Block H and the re-visioning of history:
How communities and media redefine their culture.

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ABSTRACT

Using the examples of murals within Northern Ireland and the genre of First Person Shooter (FPS) games this paper examines how communities and the media define cultural and social memory. The subjective perceptions we possess are determined our experiences and recollections of the past and the societies in which we exist.

Drawing on theorists including Flusser and Deleuze the role of memory in constructing our communities is discussed. The temporality of our existence leads us to memorialise the past in a more concrete forms which then ensures a continuation of the realities we exist within.

The dominance of the Military Industrial Entertainment Complex, combined with an analysis of propaganda, is examined through Virilio and Baudrillard. The virtualising of war and the establishment of perpetual fear ensure little or no resistance to the domineering ideologies of the military.

Kuma\War is used to illustration the convergence of the real with the hyper-real, the shorting of distance with the past and the present and how new tools of persuasion can be utilised to convert a global community.

A discussion of *Elephant* and the broadcast ban demonstrates the mute irrefutability of violence and how it is ones own perspective, motivated by both memory and desires, which determines the moralistic standpoint that is taken on conflict.

By exploring these examples and theories it is the author's intention to provide understanding behind the motivations of *Block H*, the factors that have influenced its production and execution.

So, oft in theologic wars
The disputants, I ween,
Rail on in utter ignorance
Of what each other mean;
And prate about an Elephant
Not one of them has seen!

The Blind Men And The Elephant

William James Linton 1878[1]

INTRODUCTION: Stories of Elephants

The experience of living through "The Troubles" in Northern Ireland can be understood by looking at two famous elephants. Once there was an elephant that was inspected by blind men who could not agree on its form. Although this story exists in many cultures, the tales themselves differ in how or if the conflict is resolved.   This effect of the subjective perspective on reality was contemplated by Akira Kurosawa in his film *Rashomon*, where the motives of the protagonists are held as the deciding factors on their perception of a crime. This intent of perception must be analysed by the transmitter, the media or community leader, and the receiver in the street or in front of their television 'contested events can illustrate how social divisions, normally buried in the patterns of everyday life, become revealed as people project these underlying biases onto their understandings'[2]

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[1] **Linton William James** *The Blind Men And The Elephant*
http://www.noogenesis.com/pineapple/blind_men_elephant.html
[2] **Roth Wendy d. and Mehta Jal D.** *The Rashomon EffectCombining Positivist and Interpretivist Approaches in the Analysis of Contested Events*
http://www.arts.ubc.ca/fileadmin/template/main/images/departments/soci/faculty/roth/RashomonEffect.pdf

Fig. 1

There was another elephant that was once painted and put on display in a Los Angeles art gallery. The artist intended the piece to be a commentary on world poverty and injustice, but instead provoked anger and condemnation as a "frivolous" exercise.[4] Twenty years prior to the phrase becoming cliché, the conflict in Northern Ireland had also been described as "the elephant in the room" by *Elephant* writer Bernard MacLaverty. Alan Clarke's film explores the communal refutation of social problems veiled to assume normalcy. The film features a cold and relentless series of murders without any relief or softening with rhetorical devices. It forces audience recognition of the bloody truth of Northern Irish divisions to the point where: 'the cumulative effect is that you say, it's got to stop. The killing has got to stop. Instinctively, without an intellectual process, it becomes a gut reaction.'[5]

In Northern Ireland, as with every society, each stratum has a different account of the same suppressed subjects. Instead of liberating these suppressions we glorify and rally them, turning defence in offence and maintaining the cycle of fear and anger. Political murals are part of this process, as is television, where news media is increasingly absorbed into the military industrial entertainment complex. This dissertation will focus on instances where social memory and myth are adapted to the new digital paradigms of communication media, and how the interchange of

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[3] http://www.banksy.co.uk/indoors/index.html

[4] **Banksy's Elephant Provokes Anger** http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/5355638.stm
Officials from the Los Angeles Animal Services Department told the Associated Press they would never again issue permits for such a "frivolous" purpose stating that 'we find it no longer acceptable to dye baby chicks at Easter, but it's OK to dye an elephant.

[5] **David Leland.***The way of the gun* http://www.dvdoutsider.co.uk/dvd/reviews/e/elephant.html

influence between medium and audience can be studied in relation to the interdependence between warring factions in providing "the other". There is a game at work in Alan Clarke's *Elephant* where the audience tries to discern which character is the victim or perpetrator. There are none of the usual filmic cues, as with reality either one could be the other. This is also true in times of war but acknowledged only in times of reconciliation, which is why I believe *Block H* to be appropriate at this juncture.

COMMUNITY AND MEMORY

'Community cannot be outlined on a map; rather it is built, and it can be dispersed again. Community is a process of people coming together around common problems, discovering their common values, and developing their sense of solidarity'[6]

In *Imagined Communities*[7] Anderson recognised that the establishment of an ethnic or national identity is subject to ebbs and flows rather than being static or inflexible. It relies on a social memory that 'recounts a sense of origin and distinctiveness'[8] that is relevant to individuals and contained within the self but essentially defined by the larger community structure. Outward expressions of this 'imagined' unity are manifest in time and space; reiterating mutual unities and myths between individuals and the communities they exist within. When seen in this way, the dual traditions of Republican and Unionist, Protestant and Catholic, are each co-dependent, they are counterpoints to each others ideological standpoints. These traditions (marching, mural and kerbstone painting etc) provide communities with reference points that in turn point to their own culture and highlight a definite separation from the other.

From the immediate 'knot of relations'[9] that forms the self to the extended associations and interactions of society Flusser believes us to be 'historical beings,'[10] created through continual exchanges and relations between genetic and cultural memory. He continues, recognising that both 'individual' and 'society' exist as abstract terms 'there is no individual outside society, and no society without individuals,'[11] rather they are defined by their 'intersubjective relations'. Delueze also notes that 'through the relations, the whole transforms itself or changes in quality.'[12] Communities can be understood to exist as sets within a whole, closed to an extent but fundamentally governed by the over-arching relations of the whole. As their dynamics vary and adjust the whole is re-defined in a continual evolution. This gradual homeomorphic nature of communities can be witnessed through the changing content of the murals of Northern Ireland and

[6] **Cockcroft, Eva; Weber, John; Cockcroft, Jim:** *Toward A People's Art: The Contemporary Mural Movement.* New York:Dutton, 1977

[7] **Anderson, Benedict**: *Imagined Communities: Reflections On The Origin And Spread Of Nationalism*. London:Verso,1991

[8] **Jarmen, Neil.** *Material Conflicts. Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland.* Berg Oxford. 1997 pg 6

[9] **Kac, Eduardo.** *Negotiating Meaning: The Dialogic Imagination In Electronic Art.* Proceedings of Computers in Art and Design Education Conference, University of Teesside, UK, 1999 http://www.ekac.org/dialogicimag.html

[10] **Flusser, Vilém.** "On Memory (Electronic or Otherwise)" *Leonardo*, Vol. 23, No. 4. 1990. pp. 397-399.

[11] **Flusser, Vilém.** "On Memory (Electronic or Otherwise)" *Leonardo*, Vol. 23, No. 4. 1990. pp. 397-399.

[12] **Deleuze, Gilles***: Cinema 1. The Movement-Image.* Trans Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1986 pg 10

the current attempts to soften the hard line cultural displays including the inception of the *Re-Imagining Communities*[13] programme and the re-packaging of the confrontational orange order marches every July, which are now being promoted as all inclusive family events rather than contentious marches. The "twelfth" has been rebranded as 'Orangefest'.

To establish and normalise social memories, both historical events and symbolic icons must be conceptualised or encoded into an internal milieu, so that 'they are isolated or freed from their specific history or external context and transformed into images or arranged into stories.'[14] Jarman expands on this model, recognising that the process must involve simplification; a distilling and removal of 'extraneous details' that would encroach upon or blur the intended ideological doctrines. In condensing an individual or event to its barest iconic outlines, a de-contextualisation from the past occurs, which in turn allows for all future elaborations, adapting traditions and functions to balance the accruing incorporation of meaning and re-interpretations.

'Reducing the past to a formalised and generalised ideal allows for a multiple layering of memory.'[15] Through this, the typically perceived linear narrative of history evolves into an adaptive generator of meanings and provides space for the inclusion of new figures and events.

To survive memory is necessarily an active process – it must be used and reworked in order to be maintained. This maintenance and associated experiences alters older recollections as well as affecting the contemporary personal acquisition bias of our new memories. The past determines our present, and in turn the present defines our perception of the past. Cadava notes that 'there can be no passing moment that is not already both the past and the future: the moment must be simultaneously past, present, and future in order for it to pass at all.'[16] Bergson further expands on this stating that 'with the immediate and present data of our senses, we mingle a thousand details of our past experience. In most cases these memories supplant our actual perceptions, of which we can only retain a few hints, thus using them as signs that recall to us former images.'[17] The past, or rather our memories and perception of it, determine our present actuality. The elastic tensions that exist between the past, present and future are housed in our perpetual moment of 'now'.

Social memory is fundamentally conformist, operating through the recalling and sharing of the past. It creates a sense of collective belonging by facilitating common denominators partially constructed by emotive factors such as security in numbers, and fear leading to violent conflict. It is essential that social memories are publicly displayed and reproduced. They furnish a sense of certainty while maintaining a degree of malleability. For each person there occurs a necessary search for individual meaning in order to establish their sense of identity and place within a community while also relating to the wider milieu. 'Expressed through a multiplicity of media, memory moves from an intensive experience to an extensive penetration of social life, from the liminal to the habitual.'[18]

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[13] http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/news/2006/new10072006b.htm

http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/index/arts_and_creativity/re-imaging_communities.htm

[14] **Jarmen, Neil.** *Material Conflicts. Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland*. Berg Oxford. 1997 pg 7

[15] **Jarmen, Neil.** *Material Conflicts. Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland*. Berg Oxford. 1997 pg 7

[16] **Cadava, Eduardo.** *Words of Light, Thesis on the Photography of History*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997.

[17] **Bergson**, *Key Writings.* Edited by Keith Ansell Pearson & John Mullarkey London, Continuum, 2002, pg 96

[18] **Jarmen, Neil.** *Material Conflicts. Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland.* Berg Oxford. 1997 pg 8

With the recent inauguration of the devolved government of Northern Ireland and the significant diversification of ethnicity within the country there is a concerted effort to 'recall a better and more appropriate past from which to launch new state platforms'[19] by a refocusing of history away from the polarised dichotomies that exist both in the past and present, towards a utopian inclusive ideal.

TERRITORIES OF COMMUNITY

To date the residents and communities of public housing estates are heavily segregated with an estimated 98% in Belfast divided along religious lines.[20] These communities remain sectioned off from each other by an approximately 13 miles of 'interface lines' or 'peace lines.'[21] There is little to differentiate between their physical characteristics yet they remain largely endogamous with children attending separate faith schools rarely having any meaningful contact with 'the other side,' existing within a climate of fear and distrust. These divisions of territory are echoed in the location of the murals. [See the map of murals pg 32]

This underlines Deleuze and Guattari's[22] descriptions of the deterritorialisation of community ideologies and beliefs by advanced capitalism and the reterritorialisation and homogenisation of the same allow for far greater combinatory possibilities. Previously established positions shift and merge into new cultural becomings, changing individual meanings, perceptions and priorities. Considering a programme such as *Re-Imaging Communities,* [23] which seeks to replace or remove divisive murals, is an attempt at this homogenisation. This ideal is rather ambitious when considering segregation imposed by the continued towering presence of the peace-lines.

The murals of Northern Ireland can be understood as essentially territorial, as defining the specific communities that exist around. They display predominant loyalties or habitus. They are largely contained within areas that hold more extremist affiliations with a particular cause or side. They are messages for the people by the people, frequently espousing the adlibbed manifestos of paramilitary organisations while drawing on fundamentalist doctrine. In *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* Debord recognised that 'the flow of images carries everything and it is similarly someone else who governs at will this simplified summary of the perceptible world; he who chooses where the flow will lead, and the rhythm of what should be shown'[24]

While the image may have a degree of autonomy in its external existence, (by its very nature it is removed from its creator) and be open to a certain amount of free interpretation, in the context of

[19] **Jarmen, Neil.** *Material Conflicts. Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland.* Berg Oxford. 1997 pg 5

[20] **O'Hara, Mary** *Self-imposed Apartheid* http://www.guardian.co.uk/Northern_Ireland/Story/0,2763,1191027,00.html

[21] **Peace lines** http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belfast_Peace_Lines

[22] **Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari.** *A Thousand Plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987

[23] **Re-Imaging Communities** http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/news/2006/new10072006b.htm

[24] **Guy Debord:** *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle.* 1988 http://www.notbored.org/commentaires.html

the Northern Irish murals the image always carries particularly sentient resonances to each side of the divide.

In most of the world people live in a media saturated environment, in both their personal and public domains. The murals of Northern Ireland offer us an avenue to explore how they may be used as tools of community propaganda, promoting suppression, enforcement of belief interpretation stance, rule of law and culture or nostalgic fraternity.

MURALS OF NORTHERN IRELAND

Through an analysis of their murals the physical divisions that culturally interlink the communities of Northern Ireland can be seen as interdependent social groupings of memory and public collective history. 'Looking to the past for what can be pressed into the service of the future, such communities may fashion for themselves a heroic past, a reworking of earlier times that Nietzsche calls monumental history.'[25]

By memorialising an individual such as Bobby Sands in the present and using the terms of the present, the murals of Northern Ireland serve to update and propagate polarising philosophies, augmenting a type of accord within each community by heightening a dependence on partition and the existence of opposing forces. Globally this is historically evident in tribal and religious conflict.

The murals exist as a 'medium in which memories and ideology, the past and the future, can be brought together, and provide anchors for the identity of a particular community'[26] and acting as public expressions of collective memory the murals serve to 'underpin the distinctive and opposing identities of the two dominant groups' [27]

For many within Northern Ireland their murals are akin to Barthes' notion of the photographic 'analgon' of reality, something that depicts a past actuality. Indeed murals have been used by mass media as defining features of their environment. As they have been reproduced innumerable times in popular media, they have been enabled an existence beyond their daily physical embodiment. Bergson noted that while we exist in the present 'practically, we perceive only the past.' [28] The murals provide a temporal referent to an alternative view of what has previously happened. By acting as signifiers and producing meaning, by the nature of their individual positions, the murals draw attention to the networks of similarities and differences that define the communities of Northern Ireland. They have become 'one of the principle media through which republican and loyalist groups have revealed themselves in the public sphere…[and] have been

[25] **Wyschogrod, E.** *Man-Made Mass Death: Shifting Concepts of Community* Journal of the American Academy of Religion, Vol. 58, No. 2. (Summer, 1990)
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=00027189%28199022%2958%3A2%3C165%3AMMDSCO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-C
[26] **Jarmen, Neil.** *Material Conflicts. Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland.* Berg Oxford. 1997 pg 18
[27] **Jarmen, Neil.** Material Conflicts. Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland. Berg Oxford. 1997 pg 3
[28] his italics. **Bergson, Henri.** *Key Writings.* Edited by Keith Ansell Pearson & John Mullarkey London, Continuum, 2002. pg 131

used to situate and legitimise the two movements historically and symbolically within the wider nationalist and unionist communities'[29]

What could be defined as part of 'the culture of resistance'[30] the murals of Northern Ireland are most commonly found in disadvantaged estates or areas. They act as cultural signifiers to communities that have been most affected by the violence of the Troubles, and who have been 'most polarised by sectarian divisions.' While any similarities between the murals of the opposing factions are due more to environmental (i.e. social-political-economic) conditions both sides, the call to arms or sanctioning of paramilitary action in support of a particular cause is prevalent throughout.

The tradition of mural painting started in the early 1900's. It was solely a loyalist phenomenon, usually occurring in summer for the 12th July celebrations. Most murals where based on King Billy's victory at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. The nationalist mural painting tradition is a much younger one dating from the hunger strikes carried out by republicans in 1981. It stemmed from graffiti in support of them in the late 1970's which gradually became more ornate and increased in scale. Republican murals also depicted support for the IRA. With the end of the hunger strike and the decision of Sinn Fein to contest elections, which they had previously largely abstained from, the early nationalist murals often took the form of electoral advertising. This in turn lead to a diversification of content including recognition of other anti-imperialist/repressive regimes through out the world including Israeli military aggression against Palestine, Turkish hunger strikers, solidarity murals for ETA, the Basque group, the freedom campaigns for Nelson Mandela and Leonard Peltier, a Native American jailed in the 1970s for killing two FBI agents and other communist or socialist struggles from South America, Cuba and Russia.

By allying themselves with international struggles and playing the 'beal bocht' (poor mouth), and by frequently portraying themselves as victims of an oppressive regime, the republican muralists can be considered as or more media savvy than their loyalist equivalents who have come to generally portray themselves and their beliefs in a more intimidating and often less shrewd way.

PROPAGANDA

"The important thing is that it is universal and continuous; and in its sum total it is regimenting the public mind every bit as much as an army regiments the bodies of its soldiers."[31]

Bernays' recognition of the necessity of propaganda to be total and ubiquitous in establishing itself as a common ideology within society has been whole heartedly embraced by both those who govern the spectacle of capitalist society and those who fight against the ruling powers. It is essential that little or no time is left for an individual to question or reflect upon the complexities of any situation rather we are actively encouraged to extend our perpetual consumption.

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[29] **Jarmen, Neil.** Material Conflicts. Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland. Berg Oxford. 1997 pg 249
[30] **Jarmen, Neil.** Material Conflicts. Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland. Berg Oxford. 1997 pg 3
[31] **Bernays, Edward**: *Propaganda.* 1928. http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/bernprop.html

By willingly or unknowingly using these images as our principle connection to the world and so firmly rooting our identities in the consumption of their continual barrage, we construct our identities through 'by the appropriation of images, and codes and models [determining how we as individuals perceive ourselves] and relate to other people.'[32]

Where the 'image supports everything,'[33] in particular the incontestable messages that are given to us as truth Baudrillard believes that we now operate within the void of simulation where it is impossible to tell the difference between the real and hyper-real. Wars take place not one the ground but rather in the arenas of our sitting rooms through the safety of mediation. Civilian casualties become 'collateral damage', soldiers are killed by their allies in 'friendly fire', distant destructions viewed through the aiming cross hairs of 'smart bombs'. The sanitisation of mediated warfare is echoed through such metaphors as 'clean-up operation' and the 'softening-up' of enemy territories

Virilio in contrast to Baudrillard prefers the term 'substitution,' stating that 'reality has become symmetrical. The splitting of reality in two parts is a considerable event which goes beyond simulation.'[34] It is the more bewitching and commanding qualities of the virtual that substitute rather than obliterate the real. This compulsion of the virtual largely through the militarization of technologies of both the street and the mediated world has Virilio believes resulted in a crisis of perception, where we now rely on the singular, inarguable viewpoints established and maintained by the dominant ideology. The media Pilger states are 'tribunes of an ideology that regards itself as non-ideological, that presents itself as the natural centre, the very fulcrum of modern life.'[35]

In his critique of the constructs of enemy forces, and the myth of a clean war, Andy Deck considers propaganda as an encircling force that endows us with a complete system for interpreting the world, one that prohibits any deviation from the accepted truths of a society. This penetration of the consciousness through misinformation and placation aims to quell dissent. "A healthy culture must relate the memories and experiences of people who have faced first-hand the pain and brutality of war. A culture of pure distraction is a dangerous instrument of the war industry. In the name of total security, the sad fugue of forceful domination carries far and wide. For some the playground has already become a killing field". [36]

In order to preserve the status-quo and create a docile, productive society it is essential that history is revised and simplified often emphasising threats and moments of danger and as Benjamin notes this danger 'affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers.'[37] A continual propagation of the clear and present dangers of potential attacks on a system ensures continued support of a regime while the effects of 'blowback' (where a government's international policies or actions are kept secret from the public when they have resulted in unintended consequences) rather than is

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[32] **Stefancic Mitja** The postmodernist debate on a culture increasingly saturated with signs
http://www.gla.ac.uk/~dc4w/laibach/postmod1.html

[33] **Guy Debord:** *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*. 1988 http://www.notbored.org/commentaires.html

[34] **Virilio, P aul** *Pure War:* Revised Edition. New York:Semiotext(e). 1997 pg 43

[35] **Pilger, John** *The Unseen Lies: Journalism As Propaganda 2007* transcript of a talk given by John Pilger at Socialism Conference in Chicago http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Pilger_John/Journalism_As_Propaganda.html

[36] **Deck Andy** *Demilitarizing the Playground* http://artcontext.org/crit/essays/noquarter/

[37] **Benjamin, Walter.** Theses on the Philosophy of History, *Illuminations*, trans H.Zohn, ed H arendt, Fontana, London 1973 VI

causes are emphasised. Pinter pointed this in his Nobel speech when talking of the superficial recording of American State crimes 'You wouldn't know it. It never happened. Nothing ever happened. Even while it was happening it wasn't happening. It didn't matter. It was of no interest.'[38]

By portraying particular causes as noble, just or emancipating, appeals to our ideals of virtuous existence for as Benjamin recognises 'our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption.'[39] If the ethos of saving by destruction is to be advanced then it must be done so in a way so as to 'evoke the interest of the audience.'[40]

THE MILITARY ENTERTAINMENT COMPLEX AND GAMES

'In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.'[41]

The military-industrial complex that Eisenhower warned against has now become pervasive within our current societies, wrapping itself round and through the undulating continuums of society to become the military-industrial-entertainment complex. Stimulating and feeding our purported needs of technologies and media.

News broadcasts, particularly of war, now share the same aesthetics as computer games to include computer generated 3D simulations and animations of weapons and tactics, military mapping technologies, satellite imagery. To add veracity to reports reporters are embedded with the troops. (It should be noted here that this practice has been developed by the armed forces as response to the 'Vietnam Syndrome' enabling them to control both the content and flow of images and information deemed fit for public consumption.) David Neibourg refers to Compton in recognising that 'the experience of war is, for a majority of Western citizens, limited to spectacle,"[42] where we are fed a myopic, single-sided view of conflict that has been sanitised and greatly simplified. A 'virtuous war'[43] is created. Where both technological and ethical superiority are promoted, leading to a situation of hyperreality that only actually serves to alienate us further from the reality of events, and as our emotional responses are blunted our capitulation is advanced.

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[38] **Pinter Harold:** *Art, Truth & Politics Nobel Lecture 2005*
http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2005/pinter-lecture-e.pdf
[39] **Benjamin, Walter.** Theses on the Philosophy of History, *Illuminations*, trans H.Zohn, ed H arendt, Fontana, London 1973 II
[40] **Goebbels Joseph** *Principles Of Propaganda* http://www.psywarrior.com/Goebbels.html
[41] **Eisenhower D** *NLE Farewell Address*http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/farewell.htm.
[42] **Nieborg David B** Changing the Rules of Engagement - Tapping into the Popular Culture of Ameriica''s Army, the Official U.S. Army Computer Game http://www.gamespace.nl/content/MAThesis_DBNieborg.pdf
[43] **Der Derian, James:** *War as Game.* Brown Journal of World Affairs Summer / Fall 2003 • Volume X, Issue 1 http://www.bjwa.org/article.php?id=vfh7zH60DJc24E82JB5gy12uW3BiW4uDD83XtJ3v

The myths put forward by the Military Industrial Entertainment Complex are designed to ensure the passive subjugation of the needs of society for those of the never ending war machine. As with its predecessors, the active communication behind *Americas Army* or *Kuma\War* restricts itself to convenient truths. They provide a further glorification of a capitalist-based militarised outlook. The repercussions on real people on the ground are never in focus. As Giroux points out " it produces policies that rely more on force than on dialogue and compassion; it offers up modes of identification that undermine democratic values and tarnish civil liberties; and it makes the production of both symbolic and material violence a central feature of everyday life"[44]

In a sense FPS games can be understood as providing embodiment to game theory, the rationalist system of dealing with people as faceless groups, representing them as numbers, binary code to be processed and to ultimately form policy. By virtualising the real, the virtualised real and real-world interactions with it, determine the actualisation of the future.

The military have frequently used games for training purposes having created mods of *Quake* and *Counter-Strike*. The justifications for this can be easily understood there is no risk of injury let alone fatality, the space required is nominal (as compared to a real world simulation), in essence, all costs are kept to a minimum. The concept of further utilising the power of the virtual to include direct propaganda and recruiting techniques creating weapons of mass persuasion was realised by the US military in 2002. As a public relations exercise and to aid their ailing recruitment numbers in 1999 they commissioned *Americas Army*. Recognising that 'leads produced through website visits yield a higher percentage of recruits than any other method of contact'[45] the game has been downloadable (for free) from their website since 2002. Teen rated with 'goreless' violence, it is a game 'designed with specific real-world moral and political effects in direct support of legitimate violence in the name of national security and defending democratic rights.'[46] The virtual playground is now filled with 'weapon[s] of mass persuasion'[47] which reach into our real lives shaping our perceptions and beliefs.

Both the military industrial entertainment complex and wider video games industry have learned to exploit the motivating forces behind human activity. Games such as *Americas Army* facilitate opposition and cooperation, individual autonomy within collectives, and acknowledgment of achievement with permitting obfuscation of corporeal identity. Zhan Li contents in his thesis that "the antithesis of normative, rational democratic communication (and the societal freedom it constitutes) lies at the symbolic heart of this cultural domain."[48] Although it may be viewed as ethically dubious to relate a subtext of playfulness to war, he acknowledges that the inherent intersection between the two is troubling, particularly in consideration of gory FPS games. The assimilation highlights the shared behavioural patterns between the two which suggest more

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[44] **Giroux Henry A** *War on Terror: The Militarising of Public Space and Culture in the United States*
http://www.henryagiroux.com/online_articles/Third%20Text%202004-war%20on%20terror.pdf
[45] **Hodes Jacob & Ruby-Sachs Emma** *'America's Army' Targets Youth*
http://www.thenation.com/doc/20020902/hodes20020823
[46] **Zhan Li** *The Potential of America's Army the Video Game as Civilian-Military Public Sphere*
http://cms.mit.edu/research/theses/ZhanLi2003.pdf
[47] **Der Derian, James:** *War as Game.* Brown Journal of World Affairs Summer / Fall 2003 • Volume X, Issue 1
http://www.bjwa.org/article.php?id=vfh7zH60DJc24E82JB5gy12uW3BiW4uDD83XtJ3v
[48] **Zhan Li** *The Potential of America's Army the Video Game as Civilian-Military Public Sphere*
http://cms.mit.edu/research/theses/ZhanLi2003.pdf

primitive or animalistic motivations, which runs contrary to our conception of the evolved system of human relations.

KUMA\WAR

An interesting example of the convergence of real world conflict, media coverage and computer games is *Kuma\War*. Released in 2004 and distributed online, the missions in *Kuma\War* are based on ongoing real world conflict situations with new missions updated weekly in 'game-isodes'. [See page 33]

The structure of the game is based on the familiar tactical shooter genre; two teams fight each other, while individual players can choose weaponry. The major difference between *Kuma\War* and conventional games is the extensive back-story provided in mixed media for each game-isode. Audio and video clips taken from the mission's real world counterpart are mixed with generated content, which imamates television news casts. Data including opponents' available weaponry, maps, satellite images of the area and suggested tactics are provided. Historical information relating to the battle is also given. This in turn defines aspects of its 'playability' limiting possible player choices by adhering to certain aspects from the actual real world event. In maps such as *Uday and Qusay's Last Stand*[49] you can kill the brothers but not capture them. Kuma Reality Games claim their factual accuracy is guaranteed by their contacts in the American media and military, which include serving officers in Iraq and a retired general.[50] This slanted perspective is veiled by the conceit of optional playing on the side of the insurgents in certain missions.

One significant cultural response to this is the Iranian creation of *Save the Nuclear Scientist*.[51] Using the ideology of preemptive strikes Kuma released a "likely scenario" where American troops stormed an Iranian nuclear facility. After strong objections[52], and Kuma's initial refusal to remove the game, the Iranians developed a counter-clone of Kuma's scenario. Kuma responded with an additional game-isode *Assault on Iran, Pt. 3: Payback in Iraq* stating that it would pick up where they understand their Iranian counterpart will leave off.[53] Kuma believe these releases and counter-releases have the potential to lead to 'serious political dialogue.'[54]

So the Kuma ethos is not confined to representing just historical events. It is adhering to the neoconservative philosophy of pre-emption. This may have occurred because of the content they already develop for military training. Products developed for military consumption are now interchangeable with mainstream merchandise. This suggests a further acceptance of the merging of consumerism and militarisation by proving that mythic narrative does not have to wait for the

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[49] **Uday and Qusay's Last Stand** http://www.kumawar.com/UdayQuasayLastStand1/detail.php

[50] **Andy Spain** *Kuma\War Brings The Battle Home* http://www.mediajonez.com/index.html?tech/kumawar0505.html

[51] **Iranian Game Promotes Sacrifice, Martyrdom** http://www.farsnews.com/English/newstext.php?nn=8604260463

[52] **Ransom-Wiley James** *"Assault on Iran" is not a game to some* http://www.joystiq.com/2005/10/25/assault-on-iran-is-not-a-game-to-some/

[53] **Modine Austin** *Iran's 'Rescue Nuke Scientist' game battles US game studio* http://www.theregister.co.uk/2007/07/17/rescue_nuke_scientist/

[54] **IBID**

past or the present. Kuma's narratives featuring events that are likely to happen reflect the human cognitive processes that involve memory, or history, in the consideration by the subjective memory of action based on anticipatory likelihood. As such, *Kuma\War* illustrates how propaganda necessarily operates on future fears that are not yet self-evident. Barlett notes that "future events are not exact replicas of past events, and a memory system that simply stored rote records would not be well-suited to simulating future events. A system built according to constructive principles may be a better tool for the job: it can draw on the elements and gist of the past, and extract, recombine and reassemble them into imaginary events that never occurred in that exact form. Such a system will occasionally produce memory errors, but it also provides considerable flexibility".[55]

Games are reaching a point where they can amalgamate history in real time. They have begun to exist somewhere between Virilio's concept of pure war, determined by the increasing speed of communication combined with the continual advancement of technologies to leading to new configurations of space and time, and Baudrillard's hyperreal society of simulations

Kuma\War imitates the television news aesthetic, using studio talking heads informational graphics and real world imagery. This is a linear experience of the event and it reporting. The interior television of *Block H* seeks instead to recognise the mixability of channels, sources, and motives. In *Kuma\War*, the event proper takes place within the game engine, but the player choices are limited to the confines of what Kuma maintains as an accurate rendering of historical fact. We are encouraged to accept that a video game conceived and developed by an American company with military contracts can offer a superlative hyperreal experience. Keith Halper, chief executive, of Kuma Games argues that making games based on current real world events 'does not isolate players from the reality of war but brings it closer to home.'[56] It reinforces the already virtual relationship the audience and remote violence. The Kuma medium onerously claims a two sided representation while plainly subject to massive cultural and intentional bias, for political commercial reasons.

The game section of *Block H* is time non-specific. Each time the game restarts the environment suggests recent action, but the experience is not tied to any linear plot motivation. This aspect allows the objective and outcome of the game to alter according to the motivations of the players. While the online *Counter-Strike* gaming world has yet to develop its own overt culture of sectarianism in organised clans, when *Block H* is publicly released it will be interesting to observe and chart the online team choices and resultant in-game, team chat and voiceover IP behaviours. The actions of players from Northern Ireland would be particularly noteworthy players may attempt some kind of reconciliation or more likely they will revert to the older more polemic expressions of the cultural divide. It has the potential to act as a kind of cultural barometer of the attitudes Northern Irish wish to publicly espouse, albeit with the prospective anonymity internet play provides.

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[55] **Bartlett F. C**. R*emembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology*
http://www-bartlett.sps.cam.ac.uk/RememberingBook.htm
[56] **Freeman, Colin** *Battles re-enacted in video arcades N.Y. gamemaker lets players portray Iraqi or U.S. troops* San Francisco Chronicle http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2005/01/16/MNG5LAR6KU1.DTL&hw=kuma&sn=001&sc=1000

Kuma replicates the spectacle of news reporting. Television news had long before adopted a video game aesthetic in reporting violent conflict. Distancing techniques serve to dampen the visceral nature of such events. This has more recently been coupled with the conceit of raw in the moment reportage. While this embedding proved to be just as orchestrated while providing more exciting entertainment style footage, the perspective of the FPS game was ultimately realised by this new militainment.

While the developers of video games such as *Kuma\War* act surprised by the inadvertent stirring of negative emotional responses to their work, Block *H* is overtly emotive in concept and execution. Without the television interior, the game exterior of *Block H* runs the risk of being interpreted as insensitive, or trivialising experiences of pain and suffering, as other instances have proven such as the outcries at *9-11 survivor.* Both sections reference each other in content, but are executed in media that most lucidly articulate the issues of concern. The game embodies our growing detachment from the implications of violence and its commodification through the controlled perception of local threat. The television deals with the notion of interchangeable grievances and purpose. The idea of self censorship through discriminatory media consumption must be coupled with recognition of the institutional self government of media and the state.

ELEPHANT AND THE BROADCAST BAN

Alan Clarke's short film *Elephant* does not follow the linear story archetype of the conventional film or television dramas of its time. Instead, it uses extended steadicam takes to follow the lead up, occurrence, and immediate aftermath of a series of killings offering neither motive nor back-story. It instead attempts heightened realism and experience of the moment by dwelling on the bloodiness of each murder where it was usual to do the opposite. [See page 34]

The scenes before and after the killings show characters in seemingly benign and unremarkable circumstances, walking down the road or mopping up at work. It is the apparent normality that makes the violence all the more brutal. The sensationalism of visual media narratives such as Northern Ireland or Iraq serve to strengthen our associations with them in a fictional universe. They are in effect made them less real to the audience by being expressed in forms we intuitively relate with the virtual and therefore the subjects become pure entertainment free from serious real world ramifications. They become more like parables on human behaviour, much like soap operas or human interest pieces.

The film does not try to humanise its subjects with protracted characterisation, as Mike Leigh's *Four Days in July* (1985) dealing with family life in Belfast at the same time or the more recent documentary *Belfast Girls* (2006) by Malin Andersson. *Elephant* shows the audience the completely hidden and unseeable circumstances of the killings in Northern Ireland. What makes it all the more poignant is its factual basis on actual crimes. It runs contrary to the established rhetoric and emphasis on the multidimensional information supply of *Kuma\War* or situational drama. Alternatively, it dispenses with dialogue and any concern for didactic devices. The silence of *Elephant* can also be read as reflective of the broadcast ban as it was made at a time when the media in Britain and Ireland were subject to self and state censorship in dealing with "The Troubles".

To challenge these cosy assumptions about the conflict - deliberately fostered by those in high places either because they are convenient or because they believe them - is to run the risk of being branded at best a terrorist dupe, at worst a terrorist sympathiser. Journalists and politicians rash enough to dissent have felt the lash of tongues from both sides of the House of Commons and been called 'unreliable'.

Elliot suggests that by crediting Nationalist militants with an aptitude for propaganda, the British establishment qualified their identification of them as a dangerous enemy while creating a distrust of any republican statement or public information. Significantly, this strategy also justified the withholding of information by the state, for the sake of national security.

Official censorship of sanctioned media will inevitably lead to a proliferation of the unsanctioned. Although the mural tradition predates "The Troubles"[57] it has undoubtedly developed out of a growing disenfranchisement many people felt form mainstream agendas, and the mounting suppression of public representation. The murals did not claim to be a forum for freedom of expression. Instead they served as reciprocal vehicles of their own brands and style of localised control over the hearts and minds. The system of self censorship that Thatcher replaced with more overt mechanisms of control of reporting of Northern Ireland had bred a community based usurpation while neutering objective investigational reporting: 'journalists, through intimidation, boredom or indolence, [became] the instruments of the ban when they should be its principal victims and most vigorous opponents.'[58]

We are now officially back to self censorship in the British and Irish media, but fear of upsetting the delicate balance of peace has maintained an generally unchallenging media approach fostered by a growing ambivalence to a story that has lost its action. The soft unionism and nationalism exhibited by BBC and RTE are compensated by a burdening demand for more hard-line local newspapers that can respond more fluidly to the changing grievances and readings.

"It would be preposterous to suggest that the owners and editors of Northern Ireland's local newspapers are responsible for the divisions in their society. It is undeniable, however, that their papers, through the choice of stories which are published and even the use of language to tell these stories, give voice to the rival perspectives of the two communities and, as a consequence, give added strength to these perspectives in the eyes of those who hold them."[59]

Both The Broadcast Ban of the 1980's where those associated with terrorist factions (such as Gerry Adams and the IRA) where dubbed by actors, and the similarities between opposing sides, provided inspiration for the workings of the television content in *Block H.* The position of the video

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[57] Overt censorship really began in earnest in 1971, the year of internment, controversy over British army behaviour and a surge in IRA recruiting and violence. From the outset certain programme subjects were the favourite for interference: those which dealt with nationalist or republican views of the 'troubles', programmes about the IRA and controversies over security policy or the record of the army and police
Moloney The Media and Northern Ireland Broadcast ban
http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/media/moloney.htm
[58] ibid
[59] **Bairner** The Media edia of Northern Ireland http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/media/bairner.htm

timeline is determined by the audio's amplitude. This culminates in moments of synchronisation where the characters depicted seem to utter the words of others.

The visual channels contains recognisable political and state figures with people directly involved in or affected by The Troubles combined with conflict and urban guerrilla warfare. The audio channels were created by mixing narratives from varying perspectives and through emotive dialogue the human side of the conflict is considered with descriptions of violence experienced or perpetrated by the individuals portrayed. The brutality is emphasised. Yet the while the perpetrators have a sense of meaning or purpose the victims convey a sense of futility and desperation. It recognises the alienation of individuals compounded through life long experiences. The user can mix the audio and video channels resulting in a chaotic assemblage that attempts to express relationship between aggressor and defender.

Clarke pioneered the use of steadicam in television drama. This point of voice has become familiar to us now to the extent that games simulate it their own camera views, as is the case with *Block H* and *Counter-Strike*. When a player is killed in the game the engine seems to switch out of the standard first person mode used while participating/ playing, to a cinematic mode that change the players perspective to dwell on their own corpse. Ironically, the cinematic language that Clarke employed for the sake of dramatic reason has in its evolution been adopted by game developers as a means of providing a more sensationalised experience. The volume and frequency of violence in *Elephant* is also reflected in today's FPS games. Where Clarke's intensity seeks to repulse his audience, games, conversely, use such imagery as rewards and indications of success. Games such as *Grand Theft Auto* resist moral statement. In *Counter-Strike*, the terms "terrorist" and "counter-terrorist" have little ethical significance to clans and gameplay. *Block H* has modified this aspect to "Nationalists" and "Loyalists", as each side would believe that their enemies are the terrorists, and that they themselves are merely defenders their communities. This does not seek to amoralise the game environment; rather it is acknowledgment of the actual ambiguous, unpolarised reality that can be understood in radically disparate ways.

CONCLUSION

This paper has focused on the polarised communities of Northern Ireland, how both their cultural memories and the self imposed segregation led to the need to define their particular areas with visual displays and murals creating territories to be defended and secured. Evolving form a shared history each community has a distinct and specific understanding of actions past. It has become a story of victims and perpetrators each with a selective memory. The murals show how communities re-vision and define their culture.

The virtualisation of information we are able to explore a greater diversity of issues in new ways. It offers us the potential to create new combinations and find alternative understandings of the ways in which we exist. However to successfully achieve these outcomes it must be continually approached in a critical manner as the re-visioning also takes place on a global scale through media and its hidden or overt ideologies.

By re-formulating myth and creating social memory through varying techniques of propaganda and persuasion, our interpretations of both the communities we live within and those who appear to oppose us are manipulated by the Military Industrial Entertainment Complex which I believe to be 'the government of the spectacle,…[possessing] all the means to falsify the whole of production and perception, [and] is the absolute master of memories.'[60] It has become the elephant in the room which although we may be aware of we habitually perceive it differently.

The media has undoubtedly contributed to the problems faced by Northern Ireland in the last 30 years, yet this is merely a question of degrees, as it is difficult to imagine how it would not exacerbate the situation, given its modus operandi. We have never existed as objective communicators of information, nor can we force any information to be interpreted as such. The publicity of the environment grew a news-conscious populace, who once media savvy set to the task of applying social control through communication on a micro level.

Where digital media has a wider socialising influence, Northern Irish murals are part of the local environment of control. Both media renovate myths while drawing on a variety of rhetorical and narrative mediums, and aesthetic styles. They react to the global climate and assess the political barometers they are subject to. Whether or not it is discernable if violence in media affects violence, there is definitely a type of cyclical, cross influential relationship between us and the media which is constantly redefined and reinforced. The more important question is the ownership of choice and the perception of control of our interpreted realities. Our experiences of news events can become more engaging and immersive. They are still subject to the same political dynamics as the established media platforms however, and through its influence in redefining fact based media, games and interactive media risk developing deeper illusions of an objective reality and how we define both ourselves and our communities within them.

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[60] **Guy Debord:** *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*. IV 1988 http://www.notbored.org/commentaires.html

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Appendix 1

Block H[61]

One of the most striking elements of a typical housing estate in Belfast, Derry, and the wider north of Ireland, is the vast collection of murals and memorials that predominate the landscape.

The murals began with the loyalist cultural traditions of portraying King Billy and his victory every July. They were, in part at least, officially recognised and sanctioned community projects. From this tradition stemmed more contemporary and hostile murals which began to depict the modern day armed militias in balaclavas and uniforms. Memorials for fallen comrades and innocent bystanders also became popular. The republican side began to use the murals as part of their media campaign during the Hungerstrikes of Long Kesh also known as the Maze prison in 1981. The murals began to address people from outside the community. Now, with devolution moving forward in Northern Ireland, the British Government, in conjunction with the NI Arts Council, has allocated over 3 million pounds for the replacement or removal of any murals with sectarian content or aggressive themes.

The project seeks in part to document and recreate the murals and their looming dominance on their native landscape.

To put them in context, other symbols of Northern Ireland are included in the concentrated exterior world of the game. Peace Wall, flags, arches, bonfires, painted kerbstones, burnt out cars. The watchtower church is a combination of Military and Spiritual monitoring. Surveillance for the people by the people.

The *Counter-Strike* game engine was also chosen because of the game scenario. It has been modified from Terrorists opposing Counter-Terrorists, to Nationalists opposing Loyalists. This situation amplifies the relationship between the murals and sectarian icons from both communities.

The game world is in an H shape wrapped within maze-like walls. *Block H* could be the name of a housing estate, just as the H Blocks of the Maze Prison outside Belfast are well known for housing political prisoners. They, like the murals are being erased.

The game environment represents the public space of Northern Ireland, and purposely bars access to the interior of the private homes, the interior space. As such, this project can also be seen as a reaction to the blurring of boundaries between real and simulated warfare and death by the military and the media.

The interior space offers public and private reflection on past and present situations. The game projections can be seen on opposing walls, while the television is the active and controllable object from within the space. The interior suggests how a person's window on the world affects the individual, and the options that are open to them. It seeks to emulate the similarities between each

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[61] Please refer to www.blockh.net and also http://www.flickr.com/photos/blockh/sets/72157601796666626/
for further information and images.

side combining political, religious, and everyday figures whose influence affects them directly or indirectly. The actual lack or real difference between people on opposing sides is articulated by the fact that audio and video channels are interchangeable in the piece.

The interior of the tent is partially inspired by the censorship laws brought in by Thatcher that resulted in republican politicians being dubbed by actors on television. The timing of the politician's video and the actors audio was initially crude, however over time the production techniques improved to the point where the composite was sometimes indistinguishable from the original. The manipulation of what is seen and heard on television, whether it be news of war or peace, is performed by those who consume it, as well as those who produce it.

map of Belfast
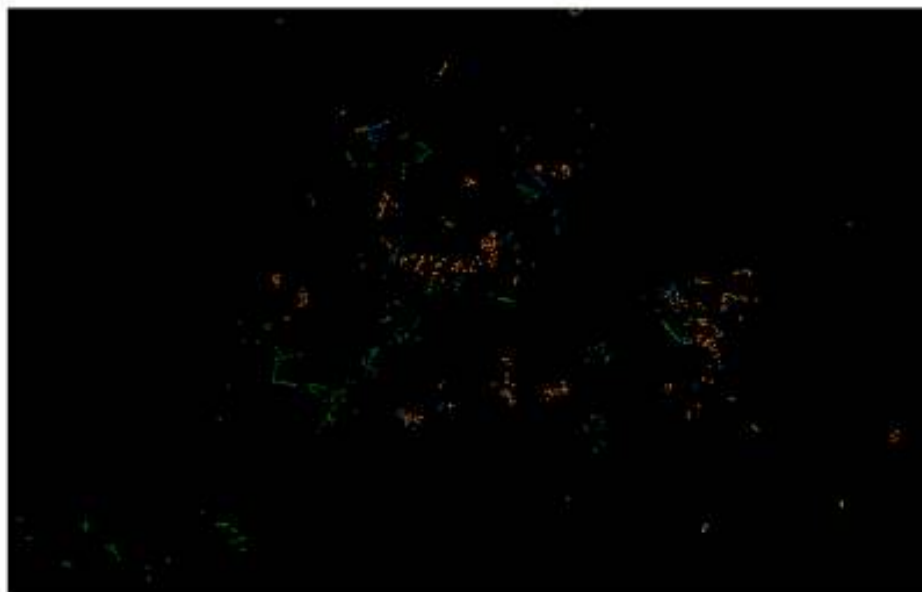
map of murals in Belfast

● loyalist
● nationalist
● non-aligned

FIG 2

FIG 3

Alan Clarke's Elephant

FIG 4