograph.[9]

In Sloan, as in later work, the documentary as a mode is deployed in serious mimicry, never intending to jettison 'honesty', 'truth' and 'authenticity', but refusing to assume their easy existence as factors of the mimetic mechanism of photography itself. And obviously this partakes of the most common of debates around photography itself – what John Tagg calls '*the prerequisites of realism*'.[10] In the most fundamental sense an intervention into the image, such as Sloan's, clearly creates an aesthetic (anti-realist as much as anti-photojournalist) disturbance that rails against a simple assumption of photographic mimesis, and provokes a

Ursula Burke and Daniel Jewesbury, *Archive: Lisburn Road*, 2004. Courtesy of the artist

familiar recourse to situational, formal and ideological readings. W J T Mitchell, in a discussion of Victor Burgin's criticism, finds himself returning to a persistent question: 'How do we account for the stubbornness of the naïve, superstitious view of photography?'[11] The ability of the photograph to create a readable account of the world, one which passes for truth, however temporarily, is thus both a curse and restriction on photography, and the source of its contortion of artistic form. Mitchell finds some satisfaction in citing Roland Barthes, and his paradoxical notion that the photograph can be 'at once "objective" and "invested", natural and cultural'.[12] Imprecise as this is, it is a useful point of departure in thinking about the relationship between an actual, physical and ideological world and a photography which is impassioned enough to wish to record that world, while being either resentful or cautious enough to refuse to record with the fallacy of transparency, or to delegate responsibility for the images taken to an archive that cares little for their reality or their unreality. It is on this turning point of Barthes's 'photographic paradox' that Northern Irish photography, like many other forms of photography, rests uneasily. In this way, a responsibility to the idea of collectivity, to the dissenting personality and to a wider ethics is kept in play in the image.

John Duncan's photographic series, *Trees from Germany*, initially enters the archival, by virtue of its coherence of conception and repetition

11. W J T Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, Chicago University Press, Chicago and London, 1994, p 283.

12. Barthes, quoted in W J T Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, ibid, p 284.

of theme. Duncan's work is always consistent in composition, in palette and in the construction of its viewpoint. *Trees from Germany* is a series of photographs in which the textures of Belfast's urban geography are in the process of changing. Building work is in progress in most of the images, taking them on a step further from his work around the time of his 'Boom Town' series, in which cleared urban spaces were dominated by builders' hoardings showing pictures of the apartments, offices and civic buildings yet to be constructed.[13] In cataloguing moments of urban development in Belfast, Duncan's work is both a contemporary archive of the city's post-ceasefire transformation and a reference back to earlier archival projects. The recurrent composition of the images in *Trees from Germany* echoes an 1894 photograph of Belfast by Robert John Welch, 'Old Belfast', which shows the rebuilding of North Street. A ramshackle set of probably late eighteenth-century buildings almost collapses under the weight of the pristine late nineteenth-century, three-storey construction that looms just behind.[14] Duncan's photographs are variations on this compositional theme in which the new and the old are juxtaposed under grey Belfast skies. In 'Berry Street, Smithfield',[15] for example, a new multi-storey car park, partly built in a faux version of Belfast's Victorian redbrick, is obscured by a square of land that is partitioned off by decaying corrugated iron. From inside the corrugated iron square, shrubs and buddleia scramble out, as if hanging over the edge of a plant pot. The textures here are key to the image. The corrugated iron (and its fading bills and posters) is a reminder of the disappearing and dishevelled Belfast before 'regeneration', under-developed, derelict and unkempt. The weedy growth escaping from inside tells of the years of neglect. This rag-tag square of land is now an anomaly, a symbol of the past surrounded by the visual language of development – the car park, the newly surfaced road and footpath both tarmacadamed in imitation of cobbled streets. Smithfield was previously a part of the city known for its time-lag qualities – family-run businesses in small premises, selling cheaply and often second-hand. Tucked behind the central shopping street, Royal Avenue, Smithfield Market (as it was) also sat between Peter's Hill and Divis Street as they descend from west Belfast into the city centre, bringing traffic from the Shankill and the Falls Roads respectively into Belfast. Hence Smithfield is not just any part of inner-city Belfast, but a once iconic hub of working-class Belfast. Cathal O'Byrne, Belfast's most idiosyncratic chronicler, described the area as he imagined it to be in the nineteenth century:

> The people of Smithfield in the old days, while they made money by the hatful, did not neglect the social amenities. Kindly, neighbourly and generous to a degree beyond the ordinary, to them the finer things of life were as important as the goods of this world.[16]

O'Byrne's fierce nostalgia comes out of the same broad impulse to rescue a collective memory which also emerges in Duncan's imagery. Smithfield's redevelopment in the 1990s is then another, perhaps terminal episode in the commercial and human geography of the area, one that finally depopulates Smithfield because its 'innumerable and diverse'[17] forms of business, and its aura of the carnivalesque, no longer fit with the regulated shopping experience – indeed the area has largely been converted to

13. Some of these images are reproduced in John Duncan, 'Boom Town', *Source*, 31, summer 2002, pp 28–36, others are in Allen and Kelly, eds, *The Cities of Belfast*. For earlier work see John Duncan, *Be Prepared*, Stills, Edinburgh, 1998.

14. Welch's 'Old Belfast' is reproduced in E Estyn Evans with Brian S Turner, *Ireland's Eye: The Photographs of Robert John Welch*, Blackstaff, Belfast, 1977, p 25.

15. Duncan, *Trees from Germany*, op cit.

16. Cathal O'Byrne, *As I Roved Out*, Blackstaff, Belfast, 1982 [1946], p 200.

17. O'Byrne, *As I Roved Out*, op cit, p 197.

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car-parking, servicing the redeveloped Royal Avenue. Encapsulating this, and typical of Duncan's eye, is the quiet irony of the street sign that stands in front of the corrugated iron, directing traffic around this obstructive hangover of the past towards the present of the multi-storey car park.
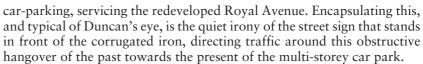
'Berry Street, Smithfield' is an image that is part of an archive, since *Trees from Germany* as a whole attempts to catch a transitional phase in Belfast's physical and social being. Other images in *Trees from Germany* are also structured in such a way as to condense periods of history. Epochs of the city's history are traced over each other, constantly enlivened with fading memory, through the look of an ethical eye that insists on seeing this tracing. The radical possibility contained in the ethical gaze of Duncan's work can be '"read" *as if it were* the trace of an event, a "relic" of an occasion … laden with aura and mystery'.[18] The 'traces' in *Trees from Germany* are sometimes the old (often sectarian) Belfast as against a new 'asectarian' commercialism (as when the top of a loyalist Twelfth of July bonfire protrudes into the carefully conceived skyline of the newly built apartment complex in 'South Studios, Tates Avenue'[19]). Throughout the series 'traces' are more likely to be literal marks on the cityscape made by developers and builders. But their more profound significance is in the sense in which Emmanuel Levinas describes 'the trace':

> Its original signifyingness is sketched out in, for example, the fingerprints left by someone who wanted to wipe away his traces and commit a perfect crime. He who left traces in wiping out his traces did not mean to say or do anything by the traces he left. He disturbed the order in an irreparable way.[20]

The 'crime' wiped away in Duncan's Belfast is a complex meeting point for a 'real', yet now only spectral form of material urban existence, and an obliteration of its past. Duncan's work insists on the irreparability signified by the trace (as a sign of an urban alterity) of a city that once was and is now being denied. As the developers move in and reconfigure Belfast, Duncan catches its last visible traces. And so he refuses to see the city as anything other than the new built upon the old. Levinas writes that the 'trace would seem to be the very indelibility of being … its immensity incapable of being self-enclosed, somehow too great for discretion, inwardness, or a self'.[21] The traces of Belfast in Duncan's work resist the sameness signified by the architectural newness of post-ceasefire Belfast and confront the city always with the past it would rather forget, the indelibility and fullness of its historical and contemporary self. And so the traces of *Trees from Germany* exist formally within the archive, yet their composition resists its reification, their form of memory that denies the archive's neutralising objectivity. As with Paul Seawright's 'Sectarian Murder' series (1988) or David Farrell's *Innocent Landscapes* of 2001 (a set of images of places where the 'disappeared' from the Troubles were said by the IRA to have been buried), Duncan's 'landscapes' haunt themselves with profound loss. They are marked with traces of a living form of what in Peace Process-speak has become universally and unthinkingly called 'communities'. Duncan asks us to remember, by seeing the signs of their loss, what happens to Belfast as a 'community', or set of communities, when the developers move in on the back of the changed political circumstances of Northern Ireland.

18. W J T Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, op cit, p 284.

19. Duncan, *Trees from Germany*, op cit.

20. Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Trace of the Other', in *Continental Philosophy: An Anthology*, eds William McNeill and Karen S. Feldman, Blackwell, Oxford, 1998, p 183.
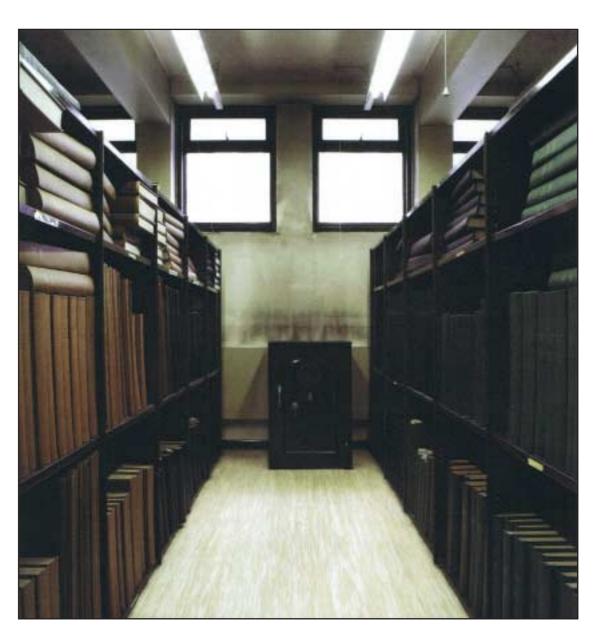
21. Ibid, p 184.

Claudio Hils, 'Newspaper Archive at Belfast City Library', *Red Land Blue Land*, 2001. Courtesy of Belfast Exposed Gallery

The current archival mode in Northern Irish photography means that the images it produces are on the verge of falling into an anthropological mode by which a society is photographed from an ambiguously insider/outsider point of view. Describing Humphrey Spender's 1930s Mass Observation photography in Bolton, Don Macpherson notes the persistence of 'a point of view from which the social event can both be seen and from which the onlooker can be sheltered'.[22] This ambiguity of the intimate anthropological gaze underlies, but is perhaps too neat a

22. Don Macpherson, 'Nation, Mandate, Memory', in *The Camerawork Essays*, ed Jessica Evans, Rivers Oram, London, 1997, p 149.

Claudio Hils, 'Photography Branch of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Knocknagoney station', *Red Land Blue Land*, 2001. Courtesy of Belfast Exposed Gallery

formulation to explain, the archival obsessions of recent Northern Irish photography.

Like Duncan, or Victor Sloan before him, Ursula Burke and Daniel Jewesbury in their exhibition *Archive: Lisburn Road* (2004) display a fundamental concern with the ways in which Belfast has been

misrepresented in the 'ideologically-encrusted images on TV and in movies, in art and photojournalism'.[23] *Archive: Lisburn Road* exhibits a photographic practice that is much closer than Duncan's to the anthropological, and in which the 'onlooker can be sheltered'. *Archive: Lisburn Road* focuses on the structures operating within the material culture of Belfast's Lisburn Road and the residential areas that cling to it along its east side, an area which has long been the epitome of Belfast's bourgeois culture. Throughout the Troubles (and indeed previously) the specific concentration in this one area of respectability, wealth and living 'properly' has been a kind of reproach to the rest of the city. In its hint that living a 'non-sectarian' life is a pleasure granted by prosperity, the area silently preached the most devastating moralism that Belfast could overhear. For some this was a hubris that was too much to bear. Maurice Goldring, writing in 1991, was offended enough to kill off this bourgeois putrefaction. In doing so he was perhaps prescient, if overstated, in his announcement of the coming death of Belfast's ultimate secluded class arbour and its place as apex for the city's intellect:

> In Belfast [the] liberal intelligentsia, concentrated in the south of the city, along the Malone and Lisburn Roads, no longer knows what the people think. Protected but weakened by their privileges, they no longer deserve to lead the country.[24]

When Goldring wrote this, the first stirrings of a new Belfast to come were already apparent. When that transformed Belfast came, after the ceasefires and the Agreement, it left the Lisburn Road trailing in its wake, a faded snapshot in the city's family album.

Burke and Jewesbury consciously deploy the archive form in this project, knowing the problems this may bring:

> The form of the 'archive' is increasingly being used by artists and curators, as a container for a range of critical devices. Often it is employed at an ironic distance, a means by which to 'critique' the practices of anthropology, or ethnography, or colonialism, or museology.[25]

In denying their work an 'ironic critique', a 'pre-ordained, unvariable formal style', and an 'arbitrarily selected content', Burke and Jewesbury set a distance between their aesthetic practice and work such as Duncan's (which certainly has a 'preordained' style and a formally, thematically, if not 'arbitrarily' selected, content). In this somewhat anti-*auteur* approach, *Archive: Lisburn Road* maintains a faith in 'the breadth of a genuine archive',[26] and believes that by adding a forgotten part of the city of Belfast to the city's own archive, a broader collective sense of what is possible in representing the city will emerge. In this sense, then, *Archive: Lisburn Road* believes that the archive can be altered from within, a faith it shares, for example, with Kai Olaf-Hesse's 'Topography of Titanic' and, to a lesser extent, Robert Adam's 'Dockers' (also projects that concentrate on one area of the city).

In *Archive: Lisburn Road*, the singularity and the intense Belfast typicality of the Lisburn Road and its people is on show. And Burke and Jewesbury's photographs reveal that being on show or being hidden are the two modes by which the area binds together its residential and commercial

23. Ursula Burke and Daniel Jewesbury, *Archive: Lisburn Road*, op cit, pp 15–16.

24. Maurice Goldring, *Belfast: From Loyalty to Rebellion*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1991, p 139.

25. Ursula Burke and Daniel Jewesbury, *Archive: Lisburn Road*, op cit, p 18.
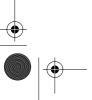
26. Ibid, p 19.

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functions. There is an extreme contrast between the foreclosure of private space and the scopic nature of the commercial strip that runs along the west side of the road. This yin and yang of home and shopping is made whole through lifestyle, as if being at home were to close your eyes, while to promenade on the Lisburn Road is to look at and be seen. Interior space is hidden away behind the discretion of horticultural screens, commercial space is the process of exaggerating a desire to be looked at – window displays are widening in the images in *Archive: Lisburn Road*, like the eyes looking in on them. Obsessed with looking, the Lisburn Road cries out to be photographed. Jewesbury and Burke see it with an empathy that refuses to be content with an anthropological irony. Instead they close in on the visually claustrophobic world of this paranoid spectacle. Less sceptical than Duncan about the nature of the archive itself, their images travel more freely, without 'slavish naturalism',[27] towards their subjects.

In expanding the photographic archive of Belfast, Burke and Jewesbury add images of the suburban, and its sense of extreme enclosure, married to the public space of relatively exclusive shopping on the Lisburn Road. So in their photographs the homes of the streets, avenues, roads and parks off the Lisburn Road shield themselves with verdure. Their lines of sight have an ideal height that begins with a hedge at around eye-level and pushes the pedestrian gaze towards the upper windows, the roof, the trees. Ground-floor interiors are hidden away as places of secret interiority where life remains a mystery, while the outsider looks up in wonder to the bedroom and the stars. The garden is less a leisure space than a place that prevents being seen, a kind of *cordon sanitaire*, and the dense, matted hedges have a depth which mesmerises the eye for the very reason that they refuse to let a gaze pass through them.
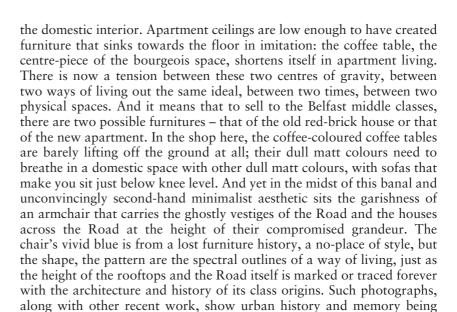
Meanwhile the Lisburn Road's shops have their own mystically self-endorsing way of ensuring that those who cross their threshold become their customers. Jewesbury and Burke show how these breeds of specialised businesses, like species on the Galapagos, adapt to the tiniest change in their surroundings. Sensing perhaps that the Belfast beyond the Lisburn Road has found its way to bring in new forms of bourgeois life not signified by the Lisburn Road itself, there has arisen a new vernacular architecture, repeated throughout the series of photographs. It is one in which the utter privacy of the homes on the east side of the road is thrown into reverse. The foreclosed gaze is made wide-eyed, brought close to the window, overwhelmed with interior luxury. So windows seem to be becoming larger and larger, as if to let in air and light, or to ward off suffocation. Front window frames expand to the size of the original house, and their materials imply that they have shaken off the legacy of red brick and sash window.

In the midst of this denial and reassertion of the Belfast origins of shops selling designer drama, Burke and Jewesbury register signs of the collapse of the bourgeois lifestyle that holds the two sides of the road together. This is best seen in a shift of style that is primarily registered by height. In one of the images in *Archive: Lisburn Road* we look into the window of a furniture shop. For sale are a chair, in blue and gold, and a coffee table. The two are incompatible. And they are made so by the apartment phenomenon that has recently arrived in Belfast, as in every other city in the Western world. Apartment living has radically changed the visual environment of bourgeois life, simply by reducing the height of

27. '… a social precipice …',
    ibid, p 20.

the domestic interior. Apartment ceilings are low enough to have created furniture that sinks towards the floor in imitation: the coffee table, the centre-piece of the bourgeois space, shortens itself in apartment living. There is now a tension between these two centres of gravity, between two ways of living out the same ideal, between two times, between two physical spaces. And it means that to sell to the Belfast middle classes, there are two possible furnitures – that of the old red-brick house or that of the new apartment. In the shop here, the coffee-coloured coffee tables are barely lifting off the ground at all; their dull matt colours need to breathe in a domestic space with other dull matt colours, with sofas that make you sit just below knee level. And yet in the midst of this banal and unconvincingly second-hand minimalist aesthetic sits the garishness of an armchair that carries the ghostly vestiges of the Road and the houses across the Road at the height of their compromised grandeur. The chair's vivid blue is from a lost furniture history, a no-place of style, but the shape, the pattern are the spectral outlines of a way of living, just as the height of the rooftops and the Road itself is marked or traced forever with the architecture and history of its class origins. Such photographs, along with other recent work, show urban history and memory being squeezed such that the instantaneously made but steady perpetuity of the photograph becomes the best form of their preservation.

Archive: Lisburn Road may wish to imply that 'irony' is an easy, or ineffectual, or overly stylised response to the complexity of urban exist-ence. But in doing so, Burke and Jewesbury are not, as they themselves recognise, innocently assuming a critical perspective. They show that the Lisburn Road is not dying, but that its function is changing. Their 'archive' has a strong sense of the historical accretion that makes the Lisburn Road. It also realised that the Lisburn Road is close to being outmoded, and, notable for being outmoded, it is slipping into an archive function for the new Belfast, just as the photographs of it add to the city's archival sense of itself. The Lisburn Road is now revealed as a functioning anachronism. It is a quaint version of a future Belfast that was never going to happen. In slipping into this archive, we should not think it has fallen into obsolescence, because it had a role to play, however perverse, however aloof, in the past identity of the city and so, in its present tense state, it will be central to the memories that make the many dystopias of Belfast's future.

Trees from Germany and *Archive: Lisburn Road* can, then, be seen to stand differently in relation to the conceptual archive of which they are both part. Duncan's formal stylisation and, within that, his subtle inclusion of archival and anti-archival moments in his photographs, allows his work to be archival in itself, on its own terms, while being wary of any archive out of the control of his aesthetic. And so his photography works continually to open an engagement with Belfast that finds its style and strength through its critique of contemporary Belfast. His critique is that of the insider, a knowing Belfast *auteur* who verges on offering his archive as an antidote to the 'official', late-capitalist Belfast which his photographs try to hold at bay. Burke and Jewesbury, on the other hand, seek to expand the archive of a notional 'Belfast' from the inside, giving it a wider canonicity, and so they can allow for a certain formal promiscuity as part of this agenda to widen the represen-tational range of a pictorial 'Belfast'. Both approaches, as we have seen,

scrutinise post-Agreement Belfast out of a concern for its existence, searching cautiously for some kind of essence of the city's identity. Both record changes in the city with a sense of real urgency, trying to keep memory alive and current, and thus always playing with the danger that an aesthetic of Troubles nostalgia will overwhelm their work.

The ultimate destination for the archive, and in some ways for serious photography, is the museum. It is the museumification of Belfast, especially its troublesome history and difficult geography, that is the continual focus for Northern Ireland photography, especially in the years after the Good Friday Agreement. In 2001 the German photographer Claudio Hils exhibited his *Red Land Blue Land* in Belfast. *Red Land Blue Land* is a set of images of the British Army training camp at Sennelager in North Rhine-Westphalia, and includes photographs of film-set-like townscapes built by the British Army in Germany as mockups for rehearsals of Northern Irish counter-terrorism. The often unnerving and literal surrealism of this landscape, its strained relationship to the 'real' Northern Ireland and the forces at work in the conflict there were then given a sharper focus by Hils in his *Archive_Belfast* project (2004). *Archive_Belfast* imagines an archive of the city and the Troubles that is made from the inside out and, more particularly, from inside peculiarly 'marginal' archives. Thus there are images from the storerooms and forgotten treasures of organisations such as the Irish Republican Socialist Party, the People's Museum (a museum of the Shankill Road), the Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross Historical Society, the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland and so on. Hils has carefully researched and constructed a semi-underground material existence for the leftovers of the Troubles, places where the cultural artefacts of the conflict are squirreled away out of sight of the new Northern Ireland that is emerging out of the 1990s and first years of the twenty-first century. These are museums or rooms that are, as the photographs make obvious, either rarely visited or falling into disuse. Yet the fact of their continued existence (and their new status as photographs) means that their significance is not entirely washed away. *Archive_Belfast* asks whether Belfast can be archived, whether its multitudinousness and the depth of its 'troubles' can be classified and contained.

The tradition of museumising the photograph by taking photographs of museum pieces has a long photographic history that goes back most famously to Roger Fenton's beautiful images of the British Museum in the 1850s. Several of Fenton's photographs, particularly his 1857 'Gallery of Antiquities',[28] are formally echoed in Hils's photographs of the storeroom of the X-ray Department of the Royal Victoria Hospital, the Newspaper Archive at Belfast City Library and the 'Evidential Video-Tape Archive' at Musgrave Street Police Station (three images that come as a group within the series). Fenton's British Museum photographs were contentious for the very reason that they might allow, as Fox Talbot suggested in *The Pencil of Nature*, for the dissemination of images of esoteric manuscripts.[29] Even in the earliest days of photography, the photographer *in* the museum could be seen to have a dangerously democratising function, turning out to the gaze of the world the museum piece (and its hidden knowledge), which is at once exhibited but only there for the initiated. Looking at *Archive_Belfast* is a similar experience. The contents of the rooms that Hils photographs seem as if they were

28. *Roger Fenton: Photographer of the 1850s*, Yale University Press/South Bank Board, London, 1988, p 21.

29. See Valerie Lloyd, 'Introduction' in *Roger Fenton: Photographer of the 1850s*, Yale University Press/South Bank Board, London, 1988, p 12.

meant to be hidden away and to represent a past which is now forgotten. However, once they appear as a photograph, a certain mystery and aura is broken, and the secret or unspoken nature of the Troubles becomes public again. This momentary lapse in the containment of the past is overcome, draining it of impact, by having the image slip back into an archive, larger than the archive that the photograph is an image of. It is no accident, then, that the first photograph in the exhibition is the photostudio backdrop at the Photography Branch of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The irony of taking photographs in museums (or secret institutional spaces), as part of an archive, is a reflection on the cultural moment of Northern Ireland at the time, and also an interwoven recognition that the aesthetics which are possible at this moment are contained in a culture tending towards the archival, systematising even its immediate past, an archive that 'defines at the outset *the system of its enunciability*'.[30] In *Archive_Belfast* such control through definition is echoed in the equally Foucauldian recognition of the role of surveillance. Scattered through the images in *Archive_Belfast* are the mechanisms of city-wide CCTV cameras, and reminders that the tapes of such cameras themselves eventually find a home in the perpetually expanding archive of the city. Hils's work implicitly sees the archive as Belfast's new mode of regulating itself. His eye wanders over the archives of the powerful, the obscure, the near-defunct, finding in each that the detritus left over from years of conflict is being stored away. This becomes a way to show how the city's past is being shepherded into neutralisation. Equally, it is a photographic series which questions whether such an archive can only work by constantly filtering out the dangerous, then cataloguing and shelving it, much as the CCTV footage watches for crime which is then labelled and shelved.

The archival mode in Duncan, Burke and Jewesbury and Hils is certainly, like Mass Observation, 'an ongoing process of *remembering*'.[31] These photographers variously use the archive in the face of an official culture that is based on forgetting, The Northern Peace Process, like Paragraph 2 of the Belfast Agreement, can now largely recognise the past only in the process of forgetting it. The archive has taken on a strange role, akin to the subconscious – a place for storing but not, in the everyday, for retrieval. These photographic projects are drawn to the archive form because of its capacity for memory but, at the same time, critique it for its capacity for forgetting. Their archival drive does not come out of a desire to catalogue. They resist that ordering of utterance which the Foucauldian archive authorises and presupposes. Yet they differently express a suspicion that archive fever is conveniently part of the act of 'forgetfulness'[32] in Northern Ireland's current moment, in which the museumification of culture, or more accurately its disappearance into the fire of an archive fever, tries to mark a cultural turning point. These images strain at that point – where history is deadened in an archive past, where class distinction is overridden in class interests, where the abrasiveness of locality is rendered neutral. This is also the difficulty for these photographers. As the politicians often say, the Peace Process is 'the only game in town'. If the Peace Process brings with it 'peace' (of a qualified kind), it has also signalled the redevelopment of the city of Belfast in the interests of a few, and the eradication of 'locality' in parts of the city. Yet peace is unarguably a good thing, and the Process itself almost impossible even to be seen disagreeing with.

30. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Routledge, London, 2002, p 146.

31. Don Macpherson, 'Nation, Mandate, Memory', op cit, p 150.

32. See Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans Eric Prenowitz, Chicago and University of Chicago Press, London, 1996, p 19.

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Quietism is the potential result. These photographic, archival projects find ways in which at least to begin to show, analyse and maybe criticise *the effects* of the Process.

While all photographs eventually become documentary, the images under discussion here are aware that there is an urgent, contorted passing of time around them – the nameless time of the Peace Process in which objects once alive with significance are beginning to have a 'documentary value' in contemporary Northern Ireland, without the help of photography. In responding to Belfast in its post-ceasefire existence, these projects reanimate the 'the authenticity of the photograph',[33] not by insisting on its capacity for mimesis but much more importantly through the way in which they show how it is possible to have an ethical, committed and critical point of view on what is happening in contemporary Northern Ireland, and in particular how the archiving of culture drains away the texture of the present. The traces of many new and disappearing forms of Belfast in the work of John Duncan, Ursula Burke and Daniel Jewesbury, and Claudio Hils are traces in the sense intended by Levinas, reminding us of the crime of wiping away the remnants of the other. In his 'Little History of Photography', Walter Benjamin explains how a city's history gets layered into a photograph and how the authenticity of the photograph becomes an ethical moment:

> But isn't every inch of our cities a crime scene? Every passer-by a culprit? Isn't it the task of the photographer … to reveal guilt and to point out the guilty in his pictures?[34]

It is with these possibilities in mind that the new archival photography in Northern Ireland has ironised, stylised and undermined from within the archive fever of the Peace Process.

33. Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography', op cit, p 527.

34. Ibid, p 527.