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Introduction*

When a society moves out of a period of inter-communal conflict, political energies often turn to questions of how that violent past may be best remembered in order to allow for societal healing. Contemporary Northern Ireland is no exception¹. The different strategies that may be utilised to deal with the legacy of the 'the troubles' – that is, the violent conflict roughly spanning the years 1969-1998, involving a variety of paramilitary, military and security forces, across the sectarian Nationalist-Catholic and Unionist-Protestant divide² – were summarised in Chapter 5 of the report of the UK government-appointed *Consultative Group on the Past*. The report suggests three forms of dealing with the legacy of 'the troubles'. The promotion of oral story-telling amongst those touched by or implicated in violence, and in a cross-community forum, is their first suggestion. Secondly, the institutionalisation of a public and inclusive 'day of reflection' is proposed as a means of engendering reconciliation. Finally, the report considers the potential for physical memorials to promote healing. Suggestions here include the creation of a shared memorial, where all the victims of tragic violence can be remembered together, and the notion of a 'living memorial', where people can learn about, as well as remember, their past. Different strategies are thus put forward about how memory can be mobilised in the service of peace (Eames and Bradley 2009).

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Which of these strategies, if any, would best allow Northern Ireland to avoid a return to sectarian violence is open to discussion. When memorials *themselves* become a target of sectarian violence, however, we exit the realm of the hypothetical, and are forced to confront the fact that certain memorial projects in Northern Ireland are **not only** failing to promote reconciliation, but are **themselves** acting as a catalyst to more violence. This article will face this issue through a close examination of one such memorial, the James McCurrie Robert Neill Memorial Garden, which has been targeted by vandals on a number of occasions.

The impetus for this investigation arose from a recognition of the similarity, and simultaneous radical disparity, between a piece of theoretical work full of interesting potential, and a disheartening and depressing real-world event. The theory is to be found in the concluding chapter of Jenny Edkins' book *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, where she discusses the possibilities for resisting sovereign power evident in protests at sites of heroic state memory. The event that illustrated the insightfulness of this thinking, while at the same time posed a profound challenge to the ethos of Edkins' work, was the attack on the James McCurrie Robert Neill Memorial Garden, on 22 November 2008, in which this memorial to two men killed by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA)³ in June 1970 was vandalised by Nationalist youths.

The article will begin by addressing these instances of resistance to memory. This section will show how such forms of resistance attempt to counter the political utilisation of the past in the present, and therefore, despite themselves, **remain** trapped in this logic, meaning that they can offer no more than an *alternative politicisation of memory*. I will then turn to a consideration of

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the impact of Jacques Derrida's work on thinking about memory. This will allow me to launch a deconstructive 'double reading' of the memorial garden, in order to chart-out a means of resisting memory that does more than replicate understandings of the past as something which can be utilised in the present for political purposes.

Resisting Memorialisation – Theory and Practice

Edkins, Trauma and Non-Violent Protest

In the concluding chapter of her book *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, Jenny Edkins discusses how the contingent spaces of state memorials may be acted upon by forces of protest **at these sites of memory**. **She argues that such** protest can act to disrupt the dominant narratives of national belonging **constructed through the memorials**, and reveal the incomplete and insecure nature of social orders.

Developing the Lacanian psychoanalytical social theory advanced by Slavoj Žižek, Edkins argues that the subject is formed around a lack (Edkins 2003, 11). The social is then seen as the symbolic realm where we attempt to overcome this lack, by forging relations with others. It is the desire to overcome this lack that leads individuals to identify themselves with a whole range of social and political movements. Persons invest meaning into these, and act as if they provide a coherent totality to their identity. This allows them to forget the lack at the heart of their selfhood. However, the fit is never complete. The role that someone chooses to play in any given situation cannot express the totality

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of their being. Something is always left out – there is always an ‘excess’, the ‘surplus’ of the real that cannot be incorporated into the symbolic system (Edkins 2003, 12).

The subject thus remains centred on a ‘lack’ but, crucially, *the same is to be said of the social*. The social is thus **constructed** as a realm of stability and security. However, this is a charade, a mere pretence that can be, and is, ripped away. War, famine, genocide – such instances, which are integral to the constitution of sovereign communities, reveal the naked trauma obscured by the pretence of social belonging. In order to reclaim the (false) sense of security we had before, such events are scripted into narratives of national sacrifice or catastrophe, in ways which make them intelligible and understandable. The attempt to re-write traumatic acts of sovereign violence into narratives of heroic sacrifice to the state takes place not least through the construction of memorials to violence. These memorials then provide a basis around which persons can re-orientate themselves within a society, and move on towards the promised future that is to be made secure by the social safety-net of the sovereign state. However, the traumatic can never be fully excised from the political, meaning that attempts at closure through memorialisation can never be fully successful.

In her conclusion, Edkins argues that state-sanctioned memorials such as the Cenotaph in London, the Mall in Washington D.C. and Tiananmen Square in Beijing work to obscure the murderous nature of sovereign politics, by upholding the deaths that are produced by sovereign power as glorious sacrifices to the nation. They therefore act to legitimise the continuation of sovereign forms of government. The official memory is layered on top of competing memories, and we are compelled to forget the lethal core of sovereign politics.

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According to Edkins, these sites may be reclaimed by 'insistently non-violent protest' (Edkins 2003, 216), which rewrite them as spaces of resistance to sovereign power, by challenging the dominant narratives of belonging and sacrifice where they are most emphatically articulated. She cites the example of the 1963 'March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom', when Martin Luther King made his 'I have a dream' speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. Demanding the still-delayed African-American equality at a site dedicated to the memory of their supposed freedom, a reverential memorial to the glory of Lincoln and his Emancipation Proclamation, served to make these demands even more acute (Edkins 2003, 217-218).

In this sense, therefore, Edkins believes that the 'force of non-violent protest against state power can be amplified when they take place in the very locations that memorialise violent traumas of the past' (Edkins 2003, 232), as they work to reveal the tenuous bases of these symbolic centres. Such protest can ensure that sovereign dominance is challenged, revealing the contingency of identity and the permanence of insecurity, in order to allow for the political negotiation of difference.

Edkins is clearly trying to think of a positive way of challenging the co-option of memory by sovereign governance. The re-assertion of the hidden traumas masked by state memorials is seen to provide a launching-board for opposition to these forms of governance, and the wars they wage and deaths they produce. However, in the context of societies emerging from periods of inter-communal conflict, where division is mobilised along fault-lines of historical memory, such resistance **often** breaks down into violence. I will now consider

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one such example of violent resistance to memory in Northern Ireland – the vandalism of the McCurrie Neill Memorial Garden

Memories of Violence in East Belfast

The McCurrie Neill Memorial Garden stands on the Lower Newtownards Road, one of the main arteries from Belfast city centre into the Protestant heartlands of East Belfast. Opened on 28 June 2003, the garden commemorates the killings of James McCurrie and Robert Neill, who were shot dead by the PIRA on the night of 27/28 June 1970. The garden replaced an earlier plaque to the memory of the murdered men, unveiled in 1971, which was lost in the widespread redevelopment of the area in the early 1970s, which saw the closely knit terraces that witnessed the bloodshed replaced by modern estates (Gibson 2003, McKittrick et al 2001, 51, Quinn 2004, 36).

The brick-walled and gated garden, commissioned by the East Belfast Historical and Cultural Society (EBHCS), contains a stone monument dedicated to McCurrie and Neill, as well as two plaques naming four other men who were killed that weekend, one in West Belfast and the other three in the North of the city. The six men were all Protestant civilians, caught up in the violence that erupted throughout Belfast in the wake of the Orange Order's 'mini Twelfth' or 'Whiterock' parade on the afternoon of 27 June (East Belfast Historical and Cultural Society 2006, 9, McKittrick et al 2001, 49).

McCurrie and Neill both died as a result of a gun battle centred on St Matthew's Catholic Church. This remains one of the most contentious events of 'the troubles', with Catholics and Protestants from the immediate area having

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'diametrically different memories of the gun-battle, each maintaining that the other side was the initial aggressor' (McKittrick et al 2001, 50).

For Republicans, the violence in East Belfast began when a Protestant mob, seeking 'revenge' (Quinn 2004, 18) for the deaths that had occurred earlier that day elsewhere in the city, began to attack Catholic property in the Newtownards and Short Strand area, including St Matthew's, with guns and petrol bombs. The PIRA were forced into defensive action, and took up positions in the grounds of the church, in order to keep the Protestant mob at bay. It was during the ensuing battle that the two men, labelled 'Loyalists' and 'U.V.F. [Ulster Volunteer Force, one of the largest Loyalist paramilitary groupings] opponents' by Raymond John Quinn, were killed (Quinn 2004, 21-22). The PIRA therefore managed to successfully defend the Catholic enclave from the onslaught of the Protestant offensive, thus illustrating their capability to act as defenders of their community (see Adams 1996, 139-140, Quinn 2004, 18-22).

According to the EBHCS publication *Murder in Ballymacarrett*, however, it was Catholics from the Short Strand who provoked the violence, by waving an Irish tricolour flag at local Protestants. Protestants claim that this was part of a carefully orchestrated plan, to lure them into a trap around St Matthew's, when they charged at their provocateurs. It was at this point that the first shots were fired by Republican gunmen against the unarmed Protestants. With Loyalist paramilitaries not yet active in East Belfast, local men had to find what guns they could in order to return fire, with the first shots from the Protestant side not coming until over an hour after the beginning of the gun-battle (East Belfast Historical and Cultural Society 2006, 14-20). They argue that PIRA wanted to show that they could defend Catholic communities from Loyalists, after the

failure of the IRA to prevent the attack on Bombay Street in West Belfast in the summer of 1969. The provocation of a Protestant attack on St Matthew's was therefore utilised to reinvigorate the IRA, in the new form of the Provisionals. The defence of the chapel was a perfect opportunity to create new Republican myths, and show that the PIRA had the capacity and strength to protect Catholics from sectarian assault (East Belfast Historical and Cultural Society 2006, 5, 54, Gibson 2003, Gibson 2010).

However the violence started, it was the first major confrontation to occur in East Belfast during 'the troubles' (McKittrick et al 2001, 50), and the murdered men were amongst the first victims of the violence which was to claim around 3,500 lives over the next twenty-eight years (Sutton 1994)⁴.

The McCurrie Neill Memorial Garden contains a poem about the events, space for the laying of wreaths and flowers, and two benches. A Union flag (more commonly known as the Union Jack) flies above the garden. The memorial is easily accessible from the main road, positioned between a child's play-park and a housing estate. Behind the garden loom the giant cranes of the Harland and Woolf shipyards, symbols of Belfast's former industrial might. The Protestant character of the locale is evident in the nearby murals to Loyalist paramilitaries, and the red, white and blue paint dabbed on the lampposts.

[insert figure 1]

Directly across the street from the memorial garden, however, are signs of Belfast's divided nature. St Matthew's Church stands on the opposite side of the Lower Newtownards Road, while the protective fence (or 'peace line' as they are euphemistically known) separating the Protestant estates from the Catholic enclave of Short Strand, is easily visible from the garden. There is thus no

avoiding the fact that the memorial is in close proximity to an interface area, where the two communities meet. This interface has been the site of sectarian violence in recent years, such as the incident around the Queen's golden jubilee in June 2002, when five persons were injured by gunshots. The violence erupted after Protestants were accused of draping Loyalist bunting on the railings of St Matthew's (Bowcott 2002, Bowcott and McDonald 2002) [insert figure 2]

On 22 November 2008, the memorial garden was daubed with paint and sectarian graffiti, in an attack attributed to Nationalist youths from the Short Strand (BBC 2008). This was not the first or last time that the memorial had been vandalised. An incident in March 2004 saw wreaths to the two men desecrated as well as the use of paint (BBC 2004b), and resulted in a revenge attack on St Matthew's (McCambridge 2004), while a minor attack occurred in April 2010 (East Belfast Historical and Cultural Society 2010a). Similar attacks on memorials throughout Northern Ireland, carried out against both communities, have become something of a regular occurrence in recent years (The Irish News Online 2001, BBC 2004a and BBC 2004c, Simpson 2009, 105, Gibson 2004). For Shirlow and Murtagh, the desecration of memorials and other 'symbols of tradition, such as Orange Halls, GAA [Gaelic Athletic Association] property and churches', is representative of the 'new forms of violence' that have emerged in the peace-process era, which have solidified differences between the two communities (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006, 2-3).

After the November 2008 attack, the widow of one of the commemorated men, Kathleen McCurrie, told the press that the vandals 'can never wipe out the truth, no matter what they do' (BBC 2008). In her eyes, the attack represented an attempt to erase the memory of the murder of her husband, by destroying

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the memorial so lovingly erected in his name. She remains adamant, however, that such a strategy will not be successful – she will remember.

Resistance or Desecration?

When reading about this attack, I was struck by the parallels with Edkins' theorisation of resistance to power at the site of memory. The memorial is an emphatically Unionist-Protestant construction, which commemorates persons killed by the PIRA, in a manner which can be read as attempting to ensure that the Unionist-Protestant community of East Belfast do not forget the horrors that violent Republicanism has inflicted upon them. The protest against this symbolisation of memory, which was conducted through the vandal's attack, can be read as a challenge to this vision of history, as revealing the constructed nature of the story of violent Republicans attacking and killing peaceful Protestants. The attack can be read as an assertion that the history of the area is more complex, and as an attempt to make audible the voices of the local Nationalist-Catholic population, which are obscured by the memorial.

In this way, therefore, the attack can be seen as structurally-similar to the account Edkins gives of resistance at sites of memory. However, the desecration of a memorial to the dead is surely not what Edkins has in mind. Those most likely to be shaken by the attack are not some abstract agents of state power, but the families of the victims, people like Kathleen McCurrie. The attacks have also been widely condemned by Unionist and Nationalist politicians alike (BBC 2008). In this sense, therefore, the attack challenges Edkins' theorisation of resistance. It is clear that protest can 'reclaim memory and re-write it as a form

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of resistance' (Edkins 2003, 216), but is such resistance desirable in this context?

I think that this case, and the similar attacks carried out in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, illustrate that utilising memorials as a site of protest in post-conflict societies fails to move beyond the essentialised and exclusionary ways of engaging with the past that are embodied in such memorials. They also reveal, therefore, a troubling blind-spot in Edkins' theorisation of resistance to memory. Transposed to this context, it becomes apparent that resistance at memorial sites is contaminated by the conceptualisations of temporality that sustain such commemorative practices.

In the chapters of *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* prior to the conclusion, Edkins employs a nuanced reading of the practices of memory behind memorials to traumatic events such as the First World War, the Shoah and Vietnam in order to reveal the politics behind their invocations of temporality, and the implications of these. This analysis is driven by a desire to disrupt the linear time that sovereign power enacts and depends upon, in order to challenge the sovereign dominance over memory and of life (Edkins 2003, xiv, 13-16). However, when she comes to theorise resistance to this sovereign power, the political action she suggests is tied to these sovereign practices, and to the instrumental view of temporality that they employ.

This may not be truly apparent in her discussions of the 'return of the repressed' (Edkins 2003, 218), which re-insert the traumatic into linear, sovereign time, in order to disrupt its unfolding. It is all too apparent, however, in the case of Northern Ireland, and the McCurrie Neill Memorial Garden. Here we find not 'insistently non-violent protest' at sites of memory, but night-time

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desecrations by anonymous gangs of youths. While it can easily be imagined that any peaceful political protest at the memorial garden would act to upset the sensibilities of the families, the fact that the only protest that has taken place there has been of a violent timbre is indicative of the inapplicability of Edkins' account in such a context.

These forms of resistance accept that the past can be utilised in the present. While they pose a challenge to the *manner* in which this is done, they do not challenge the idea that such representation is *possible*. They offer a form of resistance that seeks to recover traces from the past that memorialisation has ignored, and re-assert them through political action, in the present, at these sites of memory. They attempt to re-claim that which has been silenced in the present, the voices of history that are no longer heard. In still-divided societies such as Northern Ireland, this silenced voice is the voice of the opposed political community, possessing its own essentialised vision of historical truth.

I do not think that we have to accept this situation, whereby opposed groups have opposed versions of history, symbolised through opposed memorials⁵. I think that it is possible to effectively resist such memorialisation, without replacing one set of essentialised claims with another. Such resistance, I will now argue, can be achieved through the promotion of an ethos of deconstructive engagement with memorials such as the McCurrie Neill Memorial Garden. As the following section will illustrate, turning to the philosophy of Jacques Derrida can provide a means of radically rethinking the relationship between the past and present, in order to move beyond instrumentalist accounts of the political deployment of the past in the present.

Derrida, Deconstruction and the 'Presence of Memory'

A major facet of Jacques Derrida's early work was based around the critique of what he called the 'metaphysics of presence'. In this body of work, Western thought is seen as being characterised by a series of binaries: good/bad; inside/outside; masculine/feminine; true/false; and so on. While these appear to be simple opposites, Derrida contends that the first term is in fact privileged over the second. They are not simple dichotomies, but violent hierarchies (Derrida 2005, 38-39). A key part of the maintenance of this violent hierarchy is the manner in which the first term is given 'presence' in language. It is the natural, self-evident term, the centre and the standard from which the other term derives and is judged against. The consequences of this binary structuring of thought can be traced through such virulent practices as misogyny, racism and colonialism, as well as more mundane phenomena such as left-handed children being forced to use their right hands.

Such hierarchy is the target of Derridean deconstruction. Through a 'double movement' deconstruction aims to first overturn and invert the hierarchy (Derrida 2005, 38) before moving beyond the hierarchy itself, beyond the system that gives rise to and depends upon hierarchy, exploding the conceptual linkage between the two terms – what Derrida calls 'marking the interval' (Derrida 2005, 39). This creates a new term, a new series of terms, outside the deconstructed system, 'a new "concept"... that can no longer be, and never could be, included in the previous regime'. These are what Derrida calls 'undecidables': 'that is, unities of simulacra, "false" verbal properties (nominal or semantic) that

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could no longer be included within philosophical (binary) oppositions, resisting and disorganising it, *without ever* constituting a third term' (Derrida 2005, 40).

It is crucial that deconstruction be understood as such a 'double movement', in order to counter the critical viewpoint which sees Derrida's project as nothing more than the nihilistic destruction of modes of thought. As Derrida explains in *Positions*, the concept which is to be deconstructed

must be marked twice: in the deconstructed field – this is the phase of overturning – and in the deconstructing text, outside the oppositions in which it has been caught... By means of the play of this interval between the two marks, one can operate both an overturning deconstruction and a positively displacing, transgressive deconstruction (Derrida 2005, 56).

As this quote makes clear, deconstruction is to be seen as a positive and affirmative action. The first phase, the phase of overturning, may be quickly achieved and finished with – after all, to invert a hierarchy has always been the dream of the revolutionary. However, deconstruction must not stop here. For Derrida, 'to remain in this phase is still to operate on the terrain of and from within the deconstructed system' (Derrida 2005, 39). Therefore, the second movement, the more difficult movement, must be undertaken. Unlike the first movement, it cannot be finished, can never finish. It is instead something that must always be affirmed, as we attempt to move beyond the restrictions imposed on thought and action by the 'metaphysics of presence'. Deconstruction is that which explodes settled concepts wherever they form, which is *everywhere*, and *at all times* (Stoker 2006, 182).

This second phase is the phase which provides the new concept, that which is outside prior structures of thought – the positive, the open, the realm of new possibilities. An acceptance of the fact that this movement will never be

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finished and secured is essential to the ethos of deconstruction. Positive and affirmative movement is possible, but never guaranteed, never settled. As Derrida has stated, in a sentence that encapsulates the essence of the affirmative yet tenuous nature of deconstruction – ‘I always try to be as constructive as possible, but without any certainty, without any assurance that at some point I am not wrong’ (Derrida 2001, 68).

Simon Critchley interprets this ‘double movement’ as a ‘double reading’ of a text. Before I elaborate on what this entails, I need to make clear that, for Derrida, a ‘text’ is not merely a written document, but everything that is open to interpretation. As he states in *Limited Inc.*:

What I call ‘text’ implies all the structures called ‘real’, ‘economic’, ‘historical’, ‘socio-political’, in short: all possible referents... every referent, all reality has the structure of a differential trace, and... one cannot refer to this ‘real’ except in an interpretative experience (Derrida 1988, 148).

Everything, therefore, can be read as a text, as everything is experienced through interpretation. This is the meaning of Derrida’s (in)famous phrase ‘there is no outside-text’ (Derrida 1997, 158). **We are always in the realm of interpretation, without ever being able to access the ‘true’ meaning behind a text. It is this impossibility for an outside agent to access the intentions of other actors that makes readings, and indeed multiple readings, necessary.**

To return to double reading: the first reading, Critchley argues, must provide an authoritative reconstruction of the text, showing awareness of its original context and the manner in which it was received. In other words, this reading deals with a text in its own terms. The second reading, he continues, must endeavour to reveal the contradictions in the intended meaning of the text,

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the 'blind spots' which cannot be contained or controlled by the 'authors'. This must come from within the text, and not be imposed from outside, as it is crucial that the text be seen to *deconstruct itself*, rather than being deconstructed by an exterior agent (Critchley 2005).

The above amounts to a general introduction to the deconstructive ethos of Derrida's thought. I will now turn to consider the ways in which his thinking can be explicitly related to the problem of memory.

The 'metaphysics of presence' that structures Western language and thought, and that Derrida's critique is targeted on, can also be seen as structuring our ways of understanding and articulating notions of temporality and memory (Zehfuss 2007, 124). In the dominant modes of understanding, the present is seen as representing the absolute presence of now, a *pure presence*. The past is seen as a 'former present', that which was once presence, while the future is regarded as an 'anticipated present', that which will have presence (Derrida 1982, 16, 21).

Memory is the attempt to *re-grasp* the presence of the past. The possibility of memory in Western metaphysics is structured around an ability to reflect the past in its concrete presence. However, Derrida contends that memory can only create a 'trace' of presence, an outline of a *false presence*, a presence that *never was present*. This is because memory is shaped and distorted by the 'frame of reference' of the one who remembers – that is, the present time of the one who remembers. When we remember something, we are no longer the same 'we' that experienced the event (Zehfuss 2003, 518). Memory is affected by the present, by present circumstances. Memory,

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therefore, 'can be seen to subvert a neat distinction between past and present, and introduce an element of undecidability between them' (Zehfuss 2007, 179).

In a very real sense, therefore, remembering the past *produces* that past *in* the present. This is why memory must constantly be invoked, in order to produce and reproduce the past in the present. However, the past cannot be created out of nothing. Rather, each new affirmation of memory that takes place in the present makes reference to other memories, to other cultural or historical understandings. A memorial, for example, does not make reference just to the 'reality' of what happened in the past, but to other references to other past events, other citations of historical memory, that work together to produce specific meanings. Yet the call to memory in the present does not just invoke an already existing past, even one produced through cultural exchanges – instead, each new citation creates a new understanding of the past, a new singular memory pronounced in the present.

For Derrida, therefore, there is no such thing as an 'absolute present', a moment marked by the full presence of the now. These ideas challenge the assumptions behind memorials. A memorial is generally seen as a preservation of a past event, a reflection of a past reality, concretised in the present and into the future. However, we can take from Derrida an understanding of how the past that memorials claim to merely *represent* is instead *constituted in the present*.

The McCurrie Neill Memorial Garden is susceptible to such deconstructive challenges. In the next section, this will be carried out in the style of a 'double reading', as discussed above. Firstly, I will closely examine the memorial garden in its own context, discussing the citations and references that produce its meaning in the present. Secondly, I will reveal the internal contradictions of the

memorial, and uncover the manners in which it constructs, in the present, that which it purports to represent. This second reading will allow me to point towards a means of providing effective resistance to exclusionary practices of memorialisation.

A Double Reading of the McCurrie Neill Memorial Garden

First Reading: Reconstruction

The plaque at the entrance to the McCurrie Neill Memorial Garden shows that it was commissioned in 2003. The memorial was thus opened thirty-three years after the incident in question, and five years after Good Friday Agreement, which is usually seen as representing the end of 'the troubles' in Northern Ireland, was reached. This memorial is thus symptomatic of the trend of increased memorialisation in the post-conflict period. As Elisabetta Viggiani's database of all the public, permanent memorials, murals and plaques in Belfast shows, nearly half of all memorials in Belfast were erected in the post-Good Friday Agreement period (Viggiani 2006).

All in all, the years since the end of the armed conflict have not been accompanied by processes of inter-communal healing. Rather, segregated social spaces remain, and have indeed increased in certain respects. While areas such as Belfast city centre and some middle-class suburbs are becoming increasingly shared (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006, 10), Catholics and Protestants are still likely to be educated in separate schools, while more peace lines have been constructed at interface areas in recent years (O'Hara 2004, O'Farrell 2005,

Shirlow and Murtagh 2006, 113). Segregation in Northern Ireland Housing Executive estates is also on the increase, while the residents of the more isolated estates are prone to take longer journeys to access services in areas dominated by their co-religionists, rather than utilise local facilities located on the wrong side of the interface (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006, 60, 84-85).

The memorial, therefore, is a product of present circumstances – that of the post-conflict period in Northern Ireland, which has more or less ended the violence between the two communities, but has not ended the mistrust and division, which is still manifest in the division of political institutions, of political spaces and of strategies for dealing with the past (Simpson 2009, 29).

The McCurrie Neill Memorial Garden is emphatically Unionist. It does not commemorate 'the victims of the troubles', but the deaths of Protestant men at the hands of the PIRA. The flying of the Union flag marks it out as such, and from a distance. In the summer, in anticipation of Orange Order marches, Protestant communities are awash with Union flags and red, white and blue bunting. Nationalist areas, on the other hand, are more likely to sport the colours of the Irish Republic, green, white and gold, or the Irish tricolour flag. The memorial therefore makes no claim to represent everyone in Northern Ireland. It does not seek to rewrite the history of 'the troubles' with a narrative of belonging that everyone can aspire to share in. It makes claims on the Protestants of East Belfast and, by implication, the wider Unionist-Protestant community, but in a way inherently divided from and opposed to the Nationalist-Catholic community.

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When examining the wording employed at the memorial garden, it is apparent that reconciliation is not the aim. The main commemoration stone states:

27th / 28th June 1970

That night, in a planned and unprovoked attack, the Provisional I.R.A. introduced guns onto the streets of East Belfast from the sanctuary of St. Matthew's Chapel and the surrounding area.

They murdered James (Jimmy) McCurrie and Robert (Ginger) Neill also wounding 28 other men, women and children.

This memorial is thus as much about indicting the PIRA as about remembering the dead. The reference to St. Matthew's Chapel also implicitly links the bloodshed to the Catholic community, who are collectively charged with bringing violence to peaceful Protestant East Belfast⁶. The memorial thus conceptually merges the PIRA with the wider Nationalist-Catholic community, creating a simple division between peaceful Unionist-Protestant and violent Nationalist-Catholics. **[insert figure 3]**

The theme of accusation embodied in the memorial is perhaps most pronounced in the poem mounted on the back wall of the garden. Entitled 'Murder Most Foul', it invokes, in a simple rhyming metre, an eye-witness remembering back to the peaceful Saturday in June that became a bloodbath, through the murderous actions of the PIRA. The poem's final stanza provides a justification for the memorial:

When I look back in the light of day
There can be no compromise with the IRA
This date should be burned in our brain
East Belfast cannot let this happen again.

The purpose of the garden is therefore to keep the memory of the deaths alive in the minds of the local populace, in order to ensure they remain vigilant against the resumption of hostilities from the IRA. The declaration that there 'can be no compromise with the IRA' expresses the political stance that such memories can provide the impetus to ensure that the Protestant community takes action to ensure that they are not 'sold out' to Republicans. It also invokes the Loyalist mantra 'no surrender'⁷, which has indeed been used by EBHCS **figure-head** Mervyn Gibson to close every speech he has given at the annual memorial parade in the years 2003-2010 (East Belfast Historical and Cultural Society 2010b). **[insert figure 4]**

The memorial can therefore be **read as** offering a politicised version of past events, marshalled in the present in support of contemporary political aims. **The actions of the vandals attempted to upset this, and re-write the memorial into a shrine for Republicanism. Those who vandalised the memorial garden** translated their support for the opposed political view – that Northern Ireland should exit the United Kingdom and join a united Ireland – into action against the memorial, to re-assert their competing historical understanding of the IRA as protectors and liberators of the Irish community in the North of Ireland. Such action, however, remains within the first movement of the deconstructive reading, and can only replace one essentialised version of history, mobilised in the present, with another. In the next section, I will complete the deconstructive gesture, to reveal the inconsistencies of the memorial garden, and point towards a more productive, **non-violent means** of resisting memory in the context of Northern Ireland.

Second Reading: Deconstruction

The McCurrie Neill Memorial Garden claims to commemorate the killing of these two men by the PIRA. In its own terms, it does nothing more. A close examination of the wording and symbolisation used, however, reveals that it does much more than this. Instead of offering a simple reminder of the tragic events that occurred at this location in June 1970, the memorial attempts to construct an image of unprovoked Republican violence directed against innocent Protestants. Through reference to older historical events and the current political context, it constructs this memory in a very particular fashion as it invokes it in the present. This is not a case, therefore, of the political utilisation of the past in the present, but the *co-constitution* of this past and present. I will now examine some of the ways in which the memorial garden constructs the very past it claims to reflect.

The actions of the EBHCS in constructing the memorial and holding an annual memorial parade, and the speeches made by Gibson at those parades each year, do more than simply mark the deaths of the commemorated men. They represent the actions of what Elizabeth Jelin calls 'memory entrepreneurs' – that is, those 'who seek social recognition and political legitimacy of *one* (their own) interpretation or narrative of the past', and who are 'engaged and concerned with maintaining and promoting active and visible social and political attention on their enterprise' (Jelin 2003, 33-34). Such memory entrepreneurs 'profess to speak "on behalf" of entire communities' through a 'political sleight of hand intended to solidify particular interests' (Simpson 2009, 138) – in this case,

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continued vigilance against Republicanism and strong, **united** support for the Union between Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

For Jelin, such actors are central to the continued circulation of narratives about the past and, through competition with memory entrepreneurs who hold divergent historical opinions, to the 'dynamics of the conflicts that surround public memory' (Jelin 2003, 36). Gibson and the EBHCS see their actions as necessary to counter the Republican version of 'the battle of St Matthew's'. According to the *Murder in Ballymacarrett* pamphlet, while Republicans have been 'clever, sharp, focussed and... very successful in getting their (the republican) message across', the Protestant story, in this case and throughout 'the troubles', 'has in effect remained the "untold story"' (East Belfast Historical and Cultural Society 2006, 3). The EBHCS are thus adamant that 'the history books had to be re-written; they had to be re-written to reflect the truth' (East Belfast Historical and Cultural Society 2006, 63). The memorial garden is therefore part of a wider cultural movement designed to counter the Republican version of history, and as such plays a role in the cycles of claim and counter-claim that constitute inter-community debate over the past in Northern Ireland.

The garden can be seen as a memorial to the entire Protestant tradition in Ulster, and their strong desire to retain meaningful links with the British mainland. Through the borrowing of motifs from British war memorials, such as the presence of poppies and the use of the words 'Remember the Fallen' and 'Always Remembered' (see figure 3), the memorial is firmly placed in the tradition of Protestant sacrifice for the cause of the Union (Donnan 2005, 90). The key event implicitly referenced here is the Battle of the Somme, when thousands of members of the 36th Ulster division died for the British cause in the

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First World War (Leonard 1997, 15). Gibson's speech at the memorial garden on the 90th anniversary of the Somme made this connection explicit. He connects the battle with the current struggles of Unionism by arguing that those who died did so in order 'that we would remain part of the UK' (not to defeat imperial Germany). As such, he continues, 'we must never forget that sacrifice. It must be ingrained in our memory and we must do everything in our power to follow their example of loyalty' (Gibson 2006).

Through their redeployment in the current context, these citations are transformed to give weight to those who want to continue the struggle in new ways. One of these new battle-grounds of the peace-process period, where the weapon of memorialisation is deployed, is the arena of culture (Donnan 2005, 73). As Gibson stated in his 2003 speech:

Our goal must and should be unity, unity to ensure that our culture is not taken from us by the stealth of republicanism. We should be proud of our culture. Unity will ensure that we remain British for many generations; continued division will ensure that Gerry [Adams, President of Sinn Fein] and his evil band make further in roads (sic.) into our life and culture (Gibson 2003).

The memory of the past struggles of the Unionist-Protestant community are thus redeployed in the present, operating as a call-to-arms for the new cultural struggle that must be waged in order to do justice to their legacy and secure Northern Ireland's place within the United Kingdom.

The memorial garden is also representative of what Marie Smyth characterises as the 'culture of victimhood' that is expressed in contemporary Loyalism (and Republicanism). According to Smyth, Loyalists see themselves as the victims of IRA violence (Smyth 2006, 20). Hastings Donnan, meanwhile,

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argues that 'Protestant victimhood is mainly distinguished [from Catholic victimhood] by emphasising that those who suffered during the Troubles were the innocent bystanders of a conflict imposed upon them by republican paramilitaries' (Donnan 2008, 236). **The reality of this victimhood is then encapsulated in memorials to violence inflicted on the innocent (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006, 27).** In terms of the McCurrie Neill Memorial Garden, this stance is encapsulated both in the texts on display there, as discussed above, and in the speeches Gibson has made at the memorial site. The 2003 speech, for example, explains how the murdered men had simply been going about their normal day-to-day activities – in both cases, out socialising with friends on the Saturday night (**Gibson 2003**). The memorial thus asserts and sustains an exclusive version of the past, in which **violent** Catholics attacked and killed innocent Protestants.

The memorial garden can therefore be described as an exclusively Unionist-Protestant monument, which is designed as much to indict Republicans, and by implication, the wider Nationalist-Catholic community, as to commemorate the murdered men. It (re)writes a tragic instance of death into an historical narrative of unprovoked Republican violence, obscuring the competing historical claims of Republicans defending Catholics from violent attack. A selective story is given presence by the memorial, carried into the present and opening towards a future of continued vigilance against threats to Protestant culture and heritage.

The deaths of McCurrie, Neill, and the other men commemorated are placed into the overall context of historical struggle through their insertion into the narrative of Protestant resistance to all attempts to wrench them from their

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place in the United Kingdom. As Edkins might put it, this scripting gives the families of the victims purchase on the events, allowing them to construct a story that can be remembered, while simultaneously allowing them to forget the raw trauma of the moment of the attack. **However, this works to obscure and displace alternative understandings of the deaths – as personal tragedy, as senseless violence, as remnants of a time that has since passed.**

The historical ground on which the memorial rests does not exist outside of the manner in which it is cited through the memorial. It is something that comes into being in relation to other memories of other past events, deployed in the present for particular political purposes. This is not simply a case of the political utilisation of the past in the present, therefore, but the *simultaneous creation of a past and present*. Revealing the constructed nature of this past thus works to undermine the memorial's claim to merely reflect the past.

If the past **experienced as the threat of Republicanism was directly felt in this area of East Belfast, outside circuits of political and cultural mediation, such memorials would not be needed.** The work that they purport to do would already be done by the sheer weight of historical memory. **Identity is not a natural fact of life, but something that must be maintained in time, something that is constructed in terms of what is excluded, and something that must be policed from within⁸.** Memorials are a part of this disciplinary apparatus. Through its claim to merely reflect a past that it instead works to constitute in the present, the memorial therefore *deconstructs under its own logic*. **Revealing this to be the case** represents effective resistance to the memorialisation – resistance that challenges the legitimacy of its claims on historical memory; **resistance that challenges** the claim that certain actions in the present must be undertaken to

remain loyal to the legacy of this past; and resistance that can allow for alternative understandings of historical events, not tied to present sectarian politics, to flourish.

Conclusion: Deconstructing Memory

This article has argued that resistance to instances of exclusionary memory, which does more than invoke competing historical claims in the present, is possible. Edkins' analysis of resistance fails to escape this trap. While she possesses a nuanced understanding of temporality and memory throughout her analysis of the political practices of remembering trauma, when she comes to critique this, she remains caught within the sovereign logic of utilising past events in the present. The McCurrie Neill Memorial Garden also performs such a manoeuvre, by invoking the memory of deaths at the hands of the PIRA to provide continued impetus for the struggles against Republicanism in post-conflict Northern Ireland.

If we take this as our starting point, and allow such a belief to structure our engagement with the politics of memory, the only option available to those aghast at the manner in which memory is invoked in these instances is to rewrite the invocations in the present for other political purposes. This can be done, as Edkins suggests, by giving voice to those ignored by state monuments to war, liberation or revolution. It can also be achieved by scrawling 'IRA' on a monument to those killed by the paramilitary group, as done in the case of the attack on the McCurrie Neill Memorial Garden.

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Those who vandalised the memorial garden remain trapped within the logics of those who erected it, whereby communal belonging is viewed in absolutist terms, and historical memory is separate and not shared. Ultimately, the same can be said of Edkins' theorising of resistance to state memory. She envisions protest that reveals the violence of the state, by assuming a position of exposure to this violence (Edkins 2003, 216). Such resistance can only be operationalised in opposition to sovereign forms of power, and thus remains chained to it. The re-writing of a heroic state act into a murderous one may allow for a more productive and hopeful politics, but it is still dependent upon an ability to consciously and instrumentally utilise the past in present political discourse.

The Derridean ethos employed in this article suggests that the past that such action cites in the present has no existence outside this citation. The attempt to resist memorials in their own terms, by revealing those shades of the past that they silence or obscure, acts as if this were not the case, as if the past can be reached from the present, as if those silenced voices can be rescued from the time in which they were uttered and transmitted anew in the present. Such resistance fails to take into account that these competing claims are *themselves constructed through their invocation in the present*. This failure ensures that we remain within a system of thought **and action** which see the political invocation of memory as something that can reference the concrete essence of the past.

The consequences of this failure to move beyond such representational schemas may not be apparent in Edkins' work, but this is not the case when we turn to memorialisation in divided, post-conflict societies such as Northern Ireland. Here, resistance that works within the logics on which the memorials

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rest serves only to replicate patterns of division. One essentialised version of history is replaced by another, and reconciliation remains deferred.

The double reading of the McCurrie Neill Memorial Garden undertaken above points to a way beyond such an impasse. Targeting the assumptions behind the memorial, rather than the physical structure itself, reveals the impossibility of neutrally representing the past in the present. The memorial is built upon an imagined and constructed idea of the past, which is constitutive of its attempt to tell the 'truth' about what happened in the past. This is not a past that is utilised from the terms of the present, but a past this is constructed in the present, that is constructed co-extensively with the present.

When this is accepted, the question becomes one of building a politics in the present that can allow for shared understandings of the past, rather than building our present politics on notions of historical legacy. The actions of cross-community groups such as *Healing Through Remembering*⁹, and Kirk Simpson's suggestions to construct a shared memorial to civilian victims of 'the troubles' (Simpson 2009, 100-122), point towards what such a politics, and its shared understanding of the past, may look like. The ability to think such a politics can be promoted through an ethos of deconstructive engagement with divisive understandings of the past.

This issue, therefore, *highlights the pressing need to complete the deconstructive gesture*, and move beyond the deconstructed system which sees memorials as representative of a past, even one utilised in the present for political purposes. Memory cannot be 'reclaimed' in such cases, as to attempt to do so can only provoke yet greater affirmation of memory on the side of those who feel their memory has been attacked. To truly resist the damaging effects of

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exclusionary commemoration, we must deconstruct the assumed links between history and memory, explode the concept of memory as a reflection of the past, and work to reveal the inherent undecidability of all assertions of memory in the present.

¹ The tenuous nature of the 'post-conflict situation' has been brought into sharp focus by the killings of two soldiers and a police officer in March 2009 by 'dissident republicans', and the continuing attempts by these groups to kill police officers. However, it does not appear that these tragic events will derail a peace process which has become deeply embedded over the last twelve years.

² These terms can be, and often are, used more or less interchangeably, although there are differences between them. 'Unionist' refers to those who wish to retain Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom, while 'Nationalist' is the designator for those who seek a united Ireland. 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' may be seen to refer to the whole of the respective communities, and their political outlooks. They are more markers of identity than religious terms. 'Unionist-Protestant' and 'Nationalist-Catholic' can both be seen as representative of moderate strains of political belonging. 'Loyalist' and 'Republican', on the other hand, refer to the more extreme manifestation of the political stances, and to those who are more inclined to resort to violence in the pursuit of their aims.

³ 'PIRA' will be used in this article to refer to the particular group that waged armed struggle during 'the troubles'. 'IRA', however, will be used at points to refer to the more inclusive, historical idea of insurgent Republicanism.

⁴ According to the authors of *Lost Lives*, Neill and McCurrie were the 29th and 30th victims of 'the troubles' – see McKittrick et al 2001, 50-51.

⁵ Quinn recounts how the Short Strand celebrated the 25th anniversary of the 'battle of St Matthew's' in a ceremony which saw Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams unveil a memorial to the 19 volunteers from the district who have died for the Republican cause – Quinn 2004, 36.

⁶ Other memorials make this connection explicitly – see, for example, the plaque in memory of Johnny Megaw, which states that he was 'murdered by the Roman Catholic IRA' – see Dawson 2007, 297.

⁷ The term dates back to 1689, and the Siege of Derry, a key turning point in the Jacobite Wars in Ireland, which was to culminate in victory for the Protestant King William over the Catholic King James. It was famously uttered by the 36th Ulster Division at the Battle of the Somme in the First World War before they went 'over the top'. It has since been used to refer to the struggle against the IRA, and the unwillingness of Loyalists to give in to Republican demands for a united Ireland. It is emblazoned on countless murals across Northern Ireland, has been used in speeches by hardline Loyalists (such as the young Ian Paisley), and is even added to the lyrics of the Northern Irish national anthem 'God Save the Queen' when it is sung by Loyalists.

⁸ Shirlow and Murtagh's research shows that the fear of being ostracised from their community, and not just the fear of the other community, is a factor which motivates people from segregated areas to avoid entering the territory of the other group – see Shirlow and Murtagh 2006, 80. For

more on the construction and policing of identity in opposition to external and internal threats, see Campbell 1998 and Connolly 1991.

⁹ This group have recommended the institution of an annual 'Day of Private Reflection', to act as a 'universal gesture of reconciliation, reflection, acknowledgement and recognition of the suffering of so many arising from the conflict in and about Northern Ireland' – see Healing Through Remembering.

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