

# The arts of memory

## Icon and structural violence in a Dublin 'underclass' housing estate

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PETER THURSFIELD (IRISH TIMES)

This paper deals with the complex relationships between, and some of the everyday practices that go into, remembering and forgetting within a conflicted political field.<sup>1</sup> The object of this analysis is a set of murals in an economically and socially marginal housing estate on the outskirts of Dublin, and some of the social activities that they either commemorate or pass over.<sup>1</sup> This analysis requires an 'archaeology' of a sort, in the sense that both virtual and material layers have to be scraped away, not to reveal some deeper truth, but to outline the field of forces that create truth-effects within this context (Foucault 1973a, Rabinow 1996). If this process is conducted carefully with due regard for local knowledge, however, the rewards are high. An obscure wall in an unfashionable Dublin suburb that most people in the capital have never been to (and that many people would never want to visit), displays multiple and conflicting configurations of violence, resistance, community, ownership, even hope. To understand this wall, though, an entire local world needs to be outlined, and the connections between this local world and national and transnational forces need to be appreciated.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps appropriately, the analysis begins and ends with a defaced *tabula rasa*.

These are two pictures of the same wall separated by about five years (the photo in Figure 1 was taken at the end of 1995, that in Figure 2 in mid-2000). Despite its surface changes and the new houses around it, locals still refer to this pile of bricks as 'the Red Wall', and it still forms an important local landmark. This wall is in Gallanstown, Cherry Orchard, which is part of Ballyfermot, a western suburb of Dublin. Although only about five miles from the city centre, it is worlds away from the new construction and 'high street' capitalism which is currently remaking the Dublin built environment. Its 5,500-strong population fits the demographic profile of a neighbourhood in trouble.

It is a high-crime area, with low employment and high rates of illicit drug use, particularly heroin abuse amongst young people (Bartley and Saris 1999, Saris and Bartley 1999, 2000a, 2000b). If this community was situated in North America or parts of England, Scotland or Wales, it would most likely be labelled 'underclass', with all the pejorative associations and political conflicts implied by this term (Wilson 1989, Bourgeois 1996, Dalrymple 2001 among many others). In turn, the area has a strained relationship with most official organs of the state: the schools, the Gardaí (police), and, perhaps most especially, Dublin Corporation (the organization responsible for social housing).

To make matters worse, Cherry Orchard has benefited only lately and slightly from the economic development known as the Celtic Tiger, the decade-long boom that has seen the Republic of Ireland change from one of the most economically marginal areas in Europe into one of its wealthiest member states (Breathnach 1998). This economic growth has been driven by neo-liberal macroeconomic policies, and it has the same shape as similar booms seen in other areas of the world: better-off segments of society have gained more in both relative and absolute terms than poorer ones. Indeed, during this period Cherry Orchard has had to deal with a set of severe social issues, in particular a growing youth drug (opiate) problem. While in the last couple of years some employment has slowly trickled down to this population, particularly to those who are willing to staff the lower echelons of the service industry such as office cleaning, many people in Cherry Orchard are still losing socio-economic ground – most notably young, unskilled males.

As these problems have been developing, much of Irish society has also moved away from the notion that 'We as a society have poor members' to the idea that 'There are

Figure 1 (above). The Red Wall in 1995 in the aftermath of the Hallowe'en Riots in the Dublin Suburb of Gallanstown.

Figure 2 (below). The Red Wall in mid-2000.



PHILIP MCCORMACK / CIARA KEARNS

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1. Urban Studies in Ireland has largely been the preserve of sociology or small reports by activist researchers (e.g. Fahy 1999). For statistical and policy background on poverty in Ireland, see Nolan, Whelan, and Williams 1998. Two volumes, *Memories of the present: Irish sociological chronicles*, Vols. 1 and 2 (Peillon and Slater 1998, 2000), contain some recent research in urban settings in Ireland. See also Curtin, Donnan, Wilson 1993 and Donnan and McFarlane 1989 for some anthropological perspectives from both sides of the border.

2. Our team worked in Cherry Orchard from the end of 1997 until the end of 2000. During this period, we developed contacts with a variety of residents and with professionals working in the area, both in formal state structures like the schools and police and in newer para-state institutions such as Area Partnerships and Task Forces. Two field researchers had daily contact in the community, examining everything from the rhythms of community life to the serious social problems found therein, but certain politically sensitive topics, such as the serious drugs problem (predominantly opiate abuse) and the largely tense relationship between local people and the Gardaí, were worked on by the principal investigators (see Saris and Bartley *et al.* 1999, 2000a, 2000b).

3. The Irish Tourist Board.

4. Indeed, the picture clearly resonates with one of the more famous, if controversial, depictions of Ireland, that of Eamon DeValera's St. Patrick's Day Address of 1943:

The Ireland which we dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as the basis of right living, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to things of the spirit; a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be

poor communities in our environment' (Saris and Bartley 2000a). In technical terms, Irish public policy towards poverty has been spatialized, looking to address the 'social exclusion' of areas and populations in line with continental, especially French, models (Room 1995, Nolan, Whelan and Williams 1998). Less charitably, one could argue that this ecological model of poverty led to a sense that poverty and severe social problems now exist largely in national parks for the socially excluded, complete with socially designated rangers (such as specially trained police and social welfare officers) to maintain the boundaries of, and keep the peace in, these people preserves.

### Drugs, deprivation and structural violence

When Cherry Orchard intrudes on the Irish national consciousness at all, it is generally through the reporting of severe problems to be found therein. Perhaps the most spectacular demonstration of this tendency in recent years is the media coverage of the serious troubles in the area around Hallowe'en 1995. At that time, the Gallanstown Housing Estate in Cherry Orchard erupted into a major civil disturbance which was described by the Gardaí at the time as an 'organized riot.' The photo in Figure 1 was taken immediately after the riot, and clearly some planning for (or at least expectation of) a conflict is in evidence on 'the Red Wall'. We can read clearly, several times over, the phrase 'Let the games begin'.

As with any important event, accounts attributing both the cause and the meaning of this disturbance vary considerably. The magnitude of the incident, though, is not in doubt. On Hallowe'en night, several units of the Gardaí were lured into the area in hot pursuit of joyriders in stolen cars. They were then surrounded and driven off the street by crowds bearing rocks and petrol bombs. The Gardaí came back in force and were driven off the streets again. Over the course of several hours, tens of people were injured, two children very seriously, and dozens of arrests were made. In addition, a number of Gardaí were severely traumatized by these events (we know of at least three early retirements connected to this incident). Indeed, the Hallowe'en Riots are still viewed by the authorities as one of the most disturbing incidents of public unrest in the Republic of Ireland within living memory.

The background to these troubles is complex, and we can only outline it here. It is generally acknowledged, however, that the atmosphere in Cherry Orchard had been tense long before Hallowe'en night of 1995. Drug dealing and joyriding had reached critical levels. In some parts of Cherry Orchard, especially around the Red Wall in Gallanstown, heroin was being dealt openly: indeed, people were being ferried to Red Wall from all over the city and from up the country to buy illegal substances.

One group of individuals, in particular, were pointed to locally as being centrally connected to a wide variety of criminal activities, especially drug dealing. They seemed better organized than most other groups, with an older set of men who had some criminal connections (some of them had done jail time). They also possessed strong local kin connections in a population that had only recently been moved into the area from all over the greater Dublin area. Around these men was a larger set of younger members with only loose affiliation to the group. Their leader was a charismatic figure in his own right: to this day, some find him very threatening, while others openly admire and respect him. This younger group enjoyed their local notoriety, styling themselves 'The Red Wall Gang' after their favourite hanging-out spot. But however important 'The Red Wall Gang' might have been in the area's, and indeed the nation's, drug problem, there is no doubt that by 1995 their eponymous pile of bricks had become one of the central nodes in a nationwide market for illegal substances.

Drugs were one aspect of a bigger problem, however. In our interactions, many residents articulated a feeling that they had been substantially abandoned by the state and the broader society, that Cherry Orchard had become the designated 'skip' of Dublin Corporation, the last stop on the line before final eviction from the system. Garda interactions with the community became progressively more strained from the late 1980s, as police, largely from rural or more middle class backgrounds, began to conflate all activity in the area into 'street culture' and 'criminality.' Thus, the local penchant for track suits, sovereign rings, and particular hairstyles became the uniform of the enemy and their civilian sympathizers. In short, the Gardaí believed themselves to be involved in a war that they were in the process of losing. As one policeman recalled the situation to us,

[W]e made the mistake of allowing the minority to turn this into an enclave where 'anything goes', the strongest survive, the weakest go down. Now, that is the perception that the criminal element had. [O]nce they got into their stride [pause], the stakes were increased as time went on. Until people said 'this is a no-go area'.

The section of the Gardaí that was most committed to a warfare model of policing saw the riot as a providential opportunity to develop more heavy-handed tactics. Some police, for example, 'leaked' to the media that the Hallowe'en 'attack' had resulted directly from a misguided community policing initiative. They claimed that this initiative had been infiltrated by criminals for the purpose of gathering information about policing policies, organization and activities, information that was then used by the ringleaders of the local gangs orchestrating the rioting.

Specifically, these Gardaí pointed to a group of local youths with criminal records, known as WHAD (We Have A Dream, a title borrowed and adapted, of course, from the Martin Luther King speech), some of whom had a peripheral association with the Red Wall Gang. WHAD is a grass-roots initiative founded in 1988 to provide at-risk youth with some structure to help them avoid getting further into trouble. Hitherto, this group had been seen in a very positive light. In the event, the charge that they were some kind of criminal fifth column was subsequently described in another media report (*Irish Times* 1995) as 'factually inaccurate and a misplaced criticism of local community groups'. According to this report, as well as local historical memory, only one of the participants in WHAD was caught up in the Hallowe'en Riots.

All accounts agree, however, that the Hallowe'en Riot was a turning point for the whole of Cherry Orchard. The Gardaí decided that they could no longer afford to be as alienated from the community as they clearly were. Other state bodies were also prodded into embarrassed action to salvage a situation that seemed to have spun completely out of control. Dublin Corporation, for example, began proceedings to evict those tenants whom they (and many locals) saw as the most troublesome. At the same time, local activists were frightened into an uneasy alliance with state organizations, despite their severe reservations about many of these bodies. From early 1996 this alliance began to cast around for 'a way to put the riots behind them'. It was eventually decided that, to symbolize the new birth of the area, the dreary walls in and around the housing estates of Cherry Orchard, which had hitherto been little more than convenient graffiti canvases, were to be repainted by 'the youth of the area'. In the event, the 'youth of the area' turned out to overlap substantially with the membership of WHAD.

At this point, events took another turn. In the spring of 1996, some months before the murals were painted, but following the advent of a much more intense, some would





Figure 3. A mural depicting a harvest scene.

joyous with the sounds of industry, the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths, the laughter of comely maidens; whose firesides would be the forums of the wisdom of serene old men. [*Irish Press*, 18 March 1943:1]

In present-day Ireland, the St. Patrick's Day Address has been seized on by many commentators as the veritable nadir of an economically backward, culturally inward-looking, religiously and socially conservative state, out of which a modern society in Ireland is finally emerging (see Saris 2000).

Bartley, Brendan and A. Jamie Saris 1999. Social exclusion in Cherry Orchard: Another side of suburban Dublin. In MacLaren, Andrew and Killen, James (eds). *Dublin contemporaries: Trends and issues for the 21st century*, pp.81-92. Dublin: Geographical Society of Ireland.

Figure 4. A mural in Cherry Orchard depicting horses racing in harness.



say harassing, police presence in the area, a sometime member of WHAD, Mark Hall – an enjoyable young man from all accounts, possessed of an infectious sense of humour and a God-given facility for hot-wiring cars – died tragically on the main western thoroughfare into and out of Dublin, at the wheel of a stolen vehicle. This seemingly garden-variety road accident had a profound and unexpected effect on Cherry Orchard's youth. Mr. Hall's funeral turned into a major community event, attracting hundreds of local youths, the majority of whom would scarcely have known him. As one of our consultants remembered things,

The whole area, I mean, it was like a silence that came over them and you would just see gangs of them linking [with] one another – boys and girls, walking around. You wouldn't see one or two of them, just these massive gangs, and the silence that came over them. The girls were more inclined to be crying and the lads just walking around in groups – not doing anything, just being.

Within days of this incident, moreover, Mark's death had been radically refigured. Rather than a senseless death due an unfortunate combination of speed and bad luck, the story grew that Mark's car had been chased by the police, and that it was this hot pursuit that had forced him to accelerate to his doom. None of our local consultants were able to cite the source of this rumour, but they all agreed that it almost instantaneously became common knowledge among the more alienated youths of the area, many of whom would, again, scarcely have known Mark.

The first public pronouncement of this new 'truth' was accomplished with paint. Within a couple of weeks of Mr Hall's funeral, the slogan 'Mark Hall was killed by the Gardaí' went up prominently on the Red Wall. This simple declaration was almost immediately contradicted – again, with paint. Within a week, Mark's mother Dolores took

matters into her own hands, personally effacing this revisionist version of events that she felt intruded on her family's private grief. As another consultant, a friend of hers, said,

She had enough of the nonsense. Well I mean, she had a lot to deal with and the last thing she need was them using her son an excuse to have another riot.

This painting and repainting, however, once again brought the problem of the subject matter, as well as the authors, of the planned murals, to the forefront of many people's thinking. An effort was then made to displace WHAD from their position of preeminent mural designers and executors by the Red Wall Gang, who argued that they had the best claim to ownership of that particular wall at least. They put forward the case that the most appropriate subject matter for a painting on it was the regular discrimination and occasional incidents of outright violence that they felt they had experienced at the hands of the Gardaí. In short, they seemed to be saying that while Mark Hall might not actually have been killed by the Gardaí, he was the sort of person who could have been. Those connected to the Red Wall Gang (and some others), therefore, argued that their sense of being at the sharp end of state violence was the element of their experience that was most relevant for 'community' representation.

Since it had no standing with (indeed was feared and disliked by) the middle-class professional-led community groups organizing the mural-painting, the Red Wall Gang was institutionally sidelined from the start. Its savvy leader, however, had one play left in him. Rechristening himself and his colleagues as a community group, 'Gallanstown Vision', they made a seemingly quixotic attempt to obtain official recognition and funding. In itself, this tactic says something about the ubiquity as well as the



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Figure 5. A mural on 'The Red Wall'

- Breathnach, Proinseas 1998. Exploring the 'Celtic Tiger' phenomenon: Causes and consequences of Ireland's economic miracle. *European Urban and Regional Studies* 5(4): 305-16.
- Curtin, C., Donnan, Hastings and Wilson, Thomas 1993. *Irish urban cultures*. Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, The Queen's University of Belfast.
- Dalrymple, T. 2001. *Life at the bottom: The worldview that makes the underclass*. London: Ivan R. Dee.
- Donnan, Hastings and McFarlane, Graham 1989. *The social anthropology of urban Ireland*. Aldershot and Brookfield: Avebury.
- Dooley, Mark 1998. Horse owners march to highlight animal slaughter. *Irish Times*, 11 March: 8.
- Fahy, Tony (ed.) 1999. *Social housing in Ireland: A study of success, failure, and lessons learned*. Dublin: Oak Tree Press.
- Fleisher, Mark S. 1995. *Beggars and thieves: The lives of urban street criminals*. University of Wisconsin Press.
- Foucault, Michel 1973a. *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- 1973b. *Madness and civilization*. New York: Vintage Books.
- 1975. *Birth of the clinic*. New York: Vintage Books.
- 1979. *Discipline and punish*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Irish Press* 1943. 18 March: 1.
- Irish Times* 1995. Social Affairs correspondent. 7 November: 7.
- 1997. Horse owners protest against new Act. 12 October: 12.
- Nolan, B. et al 1998. *Where are the poor households? The spatial distribution of poverty and deprivation in Ireland*. Dublin: Oak Tree Press.

Figure 6. A detail of the mural on The Red Wall (c. 1996-99).

ideological and material preeminence of the Community Development movement in poor neighbourhoods in present-day Ireland (Saris and Bartley 2000b). However, this stroke of insight came too late to earn him a place at the mural-planning table. The community groups pressed ahead, figuring that they had won a struggle to get non-contentious, positive paintings on the walls of Cherry Orchard.

### A suburban idyll?

Ironically, the most common theme of these non-contentious murals, painted by kids from the suburban underclass, appears to be idylls in rural Ireland, such as this one of a middle distance harvest scene (Figure 3). Others of these pictures have more politics in them than is immediately apparent.

Figure 4 shows the only large mural in Cherry Orchard that was not subsequently seriously defaced. Tellingly, it is a picture of horses. Horses are important vehicles for both people and meanings in this area (Saris and Bartley 2000a). A few families in this area, for example, have a long tradition of horse ownership: indeed, as recently as the 1980s, horses were still used commercially to haul coal or milk. As the 1990s heroin wave grew in intensity, many local youths became interested in horse ownership, as one of the few positive aspects of living in Cherry Orchard. By the mid-1990s, however, legal moves were afoot to drastically curtail horse ownership in the greater Dublin area. Since the end of 1996, with the passing of very harsh legislation that effectively rendered every horse in the capital illegal, a 'horse protest', including everything from raising media awareness of this issue to battering the enforcers of the new regulations, has been ongoing in this area, as well as other poor neighbourhoods in the Irish capital. In other research, our team has explored some of the ways that horses have been used by various local forces both to stake a claim to ownership of specific spaces and to contest the lack of respect and spoiled identity that they feel are pro-

jected upon them by 'mainstream' society (Saris and Bartley 2000a). The painters of this mural, then, found a subject that not even the most alienated youth would have been inclined to deface.

This does not mean that the picture is non-contentious, however. Note that this is a picture of harness racing or trotters. This is a lesser-known and not a very respectable form of horse racing in Ireland. The sport was only introduced to the island about 30 years ago, and various attempts to bring it under the auspices of the better organized equine sports regulating agencies have not been successful. Most betting shops, moreover, will not take bets on these races as they are seen to be eminently fixable by the various interests that currently control the sport (horses substituted, papers forged, etc.), and consequently impossible to calculate rational odds on. 'Respectable' racing fans moreover speak of 'knackers' and 'scumbags' being in this line of sport, suggesting that it is mostly Travellers and the 'lower' orders (particularly the criminal elements thereof) who get involved.

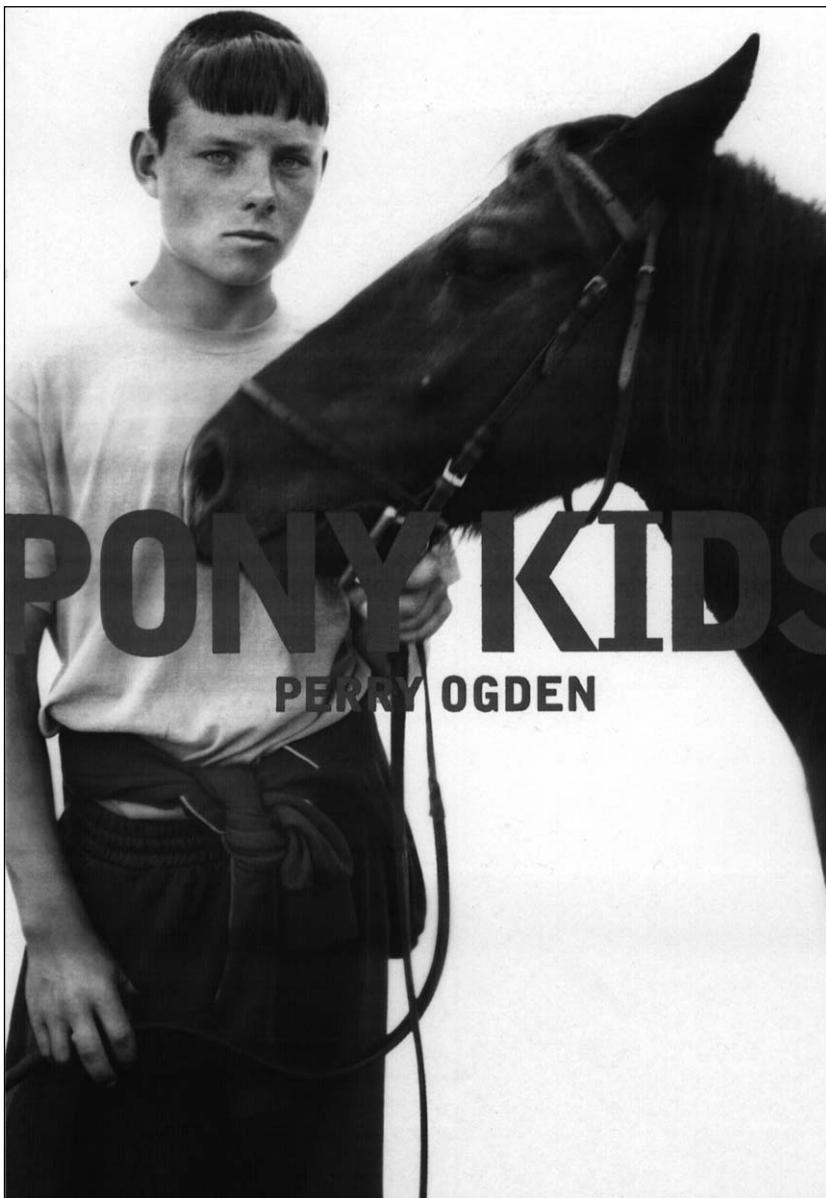
Clearly, this mural says something about dynamics within Cherry Orchard as well as the area's experience of structural violence through a cultural appreciation, and the social position, of horses and related equine activities. However, an enormous amount of both recent and older local knowledge is required to make sense of what it is saying. The subsequent respect that it has been accorded is an indication of how well its authors judged the relationship between what they could say under the watchful eye of the community groups and their official sponsors and the long-term reception they could anticipate from the more alienated end of their audience.

Other murals fared very differently. While the harness-racing picture seemed to strike a chord of universal acceptance, the Red Wall was to continue its existence as a site of conflict and debate, a veritable argument conducted in paint. The scene that went up here (see Figures 5 and 6) is perhaps the most interesting of the murals that were



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PERRY OGDEN

Figure 7. Cover of the book *Pony kids* (Aperture, 1999, isbn 0-89381-859-3) with photographs by Perry OGDEN. This work documents the lives of young people from housing estates and block of flats who keep horses in Dublin city.

Painted in 1996. It is so full of rural kitsch that one is tempted to read it ironically: indeed, even if it were cleaned up *Bórd Fáilte*<sup>3</sup> would be slow to use it even for the American market. It is full of what Vico might call 'dead' metonyms of Irish tradition, stressing tranquil rural landscapes, timeless icons and traditional music and entertainment.

Moving from right to left, a crudely painted serene older man plays a *bódhran* against a backdrop of a profoundly peaceful countryside. Further left, crudely drawn but still comely maidens dance in the shadow of what looks suspiciously like Crough Patrick, Ireland's holy mountain overlooking Clew Bay in Mayo, some 150 miles away. Finally, the figures are framed on the other side by more peaceful countryside.<sup>4</sup> The contrast between such a vision and what had been the major drugs distribution point for the greater Dublin area, not to mention the epicentre of the most severe urban rioting in the Republic of Ireland in this generation mere months before, is so striking that one scarcely knows where to begin to analyse it.

Obviously, fate has been harder on this painting, but what was depicted stayed pretty stable from about the end of 1996 until the end of 1999, when Dublin Corporation decided that a blank wall was needed in the area. There are three obvious defacements that deserve special mention, however. First, and probably least interesting, are some fires that were started in the middle of the picture. Two of these were clearly deliberately set, seemingly to have ren-

dered the activities of the comely maidens something of a toss-up between step-dancing and fire-fighting. The second and third defacements are far more interesting: they are the splash of red in the upper right hand corner of the work and the obvious lettering. The two are closely connected, but only if you know the history of this pile of bricks.

Note that the upper right-hand corner of the piece has been painted red. Clearly, this modification was added with some care: a white undercoat was laid, and then a red overcoat was applied. No local needed to be told what this patch of red meant: it indexed the Red Wall underneath the painting, and hence the Red Wall Gang. To drive home the point, someone also drew in red (again) the words 'Garda' and 'WHAD' in crossword fashion, followed by 'out now'. WHAD, it seems, gets the stick from both sides.

I want to draw particular attention to the technique of this remembering. It is a layer of paint that 'portrays' the layer below, consequently rendering its substrate visible. As in a *memento mori*, an artistic device is used to make visible otherwise unseen depths that are then constructed as more real than the surface phenomenon. At this level, at least, the Red Wall Gang got the last word – if only for a while. While not directly represented, the structural violence and actual assault that they claimed to have experienced at the hands of the Gardaí, or at least the debate about these issues, was shown to be just under the surface of things.

#### A new stability?

The relative stability of this multi-authored production belies the conflict in the area during the second half of the 1990s between the various internal divisions within Cherry Orchard and different forces from outside the area. An important focus of this conflict has been the relentless pressure on horse ownership in this area by a new, privately contracted enforcement arm of Dublin Corporation (now rechristened Dublin City Council), alongside the continuing expansion of a severe youth heroin problem. From a high of more than 150 beasts at the beginning of our research in 1997, we estimated that fewer than 40 horses remained in the area in 2000 when our work terminated (Saris and Bartley 2000a). During this period, Cherry Orchard's drugs problem worsened.

Local response to this state of affairs has taken two forms. First, in common with nearly every other socially excluded neighbourhood in the greater Dublin area, an equine centre was completed in 2000 in Cherry Orchard. From the beginning it was intended to house a mere 30 'high-quality' horses, so many local lads understandably developed a strong suspicion that they were being set up to lose a game of musical stable-places. Elements of the Red Wall Gang have been the main organizers of protests against this state of affairs, to date with little effect, although they have attracted some media attention to the situation (*Irish Times* 1997, Dooley 1998). Meanwhile, Corporation seizures of horses continued unabated, while the wasteland that once provided cover for everything from drug dealing to informal horse shows has been 'developed' by the Corporation at a breakneck pace. In the final act of the seeming normalization of this suburb, a grey wall (slightly defaced) now stands in front of what looks like profoundly uninteresting tract housing (see Figure 2).

#### Conclusion

If we learn anything from Foucault 1973a, 1973b, 1975, 1979), it is that power is productive: it is productive of subjectivities, of resistance, even of reality itself. With respect to the themes of this paper, we can identify at least two emerging strands manifesting different relationships between violence, icon, and memory in relation to the sorts of issues arising in places like Cherry Orchard.

Peillon, Michel and Slater, Eamonn (eds) 2000. *Memories of the present: Irish sociological chronicles*, Volume 2. Dublin: Institute for Public Administration.

Rabinow, Paul 1996. *Essays on the anthropology of reason*. Princeton University Press.

Room, G. 1995. Poverty and social exclusion: The new European agenda for policy and research. In Room, G. (ed.) *Beyond the threshold*. Bristol: Policy Press.

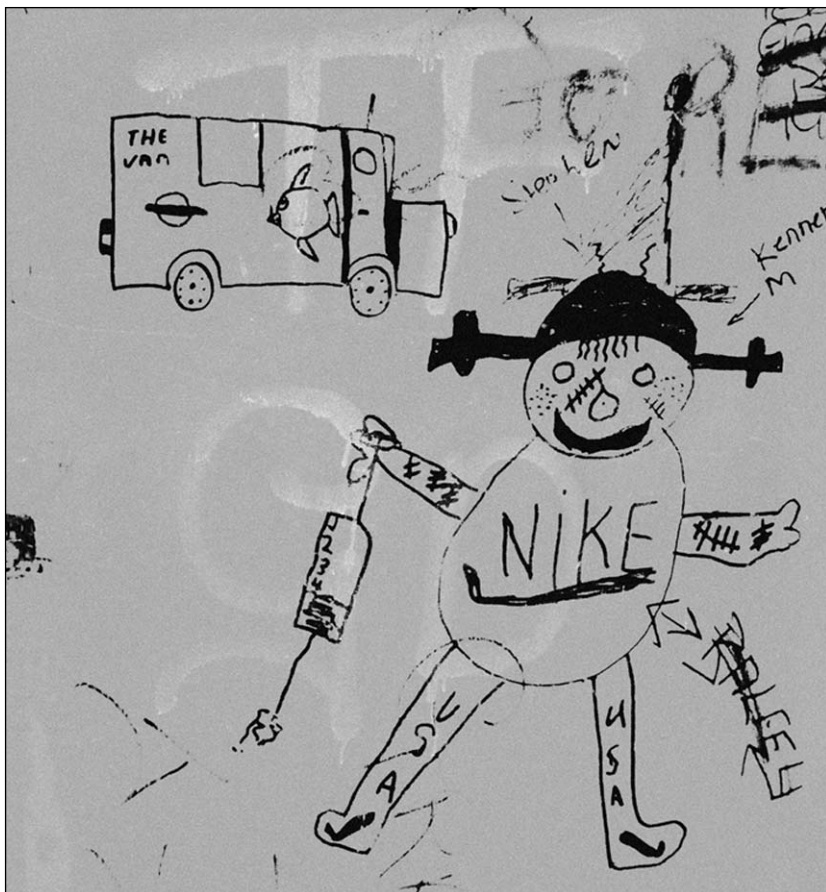


Figure 8. Graffiti visible until mid-2000 on the temporary hoarding surrounding the Eastern Health Board Resource Centre.

The first of these strands is the wholesale aestheticization of aspects of the lives of those subject to structural violence in Ireland. This trend probably finds its current acme in the work of the one-time fashion photographer Perry Ogden. In his beautifully photographed coffee-table book, *poor kids and their horses* (freshly purchased at Dublin Smithfield's Horse Fair and now likely to be seized within the month by those enforcing the recent draconian anti-horse legislation) are materially cleaned up and symbolically air-brushed of any qualities that might make a middle-class viewer squeamish, from stray dirt in the horse's mane to track marks on children's arms.

The cover of this work (see Figure 7) is a study of horse and boy staring through their local context to share a moment with a viewer. The presumed authenticity and purity of the boy's relationship to his horse is suggested by his seeming unconcern for his surroundings (which are, in the event, conveniently covered by a white sheet) and his obvious ease with the animal. Such romantic depictions of the 'urban horse' have blossomed at the precise historical moment when it has become state policy to remove horses from the capital.

The second strand can be traced by literally going back to the drawing-board, that is, by looking at some of wall painting extant in Cherry Orchard. That seen in Figure 8 was my favourite, discernible until mid-2000 on the temporary hoarding surrounding the recently completed Eastern Health Board Resource Centre. Many local people believed that this building was really a treatment centre for junkies, yet another problem directed resource in this community, less a service and more an index of how much trouble the neighbourhood was in.

In this work, there is no escape from either the problems or the context of Cherry Orchard. A chip van, the only service industry besides drugs that is locally available, stands in the background of a figure with a syringe. The syringe is held neither in its medical/drug injecting position nor in its threatening/mugging posture, but is clearly available for either purpose. The body of the figure (and

note that the gender of the user is difficult to judge, reflecting the recent social development that young women are becoming involved in opiate use at ever-increasing levels – see Saris and Bartley 1999) is marred by physical violence (facial scars) as well as by track marks along both arms – portals between the inside and outside that show the paths of a little temporary ecstasy at the price of local stigmatization, profound medical risks, and almost inevitable criminal sanctions. The instrument that does the scarring, the hypodermic needle and syringe, is both the privileged channel between the inside and outside of the body and an important means of drawing the life blood of the global economy, money, into local worlds from the outside environment. Robberies at syringe-point became a daily occurrence in Dublin's city centre in the 1990s, and they continue at present. Such crimes do not only threaten, materially and symbolically, the injection of dirt and contagion into the respectable body politic; they also draw into local markets the money that sustains and reproduces a local dystopia.

Far from placing the figure at a remove from the rest of the mundane world, such as the circulation of commodities, the artist emblazons the figure holding the syringe with both 'Nike' and 'USA': the first one of the most successful exemplars, and the second the symbolic and material epicentre, of the global market. This technique condenses several social realities. Drug dealers in the area, like their counterparts in the United States, for example, often use expensive, comfortable sports clothing to indicate their vocation and their success. US designer sports labels, manufactured by near slave labour in the third world, are preferred over all others. The relative bagginess of the garment is convenient for concealing either gear (heroin), cash or weapons, and when new, its price is well known: thus local assessment of success is easy to make. No sportswear manufacturer or retailer is unaware of this fact; indeed, some market goods precisely for this audience (see e.g. Fleischer 1995). Never slow to take up a trend, marketers on both sides of the Atlantic have also placed the Nike 'swoosh' on gaudy jewellery, such as sovereign rings and pendants (a favourite item of many people involved in the drug trade in this area). Like a tenner bag of gear or a vial of crack cocaine, such products are meant to supply a transient high that soon wears off and has to be replicated. Thus, what Jello Biafra insightfully calls the Nike swooshstika indexes and underwrites not merely the misery in the sweatshops of quasi-fascist US-allied regimes like Indonesia, but a wider world of capital and commodities that elevates some to opulence while ruthlessly confining others to misery.

Clearly, the 'classicized' body of Perry Ogden (see Stallybrass and White 1986) cuts off any interpretation that places us and the boy in the same frame, while the dystopic carnivalesque body drawn on the hoarding in front of a state building which the locals believed would eventually be directed towards 'their' drug problem absolutely requires it. The first depiction removes the boy and his horse from the here-and-now, the white sheet and a little preparation effacing the unpleasantness of a global system that, willingly or not, we share with this young man. Potentially, however, it is the same boy, or his best mate, or, increasingly, his girlfriend, that holds the syringe. S/he shares our products, but not our means; s/he shares our passion for self-construction through a repetition of commodity consumption, but in a way that we would rather not know about. The figure reminds us that what we buy either politically or economically at the beginning of the new millennium does not come cheap. Our solution to date has been to suppress this sense of structural cracking just beneath the surface of everyday life. Like Dublin Corporation, we paint things over and hope for the best. ●

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