VIRTUAL CROSSINGS: BOUNDARIES AND TRANSGRESSIONS IN REPRESENTATION AND PRACTICE IN BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND.

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Abstract: This paper deals with the very real fact of sectarian segregation in Belfast, Northern Ireland, and the plethora of ways in which sectarian boundaries are represented. In Belfast, space is divided by a variety of lines; the "Peace Line", a series of walls meant to keep hostile parties apart; "Color lines", the murals, partisan decorations such as flags, banners, and painted curbstones; and the natural lines of the urban terrain, bridges, roads, train tracks and rivers. These boundaries are both physical and representational, yet they are experienced as real and are observed in daily practice. Sometimes, however, these lines are transgressed, during extraordinary events, such as parades and festivals, as well as by individuals making choices as they traverse the city. When boundaries bend to the movements of Belfast's inhabitants, the reality of segregation is challenged and the lines of the city are momentarily redrawn. This paper will explore what happens in those moments.

Keywords: Contested space, segregation, post-conflict development, parades

Introduction

Belfast comes across like any other city these days. There are spaces for the rich and the poor. A center, with town squares, town halls, theaters and shops. And expanding into the periphery there are homes, churches, schools, parks and cemeteries, little neighborhoods, each with its own name. But where Belfast differs is that these neighborhoods are demographically segregated. Over 60% of Belfast residents live in communities where 90% of their neighbors are also their co-religionists (Brown 2002). Meanwhile, flashpoint violence, riots and paramilitary shootings still occur, often enough to fuel decades old anxieties. On the other hand, Belfast is renewing and reinvigorating itself, with local and national policy agendas pledged to create a "Shared Future" through local development and community building programs (OFMDFM). New shopping districts and public art, for instance, have opened up the former no-mans-land that was the city center. Just as these changes to the physical landscape make room for new, more constructive community interactions, this paper will argue that even momentary alterations to the

social space, as occur through movement, performance and parades, can reveal a *virtual space* of possibility, a new Belfast as its inhabitants imagine it. I investigate how boundaries are made and experienced, but also how they are transgressed and what, in these transgressions, marks the potential for the radical reconfiguration of a divided city. What follows is broken into two parts: in Part One I discuss the types of lines to be found in Belfast and how they divide space; in Part Two I provide a more theoretical discussion of space and what might happen in moments of transgression, movement and performance.

Part One: Lines

To some degree segregation in Belfast, as elsewhere, is voluntary, habitual and familiar. People make their homes near relatives, close to their houses of worship and to their children's schools, and soon find themselves in ethnic or religious enclaves. But in Belfast these enclaves are marked and separated with various technologies of division that close off certain communities to certain people, prevent communication and create barriers of mistrust and intimidation. These barriers include:

- "Peace Lines", walls or fences built with the express function of keeping populations apart
- "Color lines", the visual markings, color, banners, murals and flags that define territories
- "Local lines", the 'natural' boundaries of the city, which include not only rivers but also bridges, train tracks, roads and other terrain.

These lines form a material presence in Belfast; they are visible, tangible, and force practices of habit. Studies of materiality teach us not to ignore such a presence by privileging the 'social' because the latter is deeply entangled with the material. Objects mediate our interactions. The agency of both individuals and institutions are necessarily diffused through things, which mark status or role, through things that we exchange to bridge new social relationships, things we carry, throw out, or step around. This is our baggage as a cultural species. It is through objects that we, as subjects, are made. Daniel Miller writes, "the same ability of objects to implicitly condition human actors becomes the primary means by which people are socialized as social beings" (2005, p. 6). Developing this dialectical theory of the social and the material from prior works of Bourdieu (1977) and Hegel, Miller argues that, "our humanity is not prior to what it creates" (2005, p. 10). Rather, "it is that practice and their relationships [that] create the appearance of both subjects and objects through the dialectics of objectification, and we need to be able to document how people internalize

and then externalize the normative. In short, we need to know how the things people make, make people" (Miller 2005, p. 38).

To respond with a Foucauldian notion, materiality in the form of technologies of exclusion is the mode through which power is diffused. In the cold metal of the prison, for example, power ceases to be an abstraction. By focusing this theoretical lens on Belfast we shall see likewise that boundaries are also technologies of social alienation; they are both the symbol and the reality of a divided society. The immaterial 'sense' of belonging or not belonging, which Belfast residents experience as they traverse the city is inspired by and reified in the material objects they encounter—walls, murals, banners, painted curbs, clothes of certain colors. These objects mark space and inflect the social relations within it. As in Henri Lefebvre's theory of "social space", the materiality of space and location is more pervasive and complicated than a simple subject-object dialectic. According to Lefebvre, space is a superstructure, within and throughout which individuals act, perceive, and experience social life; "Itself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others" (1974, p. 73). Very Marxist in his thinking, Lefebvre argues that the social relations are embedded physically in spatial layouts and reproduced socially through spatial practices. We shall see this in my examples from Belfast.

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A line, geometrically, is a violence done to a plane. Extending infinitely without change of direction, it cuts in half what, in its emptiness, was once a complete whole. It creates two parts (two planes, two halves, two sides) where there was nothing previously. The following examples will attempt to draw this geometric abstraction into the reality that Belfast currently faces.

Peace Lines

The "Peace Line" is a particularly ironic euphemism, referring collectively to over 46 sections of metal and concrete walls and fences, some over 20 feet high, which physically separate Protestant-Loyalist from Catholic-Republican communities. These walls cut through the spatial grid, often obstructing through streets, closing off back entrances to adjoining neighborhoods, and casting barbed-wire shadows on the back gardens of residential terraced-houses. Gates allow access during regular business hours, but are closed in the evenings, weekends and holidays. They look like prison walls, closed gates clang like lock-down, and on either side

neighbors become many miles distant. In Belfast's radial layout a closed gate may obstruct passage between two parallel roads so that in order to cross from one to the other one would have to travel into the city center and all the way back out again.

The first "Peace Line" was erected in 1969 by the British Army to separate the neighborhoods of the Falls and Shankill Roads after a period of heavy rioting between them (Gillespie 2008; Jarman 2007). But, peace lines continue to be built, paid for and operated by the government, often at the request of the local communities where the lingering effects of violence are still felt. Take, for example, the Fall of 2001 when for many months the children of Holy Cross Primary School for Girls were harassed by mobs of protesters as they walked to and from school each day. The girls attended a Catholic school atop Crumlin Road, but to get from their homes to the school they had to pass through a predominantly Protestant neighborhood. Residents there had no fear of the girls themselves, but claimed that the parents who accompanied them, from the Catholic-Republican neighborhood of Ardoyne, could have been IRA members meaning to do harm (Interview with Fr. Aidan Troy, Holy Cross Church 5/29/2007). Especially in this area of North Belfast, Protestant and Catholic neighborhoods are right on top of each other, which is to say that within these religiously segregated communities, there are smaller enclaves of Loyalist and Republican paramilitaries located within a few feet of one another. The stretch between Catholic Ardoyne and Protestant Tiger's Bay is known as "Murder Mile" an area where the majority of conflict-related deaths have occurred throughout the 'Troubles', most of them only feet away from the victims' front doors. In this area, even a park is divided by "Peace Lines" and where no such divisions exist, burnt-out homes, rubble and empty lots take their place (from fieldwork interviews 2007).

However, "Peace Lines" are seen by many as necessary safety features and are continuously erected or raised higher at interface zones and flashpoints where periodic violence continues to erupt. In fact, according to Jarman,

> while many [peace lines] have been built in response to persistent localized violence, many others are not constructed in response to any specific incidents, but rather are regarded as a necessary precautionary part of...urban regeneration. The barriers reflect both the reality of violent conflict and the acknowledgment that the hostility, fear and suspicion are very deeply rooted (2007).

A new "Peace Line" was proposed in 2007, for example, to go around an integrated school where students had been frightened by people tossing objects into the school yard. However, as I have personally witnessed, no wall can be built high enough to not invite teenagers to try throwing something over it. Throwing objects over these walls and hanging flags where they can be seen from the other side is a challenge both to oneself and to one's neighbors. I have even seen a marching band 'practicing' early one morning where they knew they could be heard by residents on the other side of an East Belfast peace line (from fieldwork notes 2007). Though several people I encountered expressed dismay for the number of peace lines still going up, the violence of the past 40 years is not yet far enough behind them, nor their neighbors far enough away, to be comfortable with the removal of the walls. In this way, divided space perpetuates itself, producing only those fears and behaviors that exacerbate segregation. Walls—which obstruct both conflict and contact—work by alienating and dehumanizing whoever is on the other side. In his study of colonial architectures in Israel-Palestine, Eyal Weizman writes: "increasing numbers of barriers between Jewish and Arab communities in neighboring villages or shared cities … has led to the further fractalization and fragmentation of the terrain into an archipelago of enmity and alienation" (2007, p. 155). We must consider this also to be the case in Belfast, where peace lines are not merely obstructions, but obvious indexes of the presumed antagonistic presence on the other side; walls such as these both call to mind the memories of past violence associated with the neighboring community, and indelibly mark anyone who passes through their gates as a member. "The wall itself" Weizman notes, "is not only an instrument of partition, but also an apparatus of observation and control" (2007, p. 153).

Color Lines

Within this category I group all of the ways in which residents of Belfast mark their territories and fly their colors—the red, white and blue tricolor of the Union Jack demonstrates Unionist politics and a majority Protestant population, while green, white and orange shows where Catholics support the Republican/Nationalist cause. These colors may appear in murals, flags, bunting, and painted onto curbs and lampposts, covering large blocs of territory without variation. These objects occur in residential areas which are religiously segregated, but they also create what Lysaght and Basten refer to as 'sectarianized space'; where behavior and perceptions of behavior in that space are associated with a particular ethnic, political or religious group (2003, p. 227).

Such markings, and the associated presumption that 'X-group lives here' compel passers-by to behave in ways that minimize their chances for confrontation. In their research, Lysaght and Basten have found that Belfast residents, especially those who already live in segregated communities, feel an "overriding need to avoid attracting attention to one's ethnic identity, the paramount need to avoid provoking a negative reaction to presence within the territory of the other community" (2003, p. 233). The authors see this as a lingering manifestation of the everyday violence that besets Belfast during and after the 'Troubles'. But, what is also at stake is the formation of the identities that these markings represent. They leave no room for middle ground; no identity, and no spatial territory exists which is neither Protestant nor Catholic, neither unionist nor nationalist, which of course is particularly problematic for the new immigrant populations taking up residence there.

The color patterns, presentation, and murals form a classic Levi-Straussian dualism. They are simple, familiar representations of Irish and British nationalisms, but they are also visually complementary, forming mutually exclusive and symmetrical patterns of representation. The Union Jack stands for the United Kingdom, the Crown, and loyalty while the Irish tricolor stands for Ireland, the Republic and independence. Visually and symbolically there can be no compromise between them—though they have a certain balance—one cannot exist without the other. Complicated political identities are thus reified as icons of nationalism (Jarman 1998). And yet these very caricatures are reproduced in the ways in which people represent themselves and each other. One informant, a Catholic Priest, explained to me,

> You always know where you are because maybe the curb is painted red white and blue, or, the minute you go into a nationalist area, you see the Republic of Ireland flag. A lot of the symbols of the conflict are still very, very powerful…so that if you see someone walking down the street in a blue shirt, you'll know what their religion is (from fieldwork interviews 2007).

On more than one occasions, in fact, friends who were guiding me through the city told me that I could go further, but they would have to leave me—simply because they were wearing the wrong color shirt. Lysaght and Basten also found pedestrian movements themselves to be meaningful; "People walk on different sides of the street that are viewed as alternatively Protestant or Catholic. They follow predefined routes, crossing roads at particular traffic lights or junctures" (2003, p. 234). In doing so they indeed

avoid confrontation, but they also mark themselves as belonging to either one group or the other by conforming to 'sectarianized' routine.

Color patterns in social space contextualize the figures moving about within it—while colors with no symbolic load may stay unnoticed, the green of the Irish tricolor, for instance, becomes blazingly apparent where the streets are decked in Union Jacks. For those that find themselves in the 'wrong' colors in the 'wrong' place, the emotional response can range from defiance to extreme anxiety. An informant in Begonia Aretxaga's 1997 study described entering a Catholic-Nationalist territory; "I was looking to one place and another around me. It was like being in a different world, I felt also very self-conscious, as if I had a tag in my forehead saying 'Protestant,' and everybody was seeing it" (Aretxaga 1997, p. 34). In my experience, residents of Belfast routinely ignore the flags and murals that pervade their own communities, but upon crossing the color line, they immediately register what they see there as different, wrong, and even, uncomfortably foreign. Space in Belfast, even supposedly a neutral space, is thus "inherently two-sided" according to Anderson and Shuttleworth; "It is structured by territoriality, by the use of bordered space to include and exclude, to control, influence and express relationships of power … a piece of territory can be a sanctuary or somewhere safe for one group, but a space of fear for the other…" (2007).

Natural Lines

Finally, there are the lines that are simply there, rivers, train tracks, bridges and roads, which form the terrain of the city. They establish by mere fact of their presence the boundaries of neighborhood, the neutral space of the city center, as well as the rules for passage through the city. But these too are technologies of division. During my fieldwork I was surprised by a comment about a road that formed the interface between a Protestant and a Catholic neighborhood. I was observing a community development meeting when one of the attendees said: "It's not a commercial district. It's not pedestrian friendly. It's not residents-friendly. People tend to go up and down that road as quick as they can… it's negative space that way… It's a dead space" (from fieldwork interviews 2007). Instead of using the road, he continued, "people used to use the railway as a way to get up and down the road without having to pass [the Protestant neighborhood]." The train tracks are not a shortcut and the route through the train yard is fairly dangerous, but taking the path of avoidance achieves two things; it establishes self-segregated routes so that even in transit separation is maintained, but it is also an act of appropriation that challenges existing spatial practices and charges neutral,

unused space with the same symbolic allegiances as the people who use it. In most cases, according to Lysaght and Basten (2003), neutral space thus becomes sectarianized, falling into line in the same way that residential neighborhoods festooned with flags are either Protestant *or* Catholic. The interface zone mentioned above became a place known as a "haven" for Catholic youths. Likewise, Lysaght and Basten (2003) cite an example where a few park benches under a bridge became the popular hang-out for local Catholic teens. Thus, the natural local geographies become charged with sectarian divisions because of the people that congregate and behaviors that occur there. However, I would argue that if such segregation of space through spatial practice is possible, then it is *also* possible for social actors to use the material terrain to approach, alter and transgress the sectarian boundaries that confine them, and perhaps, in the process, to create new types of spaces charged with symbols and meanings that do not conform to the 'either-or' divisions that persist in Belfast today. These are moments in which movement, even the simple act of walking, can articulate the possibilities for a new spatial understanding of Belfast. In Part 2, I will discuss spatial imaginings of a grand scale—the public event—and what may be uncovered by studying it.

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Part 2: Virtual Crossings

Summers in Belfast are parade season. Marchers and celebrants of all kinds crisscross roads, public squares and fairgrounds toting their colors and banners, playing music, and making noise. The city is abuzz with preparations and streets and homes along the parade route are festooned with decorations. But, given the context described above, parade days and public events are much more than moments of celebration and cultural pride; they produce new possibilities in the space they occur. They are radical re-conceptualizations of space, in which boundaries are transgressed and erased and a new social space is produced, if only for a day and where new social relationships are possible. The following is a theoretical exploration of the public event and the possibilities it produces, intended to lay the groundwork for future research on the subject.

Movement

According to Michel De Certeau, "there is a rhetoric of walking" (1984, p. 100). He argues, pedestrians are "the ordinary practitioners of the city" (p. 93), in whom the act of walking is an expressive and socially productive activity. "Their intertwined paths give shape to spaces. They weave places together" (p. 97). Thus, making one's way through a city is a communicative act that situates oneself in relation to the city and the others in it. De Certeau's use of the term 'rhetoric' implies not only a linguistic metaphor, but also the use of figurative style and compositional techniques for the purpose of persuasion. Thus, movement through the city, whether in observance or defiance of boundaries, is always intentional, always argumentative; it is the constant debate between people and their material surroundings about how to belong to this place and to each other.

Matthew Johnson, a British archeologist, argues that one's sense of belonging to a particular group has everything to do with his sense of belonging to a particular place. And yet, he argues, "[m]any people do *not* belong to a particular place; they are nevertheless, just as much part of the national community" (2007, p. 177). The writing of history tends to reify boundaries, establish retroactive stability, when in reality "[p]eople moved around, had conflicts with each other, and often saw very sudden change in their lifetime" (Johnson 2007, p. 191). Belfast illustrates both of these contradictory tendencies: identity and belonging are constantly being pulled into a stable, dualistic social structure that defines the space of Belfast and the rest of Northern Ireland as Protestant *versus* Catholic, and Loyalist *against* Republican. With just as much force, these communities are pushing back against the boundaries that confine them subtly altering the social terrain with every act of crossing and transgressing.

Events

Anyone who knows of Belfast and of conflict in Belfast knows of the Orange Parades, a Protestant-Unionist tradition in celebration of the Battle of the Boyne. At parade time each year fife and drum bands march a path through the city with thousands of residents following behind them. The path zizzags through Protestant neighborhoods and public squares, and in some places passes or crosses into predominantly Catholic areas, traversing over five miles of ground from the city center to and from the fairgrounds. Yet, for all its celebratory intentions, the rhetoric of marching and music are often received as an aggressive act by people disturbed by the noise or blockaded in their homes during the parade. As demonstrated by the 2008 parades, when riots erupted in Belfast and several policemen were injured, such dramatic appropriations of space are met with equally aggressive resistance (RTE News 2008).

On the other hand, events may also use rote sectarian symbols to push boundaries, and break into space otherwise denied to them. For example, the first public political demonstration by Irish Nationalists ever to be allowed in Belfast's city center occurred in 1994, just after the IRA ceasefires. "Republicans triumphantly marched into the center of Belfast where Gerry Adams placed an Irish flag in front of City Hall and declared it liberated" (Santino 1999, p.517). It was a simple symbolic gesture, but it marked the moment that Republicans, Nationalists and Roman Catholics finally gained access to the 'public space' of the city center. Jarman (1997) would argue that the parade's stylistic conventions might superficially appear as a lack of change, but actually, dynamic political conflicts are played out during these seemingly mundane social rituals. The symbolic 'liberation' of Belfast's city center was a real appropriation of space.

However, many other events represent Belfast differently, and yet are equally dramatic in the ways they appropriate and reassemble space for radically different purposes. In June of each year the Clonard Monastery in West Belfast holds a novena; nine days of masses and prayer, which are broadcast on loudspeakers throughout the parking lot, where thousands of worshippers stand listening, praying and singing along. The Clonard Monastery is situated between Shankhill and Falls Roads, the site of the first peace line ever erected, and the location of notorious acts of violence during the 'Troubles'. Only a few blocks away is Bombay street, where an entire row of Catholic homes were burnt out by Molotov cocktails, and nearby sits an empty school, pockmarked with bullet holes from an era when gunfire in the streets was common. Yet, the Novena attracts pilgrims of many faiths, from Belfast and beyond, to stand shoulder to shoulder in shared prayer and in this shared activity they produce and inhabit a new space together for the nine days of the celebrations. This event reveals a host of possibilities that are not accessible at other times of the year when the Catholic Monastary is merely part of the scenery in this Catholic neighborhood. During the Novena however, the nearby streets are festooned with purple, yellow and white banners, colors that have meaning in the Catholic faith but are not part of the repertoire of 'sectarianized' space. Thousands of people of many faiths suddenly find the political and sectarian markings that normally surround the space inconsequential to their goals as pilgrims, and conversely the local residents have no fear of the thousands of newcomers and outsiders swarming into their space. It is worth asking whether such momentary changes may linger, if the Monastery and surrounding neighborhood may remain de-territorialized, and what more subtle changes may occur.

St. Patrick's Day Parade, a recently adopted tradition, has been developed with Shared Future funding as a more inclusive, non-sectarian event, in

which local traditions are fused with carnival styles. The Belfast Pride Festival, one of the most successful gay pride events in the UK, is a multi-day, multi-sited event, culminating in a 1-mile parade promoting equal rights. It is one of the few events in Belfast, which has no reference to sectarian divisions and therefore is also one of the few events inclusive of all religious and ethnic groups in Belfast. In addition to these, the West Belfast *Feile* represents new conceptualizations of community and local culture, and the Tall Ships festival draws people to the waterfronts to view and board tall ships effectively turning a defunct industrial landscape into a tourist zone. Such events temporarily reconfigure Belfast's social space through the intertextuality of thousands of people and symbols. They promote local identities that do not fall along the old sectarian lines, rather they demand the recognition of a new and different type of citizen, one for whom sectarian boundaries are less important than the line barring him or her from full public participation in daily life. As witnessed with the political and sectarian symbols that divide the physical space of the city, temporary symbols can indeed become reified into accepted knowledge and practice. As Belfast enters a new post-conflict period these events reveal Belfast's and its people's fantasies of peace and prosperity. The moving parade invades space already defined and transgresses the boundaries of the different ways of *being* in Belfast. It forces its observers to question their assumptions about who and what belongs where, but in contrast with the existing visual markings of segregation, the parade also forces people to consider whether the very space they inhabit is open to new possibilities and/or challenged by the parade of passing people.

Possibilities

Above, Henri Lefebvre's definition of 'social space' as a complex construction of the social values and meanings of a given society made physical within the material objects, buildings and surroundings that are produced by that group, suggests that there is a weight to these values and meanings that keep them relatively static. I propose, however, that large-scale public events are radical re-conceptualizations of social space, in which, briefly, all the previously indelible social mores are re-imagined, new meanings are produced and enacted, and the space is repopulated with new participatory publics who act in communion through the event itself. Every radical re-conceptualization of space inevitably produces a radically altered population to inhabit it. The prominent examples of our immediate past and present show that the social structures of a particular place are deeply responsive to how space is physically organized. Isolated West Berlin became a hidden city and a beacon of hope to its East Berliner neighbors who contrived all sorts of imaginative passages to secret themselves through its emerald gates during the period of the Berlin Wall

(Taylor 2006). Athens conversely became an overcrowded and schizophrenic hodgepodge when entire rural communities were forced into cities to prevent their harboring of rebels after the Greek Civil War (Panourgia 2009). There the elite and the disenfranchised lived side by side and the vast differences between those with wealth and those without became the silent but obvious contradiction to the military government's propaganda. And today the postmodern spatial politics in Israel and Palestine continue to produce an "impossible Escher-like arrangement that struggles to multiply a single territorial reality", while the populations that live there struggle to make a living, contact relatives, and move about in their physically fractured reality (Weizman 2007, p.182). What these varied examples demonstrate is that the strategic use and alteration of physical space by a governing body – partitioning it, clearing it, navigating it – always implicates its inhabitants, who must situate themselves in this changed space as if arriving in a foreign city (or perhaps as if a foreign city has arrived on them). Yet, what I ask is whether a public event – an action of assembled, multidirectional agency – could produce observable changes in the social space where it occurs by 'shifting' boundaries and creating new meanings.

Jane Bennett (2005), and Deleuze and Guattari (1987) have proposed two appealingly irregular models for understanding the 'event' as I see it: the *assemblage* and the *rhizome*, respectively. These are anti-hierarchical metaphors of social organization that include both human and non-human and material nodes of agency in a "living throbbing grouping" (Bennett 2005, p. 445). Bennett has applied this concept to the American electrical power grid, and has skillfully shown how moments of breakage, such as the blackout of the American North-East and Canada in August 2003, can be attributed to a cascade of human decisions, random reactions, and electrical currents. Like an *assemblage*, the parade is a complex conglomeration of human and non-human participants; color, music, flags, banners, all have significance in the performance of the parade. As these assembled 'actants' move through space, they carry new meanings with them, and interact with the social symbols already there—the signposts, curbstones, murals and street names.

Thus, the parade itself constitutes a 'virtual space', a liminal space in which the possibilities for a new and different Belfast are played out. In this virtual space symbols and performances representing new ideals of identity and community cross into and impose themselves upon the 'social space' that already exists, and then disperses. Sometimes, as in the Orange Parades, the virtual space amplifies only what is already there. The existing social structures are reiterated and reinforced through the same flags, songs, sermons and other symbols of division that define other Unionist

spaces. Yet, other events, such as the Monastic Festival, Gay Pride Parade, or the St. Patrick's Day Carnival represent a reversal or re-imagining of those social structures; they momentarily produce a vision of social space that has no existing equivalent in Belfast. As in the examples above from Berlin, Athens and Palestine, sudden changes to the physical space can also radically reconfigure the social space. Yet parades are temporary events, and perhaps have only temporary consequences. What remains to be seen, is whether the visions enacted through the performance of a parade, can translate to more permanent understandings of the social geography of Belfast.

To summarize, what is proposed by studying these events is that the event itself is a large-scale spatial action, which semiotically produces meaning in the space in which it occurs, temporarily altering that space and the relationship that the event's participants have with it. What remains to discover are the type of new meanings and new relationships produced in that moment and the ways in which they relate to what was already there.

Conclusion: Movement and Transgression

The riots in Athens in December of 2008 demonstrated a moment of extreme disjuncture between the young citizens of Greece and what symbols and meanings they saw in the space around them. The fires, broken shop windows, graffiti, blockades and standoffs where police and protestors formed lines with their own bodies, seemed like incomprehensible acts to a foreign audience, and yet participants in the events insist that they were intentional, political, and motivated out of extreme anger at a society which, they believe, treats human beings like commodities (Anonymous 2009). The Greek riots were a violent, anarchic uprising, which momentarily changed the social landscape, the relationships between parents and children, the powerful and marginalized, the state and its citizens before dissipating into the Christmas season. The cause of these social changes, as I have argued above, was the radical re-conceptualization and re-appropriation of space by the Athens youth, but what remains to be seen is whether this instances can have any lasting consequences. While Belfast may no longer, (or at least not often), be the site of violent uprisings, it is still a place where sectarian segregation confines the daily movements and the lives of its ordinary citizens. In such a place, extraordinary events, such as parades and festivals, are bound to be moments for undoing and resisting these confinements.

Outlined above is an approach toward an understanding of segregation and localized identity through observing temporary appropriations of space. To

recognize the large-scale public event as a moment in which boundaries are challenged and social relationships are renegotiated is to open up an entirely new window on the post-conflict experience in Belfast. Also, by applying this methodology to spatial practices and territorial conflicts elsewhere in the world, we may open up new ways of understanding spatial relationships, ritual, public resistance, and participatory citizenship. By considering the mass movements of thousands of individuals abstractly, as one actor (the event) acting on one object (social space), the *assemblage* model enables researchers to see the whole effects of combined practices in whatever context these might occur. More importantly, to use spatial practice as a way to approach identity is a method that effectively circumvents the polemics of identity politics. By focusing broadly on the event as a whole, broader social relationships become apparent and are less confined by difficult attempts to prove how subjectivities are constructed, normalized, and enacted. In Belfast specifically, by focusing on the Orange Parades, The Clonard Novena, and the Gay Pride Parade, events with differing degrees of contentiousness, different bodies of participants, and different purposes for the use of space, I hope to illustrate that there are ways of living in and experiencing society, which are not bounded by sectarian lines and a history of violence. But it is only during extraordinary moments, during these events, that these ways of *being* are able to diverge from the rigid divisions of space, and spatial relationships that living in segregation for so many years has caused. A space is made in which citizenship is possible in a form that does not pit Protestant against Catholic, Republican against Loyalist, but instead imagines new ways of being from and living in Belfast.

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