Cork as canvas: Exploring intersections of citizenship and collective memory in the Shandon *Big Wash Up* murals

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ABSTRACT

Urban space has the potential to shapes people's experience and understanding of the city and of the culture of a place. In some respects, murals and allied forms of wall art occupy the intersection of street art and public art; engaging, and sometimes, transforming the urban space in which they exist and those who use it. While murals are often conceived as a more 'permanent' form of painted art there has been a trend in recent years toward more deliberately transient forms of wall art such as washed-wall murals and reverse graffiti. These varying forms of public wall art are embedded within the fabric of the urban space and history. In this paper will explore the intersection of public space, public art and public memory in a mural project in the Irish city of Cork. Focussing on the washed-wall murals of Cork's historic Shandon district we explore the sympathetic and synergetic relationship of this wall art with the heritage architecture of the built environment and of the murals as an expression of and for the local community, past and present. Through the Shandon *Big Wash Up* murals we reflect on the function of participatory public art as an explicit act of urban citizenship which works to support community-led re-enchantment in the city through a reconnection with its past.

SUBTLE INSCRIPTIONS ON THE URBAN CANVAS

Public art can take three main forms: gallery art outside in which objects are placed in a land/urbanscape where there is no prior relationship between the piece and its location; where an object responds to its location in some way and becomes indivisible from its location; and public art which provides critical commentary (Mossop, 2001, p. 21-22). In many respects murals as a form of public art simultaneously reflect all three characteristics. Despite, or perhaps as a result of, their contribution to a sense of community and focus on changing relations with public space the creation (or destruction) of a mural can be an intensely political activity. There has been a great deal of scholarship and commentary on the politically-oriented painted murals of Northern Ireland which have figured as a prominent feature of the visual environment since the early twentieth century (Rolston, 2012). Collectively emblematic of the segregated and polarised working class areas of Belfast and elsewhere in Northern Ireland (McCormick and Jarman, 2005) these murals have become internationally recognised as exemplars of political wall art and have themselves been recast as a tourist attraction (Hill and White, 2012). By comparison to the Northern Irish murals, relatively little has been written about the contemporary or historic murals of the Republic of Ireland.

Murals can be a tool for space revitalization and inviting artists to work with the local community to create works in previously neglected, abandoned or overlooked spaces can reactivate and transform both communities and places. While murals are often conceived as a more 'permanent' form of painted art, there has been a trend in recent years toward more deliberately transient forms of wall art such as washed-wall murals and reverse graffiti. These varying forms of public wall art are

embedded within the fabric of the urban space they occupy and can contribute to the creation and re-creation of urban memories. In this paper we explore the intersection of public space, public art and public memory in a mural project in the Irish city of Cork.

Focussing on the washed-wall murals of Cork's historic Shandon district we explore the sympathetic and synergetic relationship of this wall art with the heritage architecture of Shandon's built environment and social and economic history. We also consider the citizenship processes at play in the production and consumption of the murals as an expression of and for the local community, past and present. Through these murals we reflect on the functions of participatory public art as both 'subtle inscriptions in the cityscape' (Sharp, Pollock and Paddison, 2005, p. 1008) and an explicit act of urban citizenship which works to support a 're-enchantment in the city' (Mossop and Walton, 2001, p. 9) through a reconnection with its past.

UNDERSTANDING MURALS AS PUBLIC ART IN PUBLIC SPACE

Public art performs a range of social, community and economic development functions (McCormick and Jarman, 2005; Grodach, 2009) and has the capacity to enhance or personalise public space and provide a vehicle for a community to express its identity and engage in civic dialogue. Public art, particularly through murals which focus on local themes, also has the ability to engender a sense of pride and community identity by contributing to cultural heritage and responding to local issues (Becker, 2004) and emphasising local uniqueness. Public art like murals can visually identify and define a community (Remesar, 2005, p. 7) and contribute to the creation of a sense of place that distinguishes a community from neighbouring streets and from comparable locations in other towns (McCormick and Jarman, 2005). Public art of this kind can also contribute to the revitalisation of an urban area and assisting in the stimulation of local economies and local economic regeneration and revitalisation through tourism and increased local investment (Becker, 2004; Grodach, 2009; Remesar, 2005). Public art can also help to manage public space and improve the existing urban visual landscape (Remesar, 2005, p. 7–8); murals for instance can reduce the proportional amount on new unsanctioned 'graffiti' (Craw et al, 2006). This process is not uncontested and shows the ways that public art can also establish unintended exclusionary boundaries (O'Callaghan and Linehan, 2007, p. 313) by defining who and what kinds of artistic expression do and do not belong in a given urban space (Schacter, 2008).

Perhaps the most important social functions of community-level cultural activities and public art like murals can be the re-establishment of community connection and interest in a given public space, or 'common ground where people carry out the functional activities and rituals that bind a community, whether it is in the normal daily routine or the periodic festivities' (Carr, Francis and Rivlin, 1993, p. ix). This may be enhanced by the fact that murals often exist at a human scale, at least in terms of connectivity, and have an inherent and tangible connection to their site. Public art and the process through which it is produced is able to create a sense of inclusion and generate a sense of

ownership which has the potential to forge new connections 'between citizens, city spaces and their meaning as places through which subjectivity is constructed' (Sharp, Pollock and Paddison, 2005, p. 1003). As a result of this connection with place, Pearson (2006, p. 120) notes that creating a mural is an act of generosity towards the built environment, as artists leave to posterity (or at least an extended period) an addition to the architectural fabric and collective memory of a place. However, rather than focussing on the painted murals to which Pearson refers, this paper considers the use of emerging wall art techniques which, while temporary in nature, are no less significant in their ability to contribute to community and connection with place.

Temporary murals include reverse graffiti and washed-wall murals which involve the creation of temporary art by deliberately removing dirt from a surface and leaving a clean trace behind (Truman, 2010, p. 8). Sometimes called artistic power washing, this process can involve the removal of existing and naturally accumulating urban dirt or may employ the application of a background screed onto a wall surface before a stencil is placed over it and power-washed to reveal images. This washed-wall technique was used to create the *Big Wash Up* murals in the Shandon district of Cork city, Ireland in 2009 which form the subject of this paper. Most murals represent or reflect the community in which they are situated (Becker 2004). As such, they are closely tied to their community and surrounding society. The following discussion contextualises the creation and consumption of the *Big Wash Up* murals within their local and historical context before critically considering the project through the lens of urban and cultural citizenship.

A CULTURAL HISTORY OF CORK AND THE SHANDON DISTRICT

Shandon is an inner-city district of Cork, Ireland's second largest city. Shandon is one of Cork's most historic and culturally significant districts. Shandon's architectural form includes a mix of buildings from the eighteenth to twenty-first centuries and boasts an eclectic mix of Georgian, medieval, Victorian and more modern architecture. Shandon boasts a number of keynote buildings which are integrated into the streetscape and architectural form of the area including: St. Anne's Church which features a clock-tower that dominates the skyline of Cork; the Firkin Crane with its distinctive circular shape; and the Shandon Craft Centre, housed in the former Butter Exchange building, which boasts an impressive entryway framed by four imposing Doric columns (figure 1).

Insert figure 1 here

Shandon's urban form is high density, but not high rise. It is built at the human scale. In keeping with the area's medieval origins the street pattern has remained largely unchanged since the 1600s and the principal thoroughfares have medieval origins. The district, once housing Cork's working class in its narrow lanes of small terraced houses, is now characterised by a mix of social and affordable housing, sheltered accommodation, private rentals and private ownership. Despite its

heritage value, Shandon and the centre of Cork became rundown (O'Callaghan and Linehan, 2007) from the 1970s onward, as a result of a number of factors. Principal amongst these was a lack of a coherent planning framework which led to under-utilisation, under-appreciation and ultimately under-investment in the area. In the absence of an effective planning and governance framework, calls for sensitive development, investment and regeneration of the area which would preserve its architectural character were often unsuccessful. This prompted a groundswell of activities directed by the local community, including residents, traders and artists. This movement was keenly aware of the importance of exploiting the area's tourism and economic potential while conserving its local heritage and architectural character (Cork Corporation, no date). Various groups, including the Shandon Area Renewal Association, formed organically with the intention of reinvigorating the area through volunteerism, active citizenry, art, design and better use of public space.

A CULTURE OF DEVELOPMENT

Irish local authorities attach significant importance to culture as a tool of development and it has assumed a major role in Irish spatial planning (Bayliss, 2004). Investment in the arts in Cork aimed at regenerating the Sharon area has included converting the former Butter Exchange to house the Shandon Craft Centre, which provided subsidised workshops for small-scale craft enterprises, and the redevelopment of the Firkin Crane as a performance venue. Cork is widely admired for its flourishing arts life, which attracts both locals and tourists (Murray, 1995, p. 149) including a vibrant calendar of annual festivals such as the Dragon of Shandon Samhain Parade, Cork International Film Festival and the Cork Jazz Festival among others.

There is a sense of civic pride in the cultural achievements of artists and art-workers from Cork, and a strong interest in experiencing and showcasing the artistic and cultural achievements of international artists (Murray, 1995, p. 161). This was reflected in Cork's selection as the 2005 European Capital of Culture (Binns, 2005). However, some Cork residents felt that the program privileged 'high' art rather than the kinds of cultural activities that they valued. In response, a number of activities were developed by local artists' collectives to support the official program in either a formal capacity or as supporting, fringe and underground projects. This can be seen as part of a broader attempt by some citizens 'to asset their "right" to have an input in how the[ir] city is both shaped and imagined' (O'Callaghan and Linehan, 2007, p. 322). In some respects this work was a natural extension of the community-led regeneration work undertaken in Shandon from the early-2000s which reflected the need to make the city appealing to its own inhabitants as well as tourists (Murray, 1995, p. 161).

WHAT IF… AND THE BIG WASH UP MURALS

Cork Community Art Link (CCAL) is one of the city's most prominent not-for-profit community art organisations. Based in Shandon, CCAL undertakes creative arts projects in partnership with

community and youth groups to create processes, interventions and art works in the local area. Prioritising working with groups who are disadvantaged or socially marginalised in their access to the arts and in their participation in making local and national culture, CCAL advocates access to the arts as both spectator and participant as a fundamental right that should be universally available.

CCAL inaugurated its annual *What if...* public art initiative in 2005 as part of Cork's European Capital of Culture program. Utilising a partnership model to engage communities the *What if...* program was designed to develop outdoor art works and activities which challenge the dynamics of public spaces and places (CCAL, *What if*, no date). The 2009 program was called the *Big Wash Up* and featured a series of temporary washed-wall murals showcasing Shandon's community and cultural history. The murals were launched on 27th June 2009 during the Shandon Street Festival. The walls of the Firkin Crane and the Butter Exchange building hosted some of the more spectacular murals (figure 2).

Insert figure 2 here

MEMORY COLLECTION CLINICS

Community consultation is a vital element in ensuring that public art is 'both for the people and by the people' (Remesar, 2005, p. 8). The recognition of a particular community and their association with a specific place are integral to this process of validation and inclusion (Sharp, Pollock and Paddison, 2005, p. 1008). While French artist Philippe Chevrinais from Artitillerie joined CCAL for the *Big Wash Up* project (Irish Street Art, 2009) it was also undertaken with the support and participation of a large number of local organisations including St Mary's Road Library, Northside Folklore Project, and Shandon Youth Club.

Research for the *Big Wash Up* focused on gathering information relating to Shandon's cultural history from local people to bring 'stories and memories of the area back to life' (The Firkin Crane, no date). Focussing on the area's cultural and economic history, the images were based on information collected during a week of consultation workshops, called 'memory collection clinics', held with the local community. The clinics were advertised locally through the library, residents associations, youth clubs, public notices, and CCAL's large local volunteer base. Interested community members shared their experiences and memories of the area over a cup of tea. These conversations and their impressions of historic local images were audio-recorded to provide a reference source to inform the stencil design process.

Accounts of events and characters from Shandon's contemporary cultural and folk history included stories of *shawlies* (poor, older women in lace shawls who often ran street stalls), *crubeens* (a traditional dish of pig's feet), *corner boys* (unemployed and often unmarried young men who congregated together for company and mischief) and the *buttera* (the Shandon Butter Exchange brass band which has existed since 1878 and continues to attract membership of all ages from school

children to retirees). Through this consultative process, the collective memory of a community inspired over fifty temporary images, each of which told a story of Shandon's cultural past and validated the history, lived experience and memories of the contributors.

CCAL also worked closely with children from local schools and youth centres and other community volunteers to design, create, cut and apply the stencils that formed the subsequent murals which were created using a temporary reverse graffiti technique. The technique involved applying a temporary black screed onto the walls before power-washing a stencilled image to reveal a clearly defined monotone image as shown in figure 3 (Hernandez, 2009). A video of this technique being applied is available at Hernandez (2009).

The creation of public art, like these murals, can work to integrate the community with the work of art by engaging people previously held at a distance from the artistic process to participate in its creation. Miwon Kwon has observed that 'sometimes this absorption of the community into the artistic process and vice versa is rendered iconographically readable' and can result in members of the community being able to 'see and recognise themselves in the work, not so much in the sense of being critically implicated but of being affirmatively pictured or validated' (Kwon, 2002, p. 95). This can occur at a conceptual level where residents may see people like them or to which they positively relate, or where they may even see themselves featured. This outcome was evidenced in the *Big Wash Up* where stencils of the faces of youth volunteers were featured prominently in the murals on the columns at the entrance to the Butter Exchange building. The young people's names, in their own hand-writing, were also included at the base of the columns (CCAL, *Big Wash Up,* no date).

Insert figure 3 here

THE CITY AS A SITE OF CITIZENSHIP

Public art can help to create space in which people can identify themselves by creating opportunities to reflect on the use of public spaces and how this can affect behaviour or actions within them (Sharp, Pollock and Paddison, 2005, p. 1004). Weber (2003, p. 7) has observed that murals in particular 'assert moral claims to public space, claims concerning the history, identity, and possible future of the surrounding area'. As such they can be used to foster social inclusion in the city and give 'expression to the multiple and shifting identities of different groups' (Sharp, Pollock and Paddison, 2005, p. 1006). This process of identity formation can be understood as an active process of citizenship in which identity and citizenship are co-constituting; citizenship guarantees an identity (Turner, 1993).

Citizenship can be understood as the set of political, economic, cultural and other practices that define a person as a competent member of a society, and which consequently shapes the flow of resources toward or away from them (Turner, 1993, p. 2). Public art offers communities a way to participate in the planning, design and creation of communal space (Becker, 2004, p. 6). Artists are in a unique position to support such transformative citizenship ideas through the opportunity 'to

intervene, to interact with the contemporary community, to research and reveal the past in a subtle and intuitive manner' (Sharp, Pollock and Paddison, 1995, p. 1008).

The considerate provision of public art requires close collaboration between artists and communities (Smith, 2005). Communities are made up of a variety of actors and groups, who often represent different interests. Community murals, like other forms of public art, can assert moral claims over public space and can speak to an area's past, present and potentially future history and identity (Weber, 2003). Public art can exert significant influence within communities and may provide positive expressions that galvanise actors or negative expressions that may be contested. Harnessing community involvement in the creation of public art can therefore be understood as a process of activating citizenship.

As the Shandon memory collection clinics demonstrate, the participatory creation of public art at the community level can also provide opportunities for socialisation and contact across different sections of the community and encourage greater understanding between groups and increase social cohesion (Bayliss, 2004, p. 502). Such a process is consistent with a transformative view of citizenship. Participatory processes, artistic or otherwise, founded on these transformative ideals do not ask participants to cast aside their individual identity and embrace a common and shared identity. Such a process allows a wider variety of understandings and experiences to become a resource for public deliberation and can provide the opportunity for all citizens to learn from each other (Cameron and Grant-Smith, 2005). As such, the goal of participatory art of this nature is not to present or promote a homogenised version of the community but rather to progress one which is sensitive to reflecting and responding to the diverse lived-experiences of others.

CITIZENSHIP AND THE PROCESS OF MURAL PRODUCTION

Notwithstanding its potential citizenship benefits, public art provision can be a contested and complex process. Common issues that are contested in the development of murals include conservation issues and image selection processes (Becker, 2004, p. 9). Early proposals for the Shandon murals were contested by some parties because the Firkin Crane and Butter Exchange building both have significant heritage value for Shandon and the wider city of Cork. Some Shandon residents and the Cork City Council were initially opposed to the walls of these buildings being used as a canvass for the murals fearing that they could damage or negatively impact on the aesthetic heritage of the buildings. CCAL were able to address these concerns because the murals were specifically designed to be low impact and temporary, leaving no discernible trace of their existence once removed. Paradoxically, some parties appeared to be far less concerned by existing graffiti on these buildings than by proposals for temporary and sanctioned art.

The image selection process also encountered some early resistance. CCAL sought to engage members of the Shandon community at an early stage in the development of the proposal and presented a suite of preliminary sketch-ups for the murals to the Shandon Area Renewal Association.

These designs featured triskele symbols. These designs were rejected on the basis that Celtic symbology was considered trite, over-used in Ireland and disconnected from Shandon's cultural and historical contexts. Although CCAL had presented these images only as an illustration of how the murals might be placed they were misinterpreted by some residents as being indicative of the final mural design. CCAL assured the concerned parties that the final design treatment for the murals would speak to directly to Shandon's history. As a result of these assurances and the comprehensive consultation process undertaken the proposal to develop murals was actively supported once it became widely known that the final murals would reflect scenes and characters uniquely associated with the area.

CITIZENSHIP AND THE PROCESS OF MURAL CONSUMPTION

The selection of an appropriate site for a public art project like a mural must take full consideration of a number of factors. These include spatial considerations, issues of cultural attachment and identity, and scale (Matossian, 2005). Like Somdahl-Sands' (2008) analysis of *Mission Wall Dancers* performance the *Big Wash Up* murals became a dialogue between the location of the murals (both geographically and architecturally), the subject matter, and the experiences and memories of those who participate in both the creation and consumption of the murals. The relevance of the murals did not only arise only from their connection with Shandon's rich architectural and cultural history, but also from their engagement with the local community which contributed to a sense of civic identity or citizenship at both a group and at the individual level (Somdahl-Sands, 2008, p. 329-330). Using the power of collective memory combined with existing social narratives of the site the murals fostered a sense of community and shared citizenship through a deliberate act of linking the past to the present.

It has been observed that graffiti artists take an active role in 'producing and constructing their lived-in surroundings' and consciously attempt to 'permeate their surroundings with their self-identity and personhood…an attempt to embody themselves in the very fabric of the city' (Schacter, 2008, p. 38). Indeed Schacter (2008, p. 50) suggests that this may be part of 'an overt tactic to reclaim parts of the city, to regain possession of the metropolis which they believe had been sequestered from them by big business and private property'. Perhaps something similar is at play in the *Big Wash Up* murals.

Murals, like graffiti, remind us that public art is political (McAuliffe, 2012). Graffiti and other unsanctioned wall art are often destroyed by painting over it in a conscious act of 'disappearance' (McCormick and Jarman, 2005). For instance, at the same time that Shandon was celebrating its past through the *Big Wash Up* murals, another mural commemorating a different aspect of Cork's history – the 1920 hunger strike death of former a Lord Mayor of Cork, Terrence MacSwiney – was being 'disappeared' by the Cork City Council (Indymedia Ireland, 2009). The *Big Wash Up* installation was developed from the site and its history, accounting for and taking advantage of the existing urban form. The murals can therefore be understood as site-specific art work focused on establishing "an

inextricable, indivisible relationship" between the art work and its location (Kwon 1997, p. 86). As such, the *Big Wash Up* project took great care not to erase prior 'art' such as graffiti and the existing graffiti could still be seen in place through the murals (Figure 4). This practice of assimilation of co-existence has also recently been practiced by commissioned artists who incorporated existing tags into murals immortalising great Irish writers on the walls of the Cork Opera House (English, 2013). Such a practice is reflective of an understanding of the place of public art in urban space and place as contributing to the palimpsest; not erasing the past but rather celebrating and building on. However, an important feature of a palimpsest as a multi-layered artefact consisting of multiple (re)inscriptions is that each layer both changes it while allowing it to stay the same.

Insert figure 4 here

THE LEGACY OF THE MURALS

Public art has the ability to simultaneously reclaim place while recognising the past. The process of mural production and design in the *Big Wash Up* built on the wealth of community assets in the Shandon area, most particularly the buildings and the people. Focussing on bygone people, practices and interactions, the murals were purposefully designed to celebrate the area's social and cultural past by communicating and connecting it to the present. Shandon's past is often viewed and discussed by residents with fondness, as a place full of characters, community and activity. The value of the murals was their ability to render this history visible and to validate previous lived experiences by communicating these realities to a contemporary audience of residents and visitors. The murals allowed Shandon's built environment to become a display space in and of itself and to celebrate its history and communicate rich details of its past to a contemporary audience through the process. They temporarily became another layer of the area's architectural fabric and re-inscribed historical people and customs on the contemporary urban form. In doing so, the murals were responsible for 'reinstating a presence in the landscape and recovering a lost history' (Sharp, Pollock and Paddison, 2005, p. 1006). Moreover, the imagery of the murals was informed by a process of 'memory collection', which relied principally but not exclusively on older members of the Shandon community, whilst younger members of the community actively participated in their creation and installation. This provided another inter-generational aspect of the project that complemented its other citizenship outcomes.

The stencilled images of the *Big Wash Up* murals encouraged viewers to imagine the detail and to further animate the portraits in their own minds. This process led to some unexpected outcomes, notably in the case of the large-scale images that were stencilled onto the four columns at the entrance to the Butter Exchange building. Some viewers reported being unsettled by these images the first time they saw them at night. This was because the area's low lighting caused some people to momentarily interpret the images as looming phantoms, surveying the streetscape and guarding the

entrance to the Butter Exchange. This outcome, though unanticipated, provided another talking point in respect of the murals and offered another layer of understanding and shared knowledge amongst the community. Like Lippard's observations on photographs, the murals in this context can be understood as 'ghosts or shadows' (1997, p. 56) concerned with 'memory—or perhaps about the absence of memory, providing pictures to fill voids, illustrating our collective memory. So they are an excellent means with which to trigger concern and soothe anxieties about history and place' (p20). However, this practice is contingent on commitment to the idea of community, for without it there is always the danger that the murals will simply be 'shadow texts' which are overly simplistic and promote misconception and myth (Simon and Eppert, 1997, p. 184). Walter Benjamin is often noted for his related observation that, 'There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one…we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim, that claim cannot be settled cheaply' (1999, p. 245–246). Through Benjamin and Lippard we can thus recognise that although cities are constant sites of change and that the contemporary is inevitably overlaid onto the past, if the contemporary city and its citizens fail to pay sufficient and appropriate tribute to its heritage, and 'we ignore the concept of community, it will come back to haunt us' (Chin in Lippard, 1997, p. 94).

Notions of community can be first and foremost honoured by including the community in decisions about the public art which is placed in and on it. Community-based and site-specific public art requires a relationship between the artist, artistic institutions, the community and the local site which is based on an understanding of the history of the area and the constituency of the art audience, the social relevance of the project, and the input of multiple stakeholders who 'end up collaborating with the artist to produce the work', thus the project 'in the end will have engaged the site in a multitude of ways and the documentation of the project will take on another life within the art world's publicity circuit' (Kwon, 1997, p. 100–101). Indeed the project website is replete with images of volunteers, young and old, cutting, creating, power-washing and posing by the murals (CCAL, *Big Wash Up,* no date).

The *Big Wash Up* murals involved the initiation of social dialogue and the participation of a community in depicting valued aspects of their culture. The project was intended to be temporary; designed to last for only one summer before being removed. However, the life-span of the murals turned out to be longer than originally intended and they were left in-situ for more than three years. The Shandon murals were ultimately allowed to fade away instead of being consciously and deliberately removed from public view. In this regard, the subtlety of their existence and eventual disappearance was analogous to the memories—and, indeed, people—they represented. They were ephemeral but vital, temporary but lasting, individual but common, negatives of the ghosts of Shandon's streets. They served their purpose by addressing an audience, reclaiming place and reproducing culture before fading away. In this regard, the life-cycle of the murals may be understood

as reflective of their content and aspirations and their unique presence and departure may be seen as another vital layer in the unfolding Shandon story.

The *Big Wash Up* can be also understood as a small part of an ongoing effort of community artistic endeavour within Cork which continues to this day with continued high levels of community and volunteer support. A recent expression of this community engagement in the production of relevant and site-specific art can be seen in the *Voices from Shandon* project which involved more than a thousand community volunteers and children designing and producing flags which were used as part of a temporary public art installation on the iconic St Anne's Church in June 2013. This textile-based project allowed participants to 'create their own visual voice through a creative exploration of flag making, symbolism and community' (CCAL, *Voices from Shandon,* no date). These projects, alone and as a collective, are not exclusively concerned with the history of the place but rather with its 'historical narrative as it is written *in* the landscape or place by the people who live or lived there' (Lippard 1997, p. 7).

WASHED AWAY BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

Cities are sites and places of change. As Barnes (2005, no page) notes 'the inhabitants, their lives and their territorial markings are temporary [and] the city is being continually rewritten—like a palimpsest—layer upon layer, never quite wiping the slate clean'. However, while the *Big Wash Up* murals principally depicted everyday scenes and characters from the past, they also spoke clearly to the present and a collective appreciation among the contemporary citizenry that Shandon's history is central to its present urban incarnation. The murals are an artistic expression of the human dimensions of the city and the fragile and tenuous place and temporary space that individuals hold within it. Further they are an expression of the city as 'a layered location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth. It is about connections, what surrounds it, what formed it, what happened there, what will happen there' (Lippard 1997, p. 7).

Emphasising the role that urban form can provide as a connection to the city and its citizens present and past the murals both reflected and created memories. The murals created art in public places and spaces that while not part of traditional art space within the city, could contribute to fashioning a connection between people's lives (past and present) and the urban spaces they inhabit. In this way the murals functioned as an 'enrichment of urban design through…familiarity and memory in perceptions and experiences of the city' (Mossop and Walton, 2001, p. 9). While the murals may be seen by some as being perhaps trite or playing too much to the nostalgia of older residents, this resurrection of the past could equally be understood as reflecting Lippard's (2000, p. 164) rehabilitation of nostalgia as a 'seamless and positive part of life' in the city. Similarly the murals can be understood as a 'welcome reprieve in the flow of everyday urban life' (Kwon 2002, p. 65) in which values like authenticity are reworked through site-specific community art to reinforce 'a coherent sense of historical and personal identity' (Kwon, 1997, p. 104) and an 'unearthing of

repressed histories…and the re(dis)covery of "minor" places so far ignored by the dominant culture' (Kwon, 1997, p. 105).

Locally-driven site-specific arts projects can contribute to community empowerment as planning, executing and enjoying such activities can counteract the exclusion of local residents from local urban decision-making process and can strengthen community institutions and volunteer groups (Bayliss, 2004, p. 502). The *Big Wash Up* provided participants with a licence to inscribe themselves and their history on the walls of their local community and to make their mark on the urban landscape. As a mural-filled space the walls both have memory and create memory, however, due to their temporary nature the *Big Wash Up* murals escaped the fate of obliteration by simply fading away. In many respects the murals can be understood as social history embedded in urban form and expressed through public art, however, the temporary nature of the washed-wall murals remind us of the temporary place that we too hold within the city.

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