Essays Exploring the Belfast Experience

The Belfast Workshop, Northern Ireland

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Right: The workshop participants in front of the SpringVale Training Center, a new vocational school in the center of the 'Peace Lines' area of Falls Road, Shankill Road and Springfield Road, and venue of the workshop.

SIGUS offers an umbrella for research support, workshops and courses focused on low income communities, stressing participatory method in promoting affordable and equitable housing. Established in 1984, SIGUS grew out of the rethinking of method, practice and teaching in the housing field driven by the concerns of the rapidly expanding informal sector in developing countries.

SIGUS is directed by Dr.-Ing. Reinhard Goethert, assisted by graduate research assistants from the Departments of Architecture and Urban Studies. In its activities it draws on faculty from the Departments of Architecture and Urban Studies at MIT, and from national and international agencies in exploring the new expanding professionalism.


SPRING VALE

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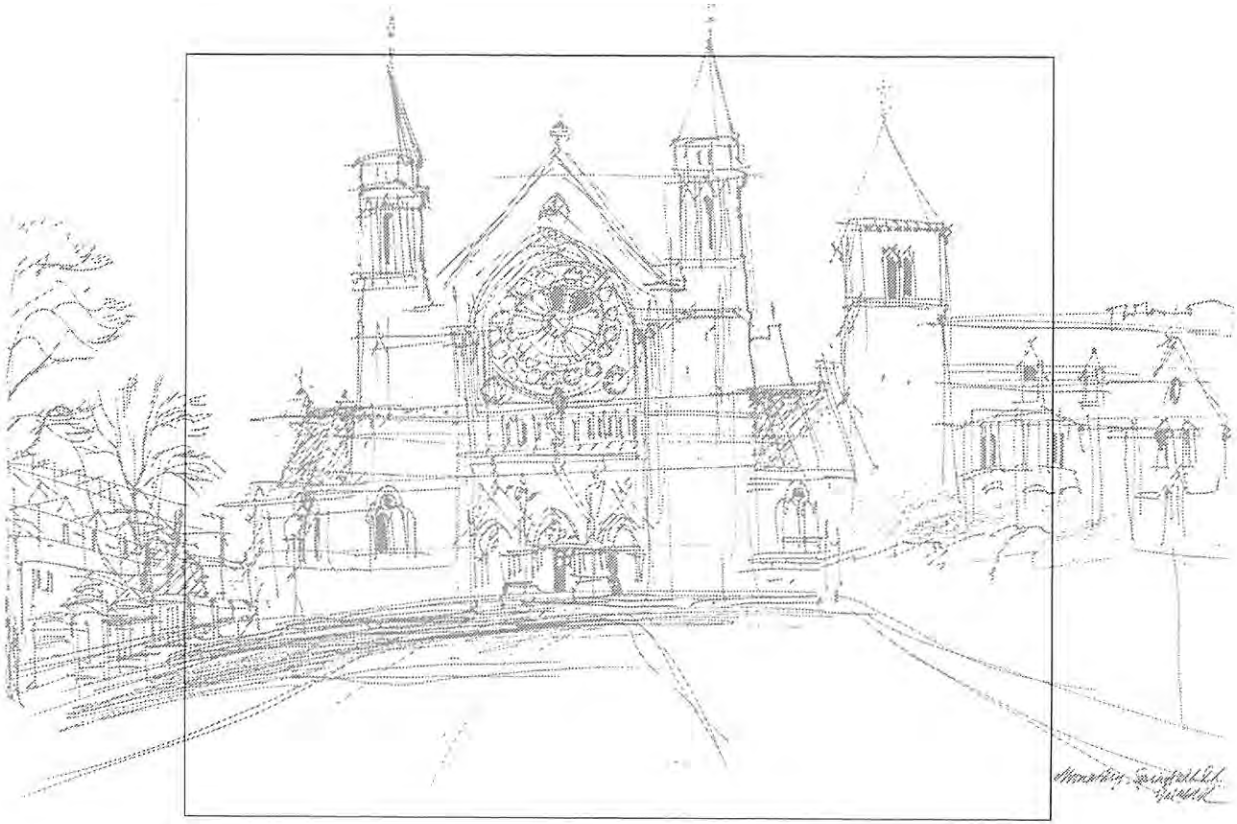
Jean Riesman is an instructor and a PhD candidate in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning.



FOREWORD

This booklet is a collection of impressions during a 2-week workshop in the divided and contested areas of West Belfast, Northern Ireland. Participants were drawn from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Oxford Brookes University, hosted by the Queen's University in Belfast and with counterparts from previous workshops from the Universidad Nacional de Ingenieria, Lima, Peru; Warsaw University of Technology, Warsaw, Poland and University of Natal, Durban, South Africa. The participants from MIT were asked to reflect on their experience and this booklet is the collection of their thoughts..

This workshop is the fifth in a series focused around the theme "'rebuilding vulnerable communities", organized by SIGUS and CENDEP – the Centre for Development and Emergency Planning, Oxford Brookes University. Previous workshops were held in Kingston, Jamaica, which targeted a very low income marginal community in the downtown; Delhi, India, which worked in a squatter community in the midst of a now-established housing project; Lima, Peru, which dealt with the complexities of deteriorating inner cities and the ongoing conflicts by the multiplicity of users and their often divergent interests, and Warsaw, Poland, exploring the transition to a market economy in the context of a massive housing complex. The report 'Rebuilding Communities' describes the workshops in more detail.

The key characteristics shared by all the workshops were the freedom and responsibility of the students to define their own areas of exploration and subsequently agendas for action, the need to involve the communities directly in their explorations, the real and immediate nature of the problems and opportunities discovered in field, and the integration of students from a variety of backgrounds and countries. The workshops deliberately expose participants to situa-

tions with a minimum of detailed study. The intent is to see and to explore seemingly intractable issues through fresh eyes, unencumbered by preconceived accepted 'wisdoms'.

The Belfast workshop proved to be the most problematic compared to the previous experiences. Perhaps because of the familiar European context with its high physical standards, participants had great difficulty in identifying issues that related to their background, particularly those in architecture and planning. Here were no squatter areas with shacks and lack of basic services, for Belfast was oversupplied and over-served with new housing and extensive support programs. There were no obvious villains nor clear shortcomings. Moreover, there was an overwhelming abundance of in-depth studies and a large number of agencies charged with development in the communities.

And despite all this the communities are in tension and turmoil.

Seven projects were ultimately identified by the participants and these were presented to the communities and agencies for discussion and comment. The projects were Community Redevelopment of the RUC Barracks; Regeneration of the Whiterock Industrial Park; A Community Development Bank; The Ahlund Commission: A Way Forward for Policing and Security in Northern Ireland; Strengthening Youth Relations to Build Trust; A Sports Technology School; Mechanisms to Improve Housing in Beechmount; and Community and Identity: A Look at the Clonard Area and its Redevelopment.

The workshop euphoria was shattered on the last day by a bombing in London declaring the end to the sectarian ceasefire of 25 years. And with it, the innocence of the workshop was ended.

— Reinhard Goethert

A short guide to terminology

Unionists: *Those desiring to remain as part of Great Britain; primarily Protestant-identified.*
Loyalists: *Those desiring to remain as part of Great Britain and willing to take up arms to do so; primarily Protestant-identified.*
Nationalists: *Those desiring to unite with the Republic of Ireland; primarily Catholic-identified.*
Republicans: *Those desiring to unite with the Republic of Ireland and willing to take up arms to do so; primarily Catholic-identified.*
Orangemen: *Another term for Unionist, often used in reference to the annual parades celebrating the victory of William of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne; the parades often have provoked partisan violence.*

IRA: *Irish Republican Army, one of the Republican paramilitary.*
Provos: *After 'Provisional'; considered the dominant splinter group within the IRA.*
UVF: *Ulster Volunteer Force, one of the Loyalist paramilitary organizations.*
RUC: *Royal Ulster Constabulary, the police force in the North, bureaucratically separate from the British Army; at 93 percent Protestant, considered to have anti-Catholic and anti-nationalist biases.*

The Troubles: *The sectarian violence between Protestants and Catholics in the North of Ireland since 1969.*

Peace wall, peaceline, interface: *The barriers built between Protestant and Catholic neighborhoods in Belfast since 1969.*

Shankill Road Area: *Protestant and Loyalist neighborhoods in West Belfast.*
Falls Road/Springfield Road Area: *Catholic and Nationalist neighborhoods inWest Belfast.*

Belfast: A Personal Journal

Sunday, January 28, 1996

...We were originally supposed to meet the group from Oxford Brookes today, but they aren't getting here until later, so I had the bulk of the day to myself. I wandered down to the Falls and the Shankill....Neither street was marked until you got way into the neighborhood, away from the center of town, which was odd....But I also saw the new high rise at Divis Flats, and the kerbstones painted red, white and blue, the tricolors, the political and sectarian graffiti on both sides. But otherwise, the neighborhoods were strikingly normal. Sure, they were urban and obviously public housing, but they were lovely homes, with quiet side streets, children playing, people chattering and walking. Except at the border. The "peace line" turns West Belfast into a kind of maze, since you can't cross the streets and they dead end in places you don't expect. Its concrete, corrugated metal and barbed wire, more than 20 feet high, and on the Protestant side, more than half of the homes were empty and boarded up....It was just great, all in all. It made it all seem real. It wasn't like "coming home", but it wasn't like going through a war zone, either. I'm glad I went and saw it myself, before I get the sanitized version when we go out as a group.

Catherine Preston is a second year student in the Master of City Planning Program.

Monday, January 29, 1996

Right, well, we've just spent about 2 hours with Gary, a lad from Youth

Speak (a peer education group), getting a guided tour of Woodvale and the Shankill. It was really fascinating listening to him talk about the area in which he grew up and the times, events and people who affected him. He showed us the middle class estates where kids throw stones over the wall, the political head quarters, the history centers, where this bomb went off, where this murder occurred. Both kids and older folks stopped Gary just to say "howyeh" to him. He told us about friends who were in the paramilitaries, and we saw the RUC armored rovers. But the problems really seem to be "normal poor" problems to a large extent, where the other groups are just the scapegoats....Its so sad, and so entrenched. And it was amazing, the ignorance of the other side, even among community workers. Gary was asked by one of the Oxford lads what "saoirse" meant, and despite having grown up around posters proclaiming it, Gary didn't know it meant freedom. I mean, if they had even a little bit of Irish history in school, he would know from "Saorstat Eireann" that the post-independence Republic was the Irish Free State. We talked about it afterward, and a lot of folks found the neighborhood unsettling, even creepy, but though it was a bit depressing, it is so much more normal than I expected, the helicopters and patrols didn't bother me as much as the "Kill All Taigs" graffiti. But I guess I am a bit odd. :)

Tuesday, January 30, 1996

Just got back from dinner with everyone at The Greek Restaurant - a tiny, six table affair owned by Northern Irish Protestants - celebrating the birthday of one of the Oxford girls. The rambunctious, joyous mood provided a real contrast to the rest of the day, which we spent with the Housing Executive. They gave us a history of the executive and of the population and housing in Belfast, then took us on a tour of the public housing around the city and in particular in the "interface" areas. We all seem to agree that housing is not the real problem here - the Execu-

tive has shown that it can build quite lovely estates. But there is no room for expansion in the Catholic areas - and the new houses, to meet fitness standards, are about twice the size of those they tear down. And the Protestants, even though they aren't using their land, are unwilling to give it to Catholics. So the Catholics housing stock is older and poorer than the Protestants, and the lines are not going anywhere - have even been institutionalized! Not only have millions of dollars been spent to build and landscape these monstrosities (offensive not to the eye, but to the soul), but they have a planning manual on them! The houses on either side are bricked up or have been torn down. Apparently an experiment with building the walls as back to back homes failed - ending in riots and burning. I know there's a reason - but I don't like it and it bugs me that the bureaucrats' attitudes are "solving the Troubles and territorial disputes are not our problem." I also find myself increasingly irked by the ignorance of the group, who seem to be illustrative of how this situation has been pushed to the back of our collective conscience. However, the ignorance is good for me, because it reminds me of my bias and shows up miscommunications. I think the best comment of the day came from a South African student who had come to understand that the problems here were far more entrenched than in his own country....The head of the INLA was killed today while we were just a couple of blocks away. They believe by his own. It just goes on and on.

Wednesday, January 31, 1996

...[The manager of the New Hill Community Centre] really feels that the walls are a necessity right now. The provide a "security" feeling that allows the communities to build themselves up. Only when they are individually developed can the societies grow together... She sees real, lasting peace a generation away,

since to boost confidence, raise without prejudice and to disarm, etc. will take at least 20-30 years. And when those mental barriers are at last down, she said, the communities themselves will tear down the peace lines....

Friday, February 2, 1996

...We spent most of our time, thought, at a day centre for the mentally ill. The centre, which serves an area with about 11,000 people, has 111 members and a waiting list of many times that. Most suffer from schizophrenia, anxiety or depression, though the depression is often attributable to alcoholism. There is little stigma left about these mental illnesses, the manager said. People understand trauma-induced schizophrenia and a majority of the adult population is either on valium or prozac. Its good to know that there are facilities like this where people can get help, but unsettling to know there are so many people who need it. Should not surprise me, I suppose. Twenty-five years of shell-shock, three generations of unemployment. That said, it is an awfully large problem, one which makes solving conflicts or even getting stable employment difficult....

Monday, February 5, 1996

...One group spent today at the British Army Airfield hearing their side of the story. I was really struck by how many of them jumped at the chance to buy into the explanation and justification of their government's presence here. Some felt that we have been irresponsible in how much we have listened to the Nationalists. Others came back with a more balanced view but still were not much cynical about the military. There were apparently told that the Army's role in Northern Ireland was not at all political and it seemed that at least half of them swallowed that. Patriotism is a funny thing, I guess. Perhaps they are as biased as I am, after all.

Wednesday, February 7, 1996

Good day yesterday. Met with Kevin, a community activist we've been dealing with for the past week, to discuss plans for the RUC barracks. Kevin lives right across the street from the barracks and to make it even more interesting, he is a devout Socialist (bust of Lenin on his TV table) and an INLA man who has spent time in Portolaoise Gaol. He was fascinating to talk to, though he wasn't able to give much advice about funding. He took us on a walk around the site and up the hill to get a view of it. We soon became aware that we were being followed/ monitored by a helicopter, which made us very nervous about taking photos, despite Kevin's assurances. Coming down, a half dozen RUC Rovers passed us and entered the barracks and then we heard a loud report which called all of us to attention as, thinking at first that it was a gunshot, we jumped about 3 ft in the air.

Friday, February 9, 1996

Well, I wish I had written about our presentations yesterday, when the mood was hopeful and forward-looking. That is no longer the case and now one wonders if what we did matters at all....Today, I went up the Whiterock Road to meet with the mural artist Mo Chara, aka Gerard Kelly. He told me about being in prison (for car bombing with intent) and being told to paint Mickey Mouse and such. Instead, he got a book of Celtic mythology and began to do Celtic designs. Then during the hunger strikes of 1980-1, he got the incentive to start doing murals (loyalists had been doing them since 1917, though Nationalists were barred from doing so) and stood up to the authorities who would try to intimidate him, even though the murals might be painted over the next day. Anyway, he wanted to talk to me about the contacts with the Irish-American business community because he has come up with an idea for a small enterprise. He wants to do Celtic design carved front doors, custom and standard, for domestic and export trade. I

saw the prototype and it was brilliant, and he has fitted it out with Celtic hardware. He figures he could employ 6 people to start and eventually as many as 20. In an area where unemployment runs between 80%-95%, 20 jobs are not to be sneezed at....

Which I guess brings us to today's disaster. Coming out of a movie theatre, we passed a TV crew interviewing a woman at a bus stop. I thought I heard them ask, "Have you heard the cease-fire has ended and what is your reaction?" I said I hoped I had heard that wrong. I hadn't. A bomb exploded in London's East End this evening injuring and perhaps killing many people. It was preceded by a message from the Provisional IRA saying that the cease-fire was over and including the ID password of the Army Council to prove that it was them, though there's speculation that this represents a division within the Provos.

I am so angry and frustrated. Yes, it was going slowly and painfully but we were closer to peace than we have been in 25 years - perhaps than we have ever been. It kills me to think that I may have been with people this week who knew that this was going to happen. I hate that my first reaction was "I'm glad I am leaving tomorrow." I feel like I am running away. The barricades and checkpoints are back already. The RUC are wearing flak jackets and the Army may be here by morning. We hope that there will be no rioting or revenge killings tonight, but we have no reason to have confidence in that. I could not walk tomorrow to the places I walked today and for the last two weeks, and know that I was safe. All the work that we, and the communities and many others, have done over the past 18 months may be lost, back at square one. Gerry Adams won't get one more concession without decommissioning. Clinton may get crucified for this. When we got here, few people had confidence in the peace process, and we had not faith that anything would change. By Thursday, a lot of us, including some we worked with in the community, had hopes. Now there is just sadness, frustration and despair. I can't

put an up note on this. Right now, everything feels impossible, that they will never learn to live together. I hope I am wrong but how can you have confidence in that when the city is at war again?

Epilogue

It is now February 23 - two weeks since the bombing. There is perhaps more reason to be hopeful now. The communities of Ireland and the UK have in loud voices proclaimed that they want their peace back, at whatever price. They seem united on this alone, even in the face of another bomb scare and a bus bombing since. There is some disagreement on how to go about it, of course, but there *is no* question that everyone wants the cease-fire reinstated. One woman told the press, "I would talk to Satan himself if it would bring peace to our country." This is a truly Christian attitude - one which whether you are Catholic or Protestant,

What's Happening?

It's 2 am and we need to wait an hour for a taxi from the ferry.

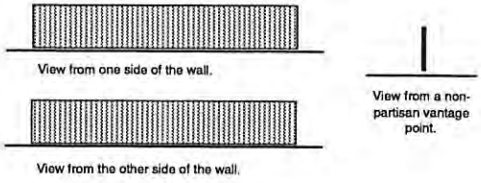
It's Saturday night and the streets are packed with laughing and screaming young people dressed in their best, all vying for taxis. This is not the first image I expected to see in the war-weary city of Belfast, Northern Ireland.

The next morning my first impression quickly changed as we walked over red white and blue painted curbs, past a jail-like compound, a no-man's wasteland, then past another walled compound (this one actually turned out to be a children's hospital) and past a third, the police barracks, with its corrugated iron walls, surveillance cameras, barbed wire, and bomb-deflecting wire meshing. This journey through the Protestant neighborhood we were staying in to the Catholic neighborhood in West Belfast we were to be meeting in was our first step into what the Irish call 'their troubles'. One step further (actually, one block further) we were faced with a nine meter high steel wall. Despite seeing these 'peace walls' that rive the city and the bricked up neighborhoods that line the walls, I had hope on the first day. I met a couple of the people that still inhabit these neighborhoods, community organizers Billy and Kevin. They spoke at length about their hopes for an inter-community relationship—allowing the two communities to work together for their mutual benefit—for instance, solving insurance problems shared by all those living near the peace lines, or dealing with issues such as drugs, education, jobs, and the effects of brutalism.

Kristin Little is a first year student in the Master of Architecture program.

From our vantage point, we could see both sides, both literally—we had the liberty to explore the neighborhoods on both sides of the walls, whereas most of the people we spoke with had never had the opportunity to see anything on the

other side of the wall—and figuratively—most of us had no prior knowledge of or alliances with either side. Billy and Kevin, we found out after our talk, are from opposite sides of the wall. Billy is Protestant. Kevin is Catholic. Both are prominent community organizers. They had never met before that day with us although they only lived a block apart.



The first group I was in looked at the idea of organized teenage peer group facilitation. We came up with a plan to facilitate one of the boys' groups on the Protestant side. The idea was to introduce the group to a method called "action planning" by actually structuring the meeting as an action planning meeting. Basically, it is a formulaic framework of questions that lead a group to form a plan of action to accomplish their goals, whatever they may be...more things to do at night, an outing with another group, meetings with a Catholic peer group, etc. It demonstrates an organized way to quickly meet their goals. Two of us went the next week to facilitate the meeting but unfortunately, none of the boys showed up.

The second project we worked on gave me hope. Two peer groups—one from the Catholic side, one from the Protestant side—had begun having meetings together. The problem, though, was that the Protestant group was going to be without a meeting place while their youth center was being rebuilt and the ties forged by the youths of the two communities were at risk. Our group set

out to actually find them a space to meet in and perhaps design it to fit their needs. After much footwork, however, we found out from another party that they weren't really in need of a space. Money for an interim meeting space had been allocated in the new plan budget. Oh well. I can't blame them for wanting to make doubly sure they got a space, but it would have been helpful to know in advance.

Something else we did not know in advance happened tragically the day after our final presentation.

"100 injured in bomb blast" shouted the papers. Everything evaporated instantaneously. The cease-fire ended and the community organizers turned into fighters, Billy emerged in the papers as a killer, the youth groups became irrelevant, the gay pubgoers dried up, and the streets emptied only to be filled up with machine gun-toting police and their iron-clad Land Rovers .

It's 2 am, the night before our departure. I just woke up to screaming and sirens. Goodbye Northern Ireland. My heart is heavy.

The streets were designed for army and police land rovers.

Gary, an 18 year old peer educator remembers seeing a man in black stretched out with a rifle along the front of the youth center. The center still has bullet holes in the windows.

I learned a lot from the mixture of people in the workshop—everyone from minefield clearers in Cambodia to aid workers in Rwanda.

I felt cruel when people's hopes rose thinking that we could do something to help them. Perhaps they realized that we couldn't help much, but perhaps not.

I thought our presentations were not professional enough.

We were definitely noticed as outsiders in West Belfast.

The English students were at particular risk in the Catholic areas so we

did the talking for them at some points.

I learned much about group work—a very important skill to possess, especially in the field of architecture.

I was attracted to those projects which seemed "doable" in the amount of time we had in Belfast. I wanted to contribute something tangible because it seemed as if our efforts would not be taken any further once we were gone.

The workshop introduced me to what I am hopefully going to be doing in the future—working with community members, leaders, and government agencies.

I made connections with others who will be working in the same field.

It was less about architecture and more about people and politics. I couldn't contribute much architecturally anyway. I have only studied it for one semester.

I also explored some ideas I would like to incorporate into my ken.

Trees and Cities

The leaves from the tree fall off, die and transform into food for the tree itself, that, at the same time grows, reproduce more leaves which will fall die and fed. But what happens if the tree gets ill? This process will be affected and if it is not attacked, the whole tree is in danger to die. The same thing happens with a city which is formed by a complex group of elements closely related to each other as a whole. If one of these elements brakes down, the whole system could fail. That is why we need to plan the city with all the necessary tools to grow and work by itself. If an element gets ill or dies its our responsibility to fix it or replace it to maintain the city going.

Belfast, an old industrial city, seems now an abandoned one. Not peaceful but a tired city. Tired of violence and segregation, tired of control and lack of freedom, craving for an opportunity to stand up by itself.

Wandering through the streets of West Belfast we found some nice brick houses and by its side as a memory of the guerrilla, skeleton of similar ones, as a consequence a lot of construction and demolition was taking place, even houses with some quality problems were being replaced by new ones. Every district was surrounded by the peace lines, big massive walls dividing the Catholic from the Protestant, with gates which in case of an attack will close and block the entrance to the area. Military bases were located every now and then in between residential areas. It was a stressful tour, even downtown Belfast didn't feel as lively as other places. It gave me the impression of an inverted place, where everything was taking place in the interior of the buildings as a way of neglecting what was happening in the outside.

Maria Elosua is a second year student in the Master of Architecture Program.

After presentations from government agencies, community leaders and

local people we got a better (but I wouldn't say simple) idea of what the situation was like.

The housing projects are being developed by resources from the government and leased to the people as a government benefit. People with economic resources can buy them if they want, but for the unemployed, (about 60% of the people of this area) it is impossible to afford one.

For how long will the government sustain this problem? They are not even sure if they will have the resources for the next 10 years, and, what is going to be the reaction of the people if suddenly the government stops or reduce the production of housing?

The lack of job opportunities is not the only cause for unemployment, the government benefits for the unemployed contributed to this situation. They are more attractive than a salary of a small job.

Even though they have plans for future external investment in the city, it seems that the violence is retarding this process. Industries need the political situation to stabilize. But how can you end with a problem that derives from centuries ago? How can you stop this ancient segregation?

While some governments invest in new computerized systems to communicate, Belfast is investing in big large walls that avoid the visual communication between Catholics and Protestants. These "peace lines" built to provide security to its inhabitants reinforce territoriality and racism.

Land and property values change from one side of the peace line to the other. The Catholics being minority have a disadvantage, they are not able to move as easily as the Protestants, and their suburb, as a consequence of this restriction, is much more dense. This demand of land in the Catholic side brings prices higher than the "other side" (as the locals refer to their neighbors).

What was happening? I was supposed to address housing problems, but here housing was definitely not the problem, for me, a citizen of a developing country this people didn't seem poor at all, and the houses they had were as middle income houses of Mexico. I listened quietly and terrified how apartment buildings were demolished because the disapproval of the people towards them and I just couldn't believe it. In my point of view the replacing of old houses for new ones was a strategy to change the image of the city a psychological intervention but Belfast needs a motor, something that will bring the whole city alive again. Something that will make the city-self sustainable helping it to revitalize.

Certain of my vocation of becoming an urban designer and planner I stood there in the middle of a sea of problems uncertain of what my tasks should be.

What was my limit? Where does the planner's area start and where does it stop? And if the planner does not fix this situation who will? Is the planner a politician, a designer, an economist, an anthropologist? A social worker? Or all of the above? Suddenly you are in danger of transforming into an idealist. But there is no time for that, there is no time to address each problem from the outside, a planner must focus and propose a solution, a small intervention that will make great changes.

Fiery Shadows, Shadowy Future

Belfast is a city of coal-burning establishments clustered about the hub of what was once one of the world's leading seaports. Its rapid growth and development in the nineteenth century are evident in its grand urban architecture, and also in its pattern of settlement and development along the major routes leading outward from the city.

These neighborhoods, most of which grew up around the major factories of the district as workers' housing, formed a coherent fabric that became an identifiable characteristic of Belfast. Generations of families grew up in the same street, if not in the same houses, as their parents had, and as a consequence, these areas often took on the characteristics of small villages, centered around local shops, schools, and the work-supplying factory.

In this aspect, Belfast has shared a common thread with Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester, and other northern British industrial cities. By the late 1950s, as Britain's industrial prowess had begun to wane and these cities had all entered into a slow but steady decline, Belfast was one of the most severely handicapped. As one industry closed its doors, none came to fill its void. The actual reasons behind this acute economic decline are manifold, intricately intertwined in both the politics of the day and the history of the region as well as with the real industrial slow-down of the post-war era. The net result was a massive loss of jobs to Belfast, along no party lines. The lack of work, coupled with a rising social awareness of the ingrained prejudices of the society, fired a dramatic civil rights movement, which rose to violent conflict between concerned parties in 1969. It was just prior to this time that large proportions of Belfast's working class were becoming more or less permanently depen-

Rebecca Hegarty is a first year student in the Master of Architecture program

dent on social welfare programs, as there was no work, and little prospect of this situation changing with the city, as well as much of Northern Ireland, involved in such destructive violence.

I came to Belfast knowing roughly the history of its settlement, development, and decline and having some idea of what were the salient issues behind the troubles of the last 25 years or so. For the most part, I was not shocked by the physical sensations I found in the city: I had visited Belfast in 1990, before the cease fire, and had seen the soldiers, the helicopters, the portable roadblocks, and the peacelines. I was somewhat prepared for the eerie sensation of a city at war, and for a public which reflected this sobering mix of anger, fear and repentance.

I suppose what I was really not prepared for was the level of convolution we, as architects (or as community developers or as planners or as whatever we were) were exposed to from the start. On a personal level, it was pleasing to see such a strong statement from the people, but its transmission was disturbing. Each person we met with, whether public official or private citizen, had both a public and a private mask: there were the issues of politics in general, and then the motivations behind them.

This chimaeral existence drove home quite dramatically the point that no issue in Northern Ireland is politically neutral. It also revealed a complexity which was not immediately apparent; in fact the breadth and depth of the great abyss between us and them was so large, at times it seemed the less we knew about the whole situation the more we could accomplish in our projects.

Ignorance, however, is never the best policy. Using discretion in revealing how much you know is wise and advisable, but entering into a potentially volatile situation with no information is pure folly. I believe most people would agree with me on this point, since in general there was a desire voiced by many for additional background information. Had our goal in Belfast really been to develop

and examine a housing agenda, then perhaps this need for information would not have been so great; the potential for conflict would have been greatly diminished. But it became readily apparent to me that I was not in Belfast to look at housing schemes and learn from Europe's largest landlord. Belfast does not have a housing problem. Belfast has a great many problems, some of which are housing related, but many of which reach far beyond the issues of housing alone.

What I took back from Belfast was immeasurable. The things I saw and heard, the people I met, will never be forgotten. However, I was disappointed in the direction and seeming simplicity of what came out of the workshop. Mainly architectural issues were addressed in the final presentations – only as peripheral possibilities were other issues brought up. In fact few, if any of the final projects, conveyed the sensitivity or the complexity needed to achieve any real goal in Belfast. For the past 25 years, Belfast has been undergoing urban renewal and redevelopment under the Housing Executive and what this has yielded is largely unimpressive. Yes, these projects have met the required goal of providing modern housing to the urban poor, but what beyond that? What other burning issues have these projects addressed? On these issues – crime, violence, fear, disjunction, education, employment (the list goes on) – these projects have not done much. They have failed on a large scale to maintain or revive the social fabric of communities.

The results of these one-sided approaches can be found all over Belfast. Some are more successful than others, but most only look at one piece of the puzzle. Our project was not to join the Housing Executive, for they have more than adequate design resources. Our project was to attempt to bring more solutions into community development and planning, to address issues which govern society and communities and to question the ways and means of achieving a not so simple end, a road we and others have started down, but which still has yet to know its destination. ❦

From Architecture to Community

The weather in North Ireland in winter was not pleasant, but it was cloudy and rainy. Although the weather in Oxford was worse – foggy. I felt more depressed in Belfast. I would like to write my impression of Belfast from architecture to community.

In the city of West Belfast, it seemed to me that the image of the city was consistent. One saw brick row houses with two-side-sloped roof and with chimney stacks on which chimney pots were lined. These elements were repeated everywhere and prompted an impression of an industrial city. One interesting thing I thought was that even though the same material and structure were applied to almost all houses, the residents tried to differentiate their houses from others. For instance, in Spring Field Park, all the houses were identical. Those were two family houses with two separate entrances on the front, chimney stacks at the center of the roof, white framed windows, and front yards, but the inhabitants added other elements to their houses such as projected windows, curved windows, designed doors, entrance porch, and so forth. Although the street life was not very visible, I could feel people's lives. It seemed to me that the chimney had an image of 'home' for them; in Kevin's house there was an electric heater which was an imitation of a fireplace.

I was kind of looking for people's activities of how people were living and communicating with each other in a community especially in the Upper Springfield area since the surrounding situation was too overwhelming: RUC barracks, peace walls, fences, and a helicopter hovering over us. In my observation, there seemed to be no particular places where people could meet and chat in a community, or even on the streets it was hard to see

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people's communication. Although it was true that there were seventy two community organizations in the area, it was difficult to see those explicit activities. Of course, Irish pub played an important role in people's communication but it was one of the issues that there were no such places for young people. It seemed to me that people's perception of the realm of public was different from that of the U.S. and a little bit distorted by the unusual situation. In addition, there did not seem to be enough park or plaza. Although there was a Business Park, it was not functioning well.

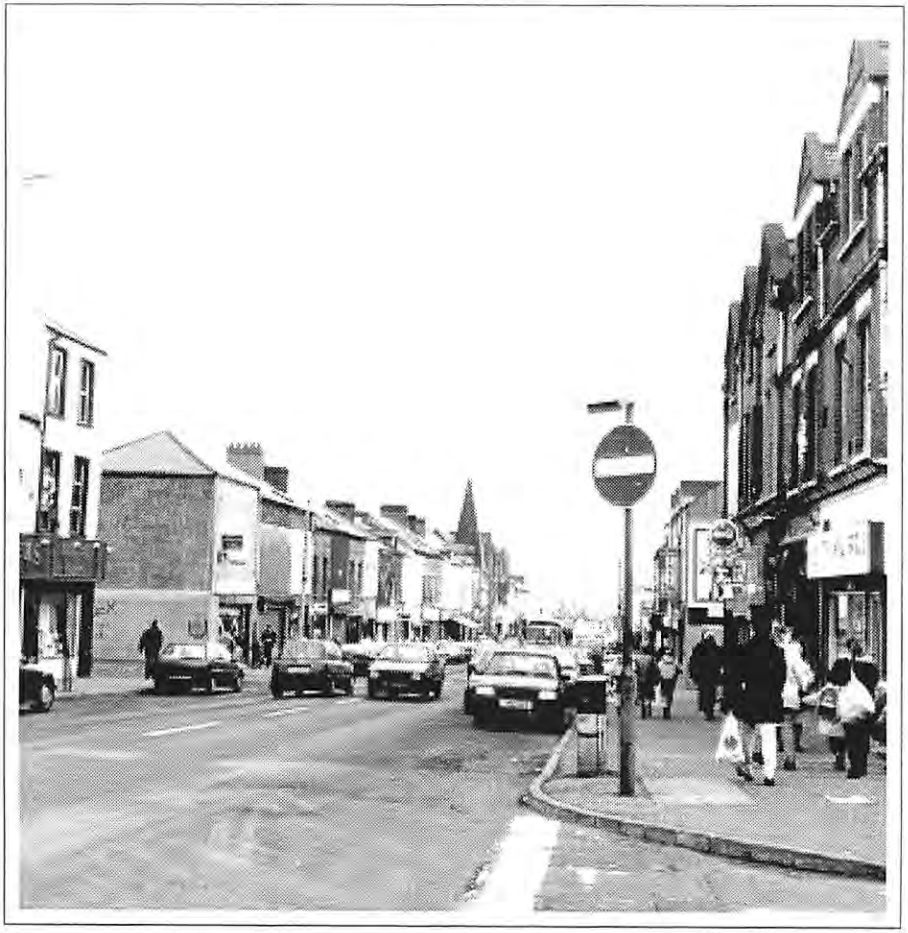
What I was amazed at, in terms of a community, was that some people had never been outside from their community, which was probably 10 to 20 hectares, for fifty years. I thought that there could be a dangerous situation in which people might become shortsighted toward the outside world in such a complicated society. I could imagine a closed society because it has been said that Japan is a closed country on account of its geometrical feature, an island, and its history. However, the case in Belfast seemed to be much more severe since young people might have prejudiced views toward the outside world. I agree to the idea that children from both sides, Catholic and Protestant, can go outside to learn together and come back, hoping that young generation can lower the peace walls. Learning abroad gives us a good opportunity to see and think about our country objectively. Even internet communication would not be good enough to help them widen their views.

Through the workshop, I was forced to ask to myself what an architect could do for people and the community. It seemed to be hopeless in a way. Some architecture students from Oxford Brookes believed that there was no room for architects. Is it true? I do not buy it. Concerning architects' role, Tommy Holland from Upper Springfield Resource Center told us about the redevelopment project between Ballymurphy and Springhill, which used to hold the festival every year

and would become a park at the end of this year. According to Tommy, a couple years ago, an architect from Spain, Gabriel (to my memory), came, designed the park with students from The Queen's University for two weeks, and proposed it to the community. People from the community were excited about the proposal and approved it to be implemented. What Gabriel and the students made was a plan and model, which I saw was not professionally made but good enough to understand their concept. It would be very important to think about media or tools which could help an architect communicate with non professionals. In this kind of situation, conventional way of designing in which the quality of presentation is considered the most important may not be the best solution. Here, speed and efficiency is required. I still do not have an answer to what the role of an architect should be but it is necessary for an architect to open his/her mind to communicate with people.

Related to an architect's role, the discussion about what attitude one should take as a developer was interesting. I thought that it would be impossible to know what was correct and what was not in such a situation of political complexity, because the majority's or the government's opinion is not always correct. For instance, the opinion of what Japan did to Asian countries during World War II is not consistent for each political party or even each politician. One needs to distinguish truth from its interpretation.

I am not sure how much I was able to understand the situation in Belfast. It seems to me that the more I try to understand it, the more questions arise. The situation is also too delicate to argue about. Apart from the serious situation in Belfast, there were great natural resources – rough and harsh. I wonder that the situation would have been different, were the weather more pleasant like that of California. ❦



The Unveiling of the Urban Village

I went ignorant and I returned more aware and emotional about the living environment. I arrived in Belfast and encountered the unexpected. It was a Sunday when I truly began to see the city in its damp weather setting. United Kingdom has always had a notorious global reputation for its depressing weather. The rumors could not be closer to the truth.

I had arrived the day before and the only recollections I had had were the quick drive through the city center, on the airport bus. The city center seemed to be lively and bustling with avid shoppers like in any metropolitan city. The Docks were enormous and its intimidating size seemed a reassuring sign of a healthy economy. However timing seem to make a whole world of difference, and what I had first seen was a disguise of what I was to learn in the next few days.

Sunday was an extraordinary day, the city looked stripped of any life forms. One could almost believe that the city was desolated, the city had shut off. People seemed to be somewhere else or maybe in their homes. It was a striking change to what I had been used to all my life, having grown up in large metropolitan states like Seoul, Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong. Sundays was my day out in the town, when one could walk around with family or friends, relaxed and on occasions treating oneself to a good dinner or some fashionable outfits. These people did not have this opportunity because all the shops were closed. There were few restaurants that opened late but in general the level of activity was minimal. That night we had out first contact with our host, Professor Tom Woolley of Queens University, Director of the Architecture Department. He greeted us, welcoming us to Belfast. However I was still unprepared for what was to come next.

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The next day the entire group students and faculty from Oxford and MIT gathered at the Springvale Training Center. This was a new complex sponsored by the government designed to train people of all age groups whilst not discriminating any race, creed and religion. We were scheduled to have a conference with various community leaders and the director of the training center. The hospitality was impeccable, there was a constant offering of coffee, tea and biscuits (an Englishman's necessity it seemed). During the conference several local community leaders were present and we were privileged to hear of their view of the situation in their 'territories' in West Belfast. We were placed into random groups where we could have a deeper conversation with these guests. In my group it was interesting to have one member from each of the two distinctly divided 'sides'. There was a representative from the Shankill Community Group, Irene who was a loyalist (also could be referred to as Protestant) like the people she represented. Then there was Terry, member of many organizations and groups but founder of the Black Mountain Environmental Group, he was a representative of the Nationalists community (otherwise referred to as Catholic), nicknamed the 'Mountain Man'. They were both passionate people, with equally strong causes and determination to improve their community.

On the whole this conference was extremely useful. We were given a general overview of the kind of issues that needed to be dealt in West Belfast. The division between the Loyalists and Nationalists was very clear, and the more I listened and observed the more unbreakable it became. One could not deny the presence of this divided line, also present in physical form as the Peace Walls. The common phrases had been "you have to remember that we were victims of terror for twenty five years", "it was very different before the cease-fire, it is much better now", "no, we would never go over to the other side", "these people are without jobs, there are skilled workers who are being neglected", "it goes back to more

than a thousand years ago, the oppression and hatred is embedded in these people's lives", "these are all urban villages, people only move within their common territory". With all these comments being thrown at us it turned into an intense information session and after a while it became overwhelming that I had to sit aside to reorganize my information intake. Being two opposing communities there were occasional contradictory comments or ignorance of the "other world, over the wall". I began to realize that my presence here was almost insignificant. The problem was so deeply rooted with their history and culture that to come as an outsider and think that with our knowledge base we would make a difference, was unrealistic. What I hoped to achieve at the end was a better understanding and hopefully make some suggestions as to ease their hardship of existing in a place, victimized by politics.

The next day we were exposed to the government officials, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), Belfast Region. The office building was new and part of the central core of commercial complexes in the city center. The hospitality was outstanding and well appreciated by the group. The director of the Housing Executive Imelda McGrath gave the opening speech in which she summarized the acclaimed work by NIHE. The public housing projects included some highly well thought out designs, but their seemed to be a surprisingly high concentration of cul-de-sac access within these new housing settlements. Some of the issues the Housing executive were tackling were home ownership's, redevelopment schemes and old people's homes. A point that was stressed that I found interesting was that the local people did not like apartment buildings, they wanted homes and among the previous apartment projects most of them were destroyed, defaced and just not maintained as well as the houses. I was impressed at the quality of these public housing units, not at all comparable to some of the cardboard like houses in some developing countries. These people were lucky in the

sense that since the standard of living is high what is considered unacceptable has to be replaced by homes that would be similar to the private homes. We were taken on a tour of West Belfast on coaches. It was during this short bus ride, that I saw the kind of environment people were living in. We drove through the center of the Protestant villages, Shankill, Sandy Row and the center of the Catholic villages, Springfield, Falls and other near by areas. I found the Protestant areas to be a little more vitalized and there seemed to be more activity both economic and social. In the Catholic areas people seemed more to themselves and they had no interest in be social, they had a destination to go to. However all the neighborhoods were gray, solemn and looked depressing. The people all looked uneasy and disguising something. Now when I think about it perhaps it was the anxiety of violence.

Springvale Training center through the sponsorship of an organization, Making Belfast Work, become our project home base during our time in Belfast. We would check in with everyone in the mornings to discuss any pertinent issues and then report back on the day's events at the end of the day. It was our 'headquarters'. Our task become clearer: we were to recall what we had learned in the past few days and in a group define a project. The first task was to define what we thought was the critical problem, and propose a solution supported by appropriate background research. The next few days we went to talk to certain people to gather the information we needed to accurately define the problem. It seemed evident to my group that these 'villages' had been quite depressing and it would be nice to enrich them with vitality, something that we had taken for granted in our more permanent environments. One of the people I had encountered through this search process was a woman who ran the Foundry Regeneration Trust Fund, Una Gillespie. Her involvement was on a large scale, she was the liaison between the government and the community organizations. She was very passionate and I felt

was probably more objective than others. She expressed immense frustration at the community as a group that they should be more aggressive and not just wait around for the government to meet their needs. The fact is the government is constantly making cut backs and the projects are getting put on hold due to lack of funds. The people are the unfortunate victims of these changes and she felt that they should take certain matters into their own hands. After an inspiring talk with her, we returned to our home base and confided with the other group members. For our presentations there were many projects and some tangible whilst others had a wide scope. I felt that it was hard to deal with most of the really important issues such as the peace wall, and the possible demolition of them, and the communities becoming more integrated. However these seemed all ideally wishes but very unlikely since it was deeply rooted into their heritage.

For the final presentation, we were to present an in-depth analysis and offer new methods or actions that would solve this problem. I knew I wanted to do something specifically related to a location rather than offering a general solution. From the preliminary problem-finding process the issue of housing was quite an interesting one since it was a high priority with many of the locals. My group, Rebecca Hegarty and myself decided to focus on the Clonard Area. This is another urban village, with one side along the peacewall and the other on Springfield Road, it was in the Catholic Sector, and had been one of the most affected regions during the days of terror. It was an area assigned by the Housing Executive as a redevelopment zone due to the portion of derelict houses. However being caught in the red tape, it has been constantly put on hold and tenants are waiting for the new proposed public houses. We decided that as Una Gillespie said people should take matters into their own hands, and suggested an alternative whilst waiting for the housing executive to proceed with plans. On our final day of this workshop all groups gave their presentations and we were critiqued by the community members

who had been kind enough to attend. They seemed to appreciate all our efforts however their greatest concerns seemed more general, such as how to encourage large industries to invest and bring employment to their people. ❦

A [Battle] Field Experience

My previous knowledge about the political, social and historical background of Northern Ireland had given me some idea about the complexity of the situation in the area. However, once I arrived there I noticed that their conflict was much more than a problem of politics or religion and was, therefore, far more complex than I had expected.

During our firsts days in Belfast, we received considerable amounts of information from the local housing authorities, the local leaders and the local people in general. I quickly found that the more information I gathered, the harder it became to understand the social framework of the conflict. Being aware of this fact, I tried to carry on working on the intimidate goal of the workshop: to identify community problems and opportunities.

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Our first introduction to the community was on the catholic side of the city where most of the low income and middle class families have settled. This area is also where most of the local police force and British Army barricades are located. We concentrated our efforts in a neighborhood whose houses had a lower quality of other middle or low income communities. We talked with the local people and leaders and we tried to understand their priorities and more urgent needs in order to have a more specific proposal to work with. It became a difficult task because even though their living conditions were not so bad, and they claimed to need very badly a playground or a decent community center, for us, it was evident that to improve their quality of life it would be necessary to address issues like employment opportunities or economical revitalization rather than their physical housing setting.

Bearing in mind our time constraints in time and the need to formulate a

proposal, our team worked with what we believed were three concrete issues: policies to improve housing conditions, design of a community center and a strategy to get more jobs. We worked very closely with community leaders and with representatives of the Housing Executive Office as well with an NGO. However, during our first presentation it became evident that our proposals were not what the community wanted because we addressed issues related to housing policies and jobs rather than concrete urban design for their communities.

In the second phase, our group worked up a more concrete proposal; we analyzed the community plan for the new project of housing in the area and we made suggestions to improve it. Considering the time constraints and our difficulties in trying to organize the information, our group presented a final proposal to the community leaders and authorities that was modest but also effective.

My experience in Belfast can be summarized in the following points:

• I was able to work in groups with students from a variety of backgrounds, races and personalities. This allowed me to experience how fascinating it can be to work with people from other cultures and backgrounds. However, at times this turned out to be complicated.

I gained access to a community involved in a difficult political and social struggle. For us as planners and architects, this aspect of the conflict, rather than its physical nature, proved to be much more difficult to understand in order to make proposals for the community.

• I experienced great opportunities of examining the community from many angles: through its leaders, through its people, through their local schools and through the authority in charge of providing them housing. All together it was an excellent opportunity to understand a larger portion of the framework of the place where we worked. However, with so much information it became a challenge to make a

concrete proposal for the people.

• I believe that our experience in the field work gave us more elements to understand the impact of 25 years of conflict. However, the experience of staying in Belfast during the last days of the cease-fire and the impression of the bomb blast in London on February 9 (the last day of our stay in Northern Ireland), provoked in me a deep sorrow for the people we had met and also, in my case, a lack of fulfillment for leaving Belfast with their endless conflict.

In summary, working with a multi-racial and multi-disciplinary group in a very complex environment was a very rich experience on both an academic and personal level. Although the goals and the main task in the Belfast workshop had not been made clear to me ahead of time, it proved to be a good educational experience that went beyond my expectations.


VOLUNTEER
TOM WILLIAMS
EXECUTED 1943
AGE 19
CRUMLIN ROAD
JAIL

Blizzard and Siege

I arrived in Belfast on a Saturday night, reaching the heart of the city in the middle of a blizzard. The downtown was closed and so was the mood of the weather.
However, in the streets near the hostel where our group stayed there was a frantic energy in the air: teenagers on both sides of the streets running and fighting with snow balls, youth coming and going, crowding the pubs and discos. Nothing could recall that a conflict was taking place.

In the following days I became aware of the problem we were to face and got stunned by the first vision of the sieged city which would be the frequent scenario in the next couple of weeks we spent in Belfast and, in particular, in West Belfast. The city was lacerated with scars – walls of brick and time – splitting past and present. The so-called era of 'The Troubles' could be seen in the walled districts, armed police trucks in the streets, cameras staring at our movements with a haunting immobility.

I myself did not know much more about the current situation in Belfast; but only the facts gleaned through newspapers' windows which usually frame reality in more darkness and fog than truth. I felt unprepared though primed for seeking information; however, the lack of previous consistent data proved to be very interesting in interacting with the locals. In talking to people with openness and surprise (and ignorance) our group found insurmountable good will and good faith. Actually, they were craving to tell us their past, their present, and somehow to share their future with us and it seem to be a honor for us. Through them we cleared the way to try to understand a millennium of history. We drank from the local fountain, tasting

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the water (or Guinness for the purists) of both hope and anger on both sides of the walls.

Our insertion into the community was guided by revolutionary hands involved in both past belligerent struggles and a future pacific hope. Through local eyes, we met a very down-to-earth reality which could not be described by public officers, community leaders, and newspapers' reporters, but that could be perceived by a more encompassing approach allowed only by proximity. Actually the information we collected from our interviews did not matched with what we receive from public officers but somehow completed it.

The facts very soon showed us that real problems would take over our dreams as aspiring urban planners, policy makers, and architects of the re-designing of the urban stage, and if possible, the human condition if we were able to intervene in the delicate web of relations knitted through the years. Alas, the housing and poverty situation we were supposed to address seemed to be an almost non-existing-problem, mainly when compared with third world shanty towns and ultra poverty problems. As a matter of fact, the urban underclass problem in West Belfast is intertwined with the civil war that makes the problem of poverty alleviation even more complicated, since instability and lack of perspective are rampant. Actually housing and urban re-design projects seemed to be a thin shell disguising very palpable reasons for the conflict: inequality, economic underdevelopment, ghettoization, segregation, discrimination, unemployment and instability - an island of poverty on the edge of the first world!

To me the walls immuring West Belfast neighborhoods inside their beliefs and fears could very well be compared to the walls relegating poverty outside the wealthiest residences in the third world industrialized cities. The police wandering through the streets is similar to armed security provided in some areas in developing countries, either in the poorest, or in wealthiest districts. And the be-

lief in a parallel system of justice, the IRA or the UVF, paramilitary armies that supposedly fight for equal rights, provide social services, and protect their own captive population, could be compared to some drug cartels, Yakuza and Mafia schemes or other private organizations dealing with security.

Surprisingly what could have become a grim environment was translated into a welcoming and friendly atmosphere. Our sources of information were our real co-workers in the projects. They had gone through the whole physical and psychological war fighting for their ideals and for their partners, killing and being killed, enduring prison and the everyday eye of the cameras. We were constantly surrounded by "bodyguards," or better, guardian angels who were "field revolutionaries", or terrorists, and shared their knowledge. Strangely, the project was only possible because of this bizarre partnership between local government agencies, local leaders, and (ex-)revolutionaries. This circumstance compelled me to consider the truth of the assessment that "a bad man with good intentions may be a man experimenting with the possibility of becoming good. Somehow it seems to me more sensible to encourage the experimentation than to insult it." Also, one could question the concepts of good or bad, ethical, and justifiable violence.

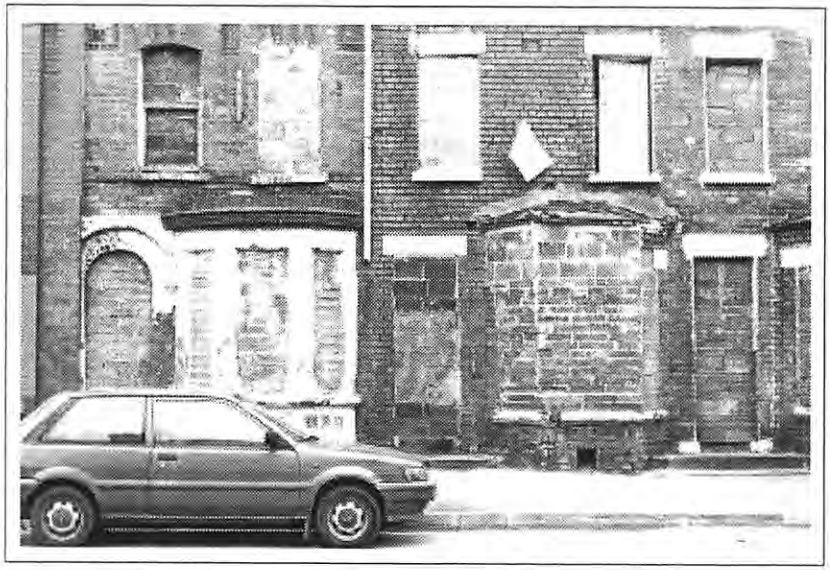
From both sides, we received a lesson of perseverance. As a matter of fact, I could say that it was a real learning experience since even the silent protest of murals cried out their history, courage, and creativity.

In seeking information to fit and fill our task I found myself drifting in controversial feelings about our role and position as professionals. Our tendencies bounced from solidarity to impartiality, to professionalism and pure (scientific and morbid) curiosity. This yielded discussions which showed how diverse our group was, mainly concerning beliefs and personal philosophy. A diversity that both enriched, postponed, and hindered decisions, teaching us the long and somehow oblique paths for participation in decision making. Yet questions such as whether

there is any ethical line to be drawn and whether there is any ethical issue concerning curiosity were constant. We questioned our position as professionals, aware that we were neither "revolutionaries with a round-trip ticket," nor neutral decision-makers. Questions were raised about to what extent a social worker, a peace worker, a refugee relief worker, or a planner should be concerned about the philosophical concerns of the government or agency philosophy he/she is working for. Wandering through West Belfast's streets and alleys, I felt misplaced: we were outsiders coming to propose a solution for a problem. However, in spite of our good intentions, the problem demanded a complicated structural change which were more than we could provide. Even worse, our final audience with the local professional and community leaders told us how far away we were from achieving a solution, how benevolent and patient they were, and how aware of their problems they were. Eventually, we realized that they were the ones who told us how to solve their problems and which projects were feasible. As an example, our group opted for developing a project concerning a small industrial park, targeting small and medium size enterprises, and relying on the fact that the informal sector would be willing to formalize and expand. Our task was to identify a project that could both provide means for job generation and create a net for small size industries, the crucial problem in the region. We relied on the fact that there was adequate infrastructure to support small size businesses. Also we were concerned that large and medium size industrial park which had already been addressed by other government agencies would be complementing our project, since many of the small firms could be integrated in a more broader production system as suppliers and establish a productive network. However, in our final presentation, we faced the disappointment of the local leaders in seeing a project that was similar to their previous choice. On the other hand, their eyes also told us that our technical project and our credentials supported their own projects and demands.

The bomb blast on the last day of our short stay in Belfast blew reality in our faces, showing us how close to firing line we were. It brought us back from the future we had somehow pictured in our final slides – filled with murals, tourism perspectives, economic development, housing upgrading, and urban renovation – blowing up our imaginations and our shared dreams, thoughts, and expectations. Actually, the real question to be asked would be how to plan for a city still in conflict? How to rebuild faith in people? I am still puzzled by the idea that had the bomb not happened (or had it happened much before), my perception of our short stay in Belfast would be much more auspicious and heartening.

I got out of Belfast in a hurry, leaving behind naive enthusiasm. On the way to the airport, the driver asked us "So are you leaving Belfast before all the shit starts again?" I had my heart heavy with the sorrow of seeing people's dream and my own dream shaken by an inconclusive end and by the weak impact of our stay in the community we worked with... However, when I landed back in Boston I had a lot to tell. I had spent two weeks with people who had escaped blasts and troubles but still had overcome them and were trying to build their future in a consistent path of dream and hope. Somehow our presence there corroborated the idea that there is always room for changes and for dreams. ❦



Putting Rapid Assessment into Practice: Tales of an Outsider in Belfast

One hears all too often about the shortcomings of development planning. Even when development projects look attractive on paper or in theory, they may fail to assist the targeted groups they are meant to benefit.

Project failure is generally attributed to the planning process itself. Due to the fact that decision makers tend to be far removed from the grassroots level they frequently do not take the time to understand the socio-economic realities of the local area. Experience has shown that when planners do not assess local needs and constraints through consultation with the community, program designs tend to be based on imperfect information or false assumptions, the results of which can be disastrous.

The information gathering and assessment processes are, therefore, key elements of program design. While many practitioners strictly adhere to the participatory assessment process in designing development projects, many others pay it lip service or even claim that they do it when they actually do not. The two-week joint MIT/Oxford-Brookes Special Interest Group on Urban Settlements (SIGUS) Workshop on Rebuilding Communities in Belfast gave me the opportunity to "test the waters" of professional development practice — to incorporate rapid assessment techniques and participatory planning principles into designing a project.

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Our task as planners and architects was twofold in Belfast. During the first week of the Workshop we would undertake a situational analysis of some of

Belfast's distressed neighborhoods. Through information gathered from local community development leaders we would formulate initial project proposals for physical or economic interventions which we would present to the community for feedback. After receiving input from the consultation with the community, we would fully develop proposals which received approval by consensus into strategies that community-based groups could carry out on their own.

Listen to the People

I found that the information gathering and rapid assessment elements of the program to be among the most demanding. When I first arrived in West Belfast, I was incredibly intimidated by the intensity of the political and physical environment. Road blocks separate this part of Belfast from the city center and imposing concrete walls literally divide disadvantaged Catholic and Protestant communities. Police vehicles resemble armored cars and, similarly, police stations army barracks. From the very first day of meetings with leaders of community-based organizations, tenants' associations, and the public sector, we began to question the role, we as architects and planners from the outside, could play in assisting these groups with our limited understanding of Northern Ireland's complex political and socio-economic situation. The media had heightened for us the sense of conflict and the urgency around peace negotiations, but nothing could have prepared us for the intricacies of Northern Ireland's political, social and economic landscape.

On account of this complexity, it was clear that the underlying issues and systems needed to be clarified before we could begin to identify resources and potential areas where we could develop programmatic or design interventions. Through lengthy conversations with people who lived and/or worked in West Belfast's neighborhoods, we tried to define poverty, security and community with their words and on their terms. But it was through our own 'eyes' and experiences

as architects and planners we began to explore physical and economic strategies we could bring to a situation with which we were just becoming familiar.

While I was in Belfast, the constant tension I felt between the need to understand the local institutional environment and the time constraints of the Workshop itself often made me feel uncomfortable about taking action. I frequently felt uneasy, questioning whether I 'knew enough' or had 'consulted with enough people' to make a decision about the types of projects we should propose to the community. The breadth of approaches to certain problems and the depth of knowledge we could obtain were certainly delimited by the time we had and forced us to draw limits around what we could expect to accomplish.

Introducing an Idea

Ironically, I also found that I was torn between having blueprints in my head and really listening to what people were saying to me. Would my 'vision' of a final outcome be flexible enough to let the community groups' voices be heard in the design process? What types of things could an outsider, such as myself, bring to the table to promote development?

The best way to address this issue, I discovered, was to take ideas I had and informally lay them out for the groups. This process of organizing around the ideas enabled me to identify strengths and weaknesses in these strategies, stimulate a dialogue around what was needed to pull them off, and begin to understand accessible financial and human resources within and outside of the community. Through this process of consultation, the design of the project would be tailored to the particular needs and circumstances of the neighborhood, formulated largely on what the communities envisioned it should address.

Taking the Idea to a Larger Forum

Our consultation with the community started out on a disappointing note. In total, only four people from community-based organizations showed up. They

listened patiently to our proposals which were in some cases highly stylized and detailed. However, from the candid feedback we received at the end of the session, it was clear that frequently our understanding of the issues were clouded by the lenses through which we saw the world as architects and planners; our experiences in other areas; and even assumptions about how institutions are 'supposed to' work regardless of the environment.

I noticed that some people in our group at first began to appear visually incredulous and/or uncomfortable when our ideas received criticism. But as we explored further why the community members had said what they did, we were able to move forward and in a more collaborative way. Through this focus group-style meeting, we gained insight into why similar types of projects had failed prior to our arrival and under what conditions the more successful projects were implemented. This process also let us demonstrate to the community that we were eager to work with them on a number of these issues and that we could bring some expertise to the table.

The merits of developing a program through this type of honest, direct dialogue rather than by coming up with a blueprint without community involvement appear to far outweigh the difficulties we often encountered with coordination and communication with the groups and even disagreements that arose among ourselves. This consultative process taught us that only through a variety of view points, could we piece together viable strategies and illustrates how the form of information gathering can shape the outcomes of the planning process. This experience also gave me a new insight into the role I could play as a planner from the outside in effecting change at the community and/or the policy levels. ❦

This summer the author plans to return to Belfast to do research for her masters thesis and work with local organizations on enterprise development issues.

Belfast's Bureaucracy: An Outsider's Perspective

I really didn't know what to expect prior to arriving in Belfast. I didn't know much about its history, culture, etc. I guess being the typical American and relying on the media (i.e., CNN and the New York Times), much of my information was somewhat biased. Like anyone else, I 'knew' that the region had consistently been under attack by paramilitary groups, most notably the Irish Republican Army (IRA). However, due to the cease-fire over the past 17 months I anticipated the environment to be friendly. I never imagined the severity of the conditions nor tension I would soon be confronted with, let alone the amount of biased information I had previously been fed.

After Sunday evening's presentation by Billy Morgan I knew I was in for something big. I couldn't quite place my finger on it. The Tuesday bus tour was the icing on the cake though. The 'housing' problem went deeper than what the group was originally told. Endless factors came into play, be it: economic, financial, political, religious, historical, etc. Bottom line, Belfast is an intricate maze that required careful consideration of all the factors. Everyone in the area had a stake in the process, and each decision needed to include a portion of every parties' requisites.

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As the first week progressed, I was concluding that a housing problem did not exist in Belfast. My basis for this assertion was the traditional developing areas housing literature. It did not fit the typical Belfast situation. I saw many structures that could house people. Whether or not they were 'fit or unfit', was a separate issue. I'm very certain that depending on who I asked about the 'housing problem', answers would vary. During the bus tour, the Housing Executive (H.E.)

representative appeared to allude to the fact that they would spend whatever it took to appease the people of West Belfast in a way of keeping them quiet. During one interview with a West Belfast local, he referred to 'keeping the people quiet' as 'normalization'. The concept of normalization was much more complex than a housing issue. It is the government's systematic response to oppressing a segment of society. Right then I knew my initial Sunday night hunch was correct. Belfast had a bigger problem than any of us could ever have imagined. Spending the week interviewing several locals, the problem was becoming increasingly apparent – 'political organization or lack there of is rampant and systematic oppression of a section of Belfast is grossly evident'. While conducting interviews, an insightful point was raised regarding the 'interface'. Probing further, the interviewee stated that West Belfast could be completely shut down with in a matter of minute – four minutes to be exact.

Walking through West Belfast on my way to the Springvale Training Center, an aerie feeling came over me. It wasn't the fact that the 'Troubles' had begun in the area, but the fact that: surveillance cameras, increased presence of RUC vehicles, fortified RUC stations, British Army helicopters flying overhead, and security towers on Blackhill Mountain with hardware facing West Belfast were much more prevalent than in other areas of the City we had visited. This only reaffirmed my conclusions about the area. The idea of keeping an eye on the enemy was literally true. For all I knew my picture was plastered on some wall in the RUC station at the corner of Falls and Springfield Road. The notion of a divided city was very real. This hadn't stopped in Berlin or South Africa, but rolled on to Belfast.

The 'interface' had varying degrees of thickness that contained a metal plate, approximately 1 inch thick, in the center. In certain areas the wall rose as high as 20 feet. This was the government's answer to restoring 'normality.

An event triggering the fact that this situation was very real, and every precaution needed to be taken was the assassination of Gino Gallagher. The bitter hatred between the factions came to light the following day when a particular wall was graffitied mocking Mr. Gallagher's death. As an outsider I will never know why this incident occurred. I can say that the perception it raised however can and will have a lasting impact. Whether positive or negative remains to be seen.

The British government's ability to bureaucratize itself even more in this area, compared to other areas in the U.K. is striking and very impressionable. The system is designed beautifully. The strong central government style, with very few linkages among the agencies is perfect. Not to mention the tight control the Department of the Environment (DoE) has on the area. Almost every government agency in Belfast is under this umbrella. What struck me though was the role of the Housing Executive. Any agency or department who can manage to have approximately 550 million pounds allocated to it each fiscal year must be doing something right! Whether or not they are fiscally responsible is a separate issue.

During Billy Morgan's presentation, he mentioned that the local government's only role was for tourism, funerals, and limited public services. To have some sort of link to the local citizenry to advise and guide them on many instances does not exist. I believe this is the only way Westminster feels they can keep some type of hold on the nationalist population.

In addition, Westminster's selective action of participants in representing the local constituency is absurd. Constitutionally not allowing Sinn Fein, a nationalist organization, from participating in the political, and negotiating process is extremely obvious. Maybe this is my way of sympathizing with West Belfast. However, I do believe the British government does not realize the opportunity it is missing when not recognizing this important impasse. This group, I believe, is the bridge between the British government and the nationalists that may lead to peace.

As the two week SIGUS-CENDEP Workshop progressed, it was evident that our recommendations or proposals would not begin to skim the surface of the problems of the area. Before this however, many logistical problems arose for the workshop and could have been avoided had the decision to work on a single project been addressed at the onset. Rather, we were given free reign as to what we felt a sufficient or adequate project should be. At the conclusion of the final presentations, I found many linkages between the projects. Many insightful questions stemming from the presentations could have been developed and attempted to be answered had ample time been given. In addition, given the situation and circumstances of the area, it would have been helpful had daily debriefings been consistently conducted.

Overall however, the Workshop was an experience I could not imagine passing up. I believe the two weeks did change my perception of development and the way Planners and Architects must work together, actively planning and (re)building communities, to achieve a healthier environment for those persons in less developed areas, or even in our own respected countries. Knowing that such forums exist for 'para-professionals', it is reassuring to know that even the greatest conditioned arrogance can be tamed.

The Walls of Belfast

In the context of Belfast and Northern Ireland the "wall" is unarguably politically charged. The making and experience of walls affirms conscious meaning and purpose. In other words these walls do not go unnoticed and are often desirable by the immediate community. Walls divide communities as well as unite. Walls protect citizens from harm as well as identify safe boundary. Walls have histories and make histories. They are a highly active tool/obstacle in the struggle for peace in northern Ireland.

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The intentions are to be as apolitical as possible. This is difficult and perhaps impossible. I have found through my recent experience particular positions relative to the struggle in Northern Ireland. These are not my struggles, and though I sympathize with the tragedy, I honestly cannot offer them an architectural solution. I am compelled, though, to offer my services as a person but this is difficult not knowing who to help and the future implications of my support. I found the people of Northern Ireland regardless of race and religion to be overwhelmingly giving and caring, family and community driven. I would without hesitation support the individuals I came in contact with in Northern Ireland as an individual. However the complication of the situation is that supporting an individual can be supporting a "cause" or taking a political position. I am no longer an individual in this context. It is far to complex a situation to fully understand, as an outsider, where your good intentions may fall.

It is also fair to say that the editorial eye of a photographer can position ones beliefs. To be honest, I feel photographs do tend a position. A position still unclear to myself and most likely can only be more confused. Perhaps it is my

reading of the photographs coupled with my experience that allows me to feel these photographs are driven by a belief. It is my intention to offer a range of experience so that one can make their own speculation/reading. I offer no solutions rather than increased awareness and concern.

In the series of photographs there are several walls documented, natural and constructed. Some walls more transparent than others. Each wall is understood and accepted differently from all sides. It is a physical fact that the first action of a wall is sub-division. In the cases presented this is true. But, also as an effect of the act of division, the public divided are united in separation.

Architects make walls. Sure roofs, windows, and doors are elements to consider, but fundamentally architects create walls to define/redefine/intensify the environment. It would be something special to be hired as a architect to take down a few walls. Now as an architect in training it would be expected that I use the knowledge of my field to aid the people of Belfast in an appropriate manner. I cannot reasonably qualify where it would be appropriate to create another wall. Further, I would not be willing or qualified to suggest the removal of any at present.

Walls have historically aided in the defense of cities uniting the public internally. Traditionally, the people that relied on the countryside for farming or whatsoever could retreat to the fortified city when in danger. The walls in Belfast house similar intentions. However, in Belfast at least two communities are present within the same city. It could be argued that Belfast is now two thriving cities compressed together.

One generality I am willing to give is that where people are employed, the diverse communities tend to associate with different and less physically brutal conflicts. The working class, the lowest income, are about 75%-90% unemployed and have been unemployed for two to three generations. Despite unemployment, poverty and housing are not immediate issues; it was not evident that people were

starving and without homes.

The wall, in most aspects, is detrimental to the unanimous peace in Northern Ireland. However the absence of the wall presents its own complications of breaking down the already strong and thriving communities presently existing.

Roads and Walls as a Reaction to The Troubles

On a visit to West Belfast, the most striking feature to anyone will be the walls and roadways that dominate the area and separate the warring Catholics and Protestant communities. My research at MIT is focused on infrastructure provision in developing countries. Much of the work done on urban highway construction, both in developing as well as developed countries, discusses the negative effects that a high-volume highway has on its surrounding neighborhoods. It can eliminate access between neighborhoods and divide communities. Nowhere have I seen a better example of this than in West Belfast.

Engineers and architects from the Ministry of Housing told me that many of the busiest roadways located in the areas where the 'Troubles' were most frequent were constructed in that location specifically to divide the communities. Public officials, as well as many community members, felt that the creation of busy thoroughfares with little pedestrian access would cut off communication and travel between the Catholic and Protestant communities. The members of these communities would therefore have less opportunity to interact in ways that would invariably become violent.

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A less veiled attempt to separate the communities is in the construction of the euphemistically named 'Peace Walls'. When one sees the walls built between communities, it is no wonder that the members of the Catholic and Protestant communities do not get along. The walls in their neighborhoods virtually guarantee an atmosphere of government-sanctioned antagonism. Indeed, the fact that the government is still constructing a Peace Wall in the neighborhood is a clear indicator that it

does not believe that the cease fire will hold.

But, as with urban freeway construction in the US, the chicken and the egg question can be elicited here. That is, do the walls and highways create the crisis, or are they a reaction to it? In discussing the presence of the Peace Walls and the arterial roads separating the Catholics from the Protestants, community members freely volunteer that they requested that the walls be constructed. People on both sides of the walls felt that their lives were in danger, and the only acceptable solution to the crisis was the construction of physical barriers between the communities.

To emphasize this point, I offer a story told to me by a resident of a Catholic public housing project in the Ballymurphy neighborhood. She told me that one day, before the cease-fire, she saw two men cutting a hole in what was then a chain link fence separating her neighborhood from the Protestant neighborhood on the other side of the fence. She knew immediately that there would be trouble. She handed out flyers to her neighbors notifying them that there was a hole in the fence and to be watchful for suspicious behavior. She truly felt that the hole in the fence, just large enough for a man to crawl through, was a threat to her life and the lives of her family and neighbors. Indeed, several nights later, a Catholic teenager in the neighborhood was shot by a sniper. The hole in the fence was fixed by the next morning.

This example laid out for me the importance to the people of both communities of the physical infrastructure that separates them. Most people I talked with recognize that the walls and roads were a less than ideal reaction to a crisis, but feel that they are nonetheless necessary. All expressed hope that someday the city can be brought back together again, with infrastructure serving the purpose of facilitating access between and across communities, rather than promoting the separation of two desperate communities.

Roads in new public housing tracts in the city are also being constructed with the 'Troubles' in mind. I noted that new housing developments have only one access road. This was probably done to discourage 'joy-riding' and to make escapes more difficult for 'drive-by' shooters.

The use of infrastructure in this city brings up for me the larger question of the unintended consequences of highway construction in cities that are not trying to separate their neighborhoods, but rather are trying to encourage economic development and facilitate access to facilities through roadway construction. Many authors have written in very general terms about the effect that arterial roadways and highways have on community cohesion, but such an effect is difficult to measure, and its consequences (decrease in land values, demographic changes, etc.) are difficult to connect to the construction of the roadway, given the many other changes going on in most urban areas. One only need to look at the example of Belfast to see that, clearly, the urban roadway system (markedly augmented by the 'Peace Walls') divides the community. This leads me to question how other communities are affected by this division, albeit unintended in most cases.

In Belfast, the creation of an infrastructure network that divides the communities was clearly a deliberate act on the part of the planners and engineers. As long as Catholics are trying to kill Protestants, and Protestants are trying to kill Catholics, the system will have to remain intact. But, if lasting peace is ever to come to this city, someone will have to make the effort to reconstruct many of the city's roadways to facilitate access, commerce, and hopefully mutual dependence between the Catholic and Protestant communities. ❦

Slouching Towards Belfast (Fifteen Ways of Looking at a "Peaceline")

In the urban landscape of civil war, certain kinds of hardware almost begin to seem normal: gates and checkpoints standing at attention along major thoroughfares; barbed wire clinging like a native ivy, thick as kudzu; security cameras staring at every public threshold as though monitoring a nation of shoplifters. In Belfast, a unique fixture has been added to the usual array of hardware, specially adapted to the demands of that city's public realm: the so-called "peaceline," the nearly five miles of walls and fences that mark the territorial divides within the city's working-class neighborhoods. More morbid even than the hardware, however, is the software: the ongoing attempts to soften the presence of the hardware with touches of urban design. And nowhere is the dissonance more striking than in the efforts to make the "peaceline" look like an artifact of civil, rather than military, engineering.

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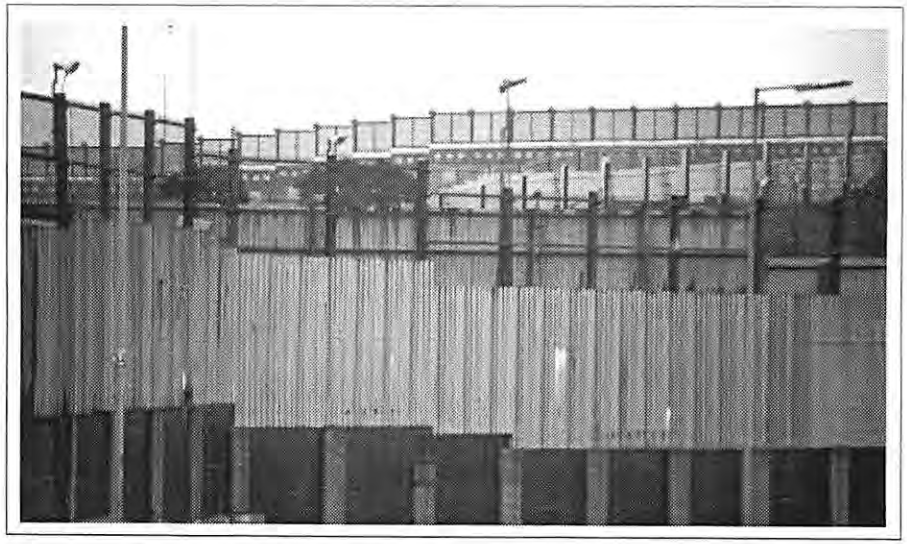
The name itself, "peaceline," is like a bomb in a coffee jar, a disarming word made of deceptively common ingredients that comes boobytrapped with two mistaken implications: that a "peaceline" establishes or preserves peace, and that it runs through Belfast in a single continuous line, like an Irish Berlin Wall. To slip into these comfortable assumptions is a perilous misunderstanding of the political geography of Northern Ireland, particularly in Belfast, where once-temporary barriers have hardened into permanent structures at 15 different flashpoints. Mindful of their language, community activists on both sides of the conflict never talk about the "peaceline," uniformly referring to the "interface" instead. While almost comi-



cally abstract, at least it is free of spurious claims to pacification, and suggests the more uncomfortable meeting of two mutually alien systems whose borders are difficult to cross.

The interfaces were born of "the troubles," that fatalistic Irish expression for the last 25 years of armed conflict over whether Northern Ireland and its Catholic minority should rejoin the Irish Republic to the south or whether the North should remain a tiny British outpost with a Protestant majority. In a wave of sectarian riots in August 1969, West Belfast Catholics were burned out of their homes in the areas closest to Protestant quarters, and retreated behind barricades improvised out of whatever materials came to hand – roasted school buses, hijacked bakery vans, shards of scrap metal. Protestants threw up their own ramparts, and the impulse spread to the back-to-back neighborhoods on the north and east sides of the city as well. These emergency sculptures, meant to deter marauding parties from both sides, were succeeded first by British Army sandbags and later by cumulative layers of concrete, corrugated iron, and chain-link fencing, all of them festooned

with thickets of barbed wire. Some streets were closed off entirely, instant dead ends; others had gates, often open by day but closed by night. Houses closest to the barricades became targets for rocks and homemade bombs; some were shielded with heavy screens, caged in like canaries, while others became unlivable and were abandoned. In the worst cases, a row of houses would be demolished to create a buffer zone, a dead space between the wall and the rest of the world, a mediæval moat littered with twentieth-century debris.

Although security-driven, the permanent interfaces have been built and maintained by Northern Ireland's public housing agency, which is responsible for the ongoing urban-renewal efforts to replace and upgrade the city's Victorian-era rowhouses. Over digestive biscuits and strong Irish tea (staples in the diet of bureaucratic Belfast hospitality), local officials made heroic efforts to explain to their foreign guests that residential segregation is a given: that they assign housing based on tenants' own choices, that it is always the preference of those households to live in separate territories, and that the residents on both sides of the "peaceline" are in

no hurry to pull the physical divisions down. One staffer distributed a laser-printed color map with the rough locations of the interfaces labelled with blue dots; another circulated a 1991 spiral-bound report assessing their visual impact on the surrounding neighborhoods. Maps at a larger scale showed the outline and extent of each set of barriers – a more accurate picture but still unreadable to a newcomer, like an Etch-a-Sketch drawing by a bored kid in the backseat of a long drive down a bumpy road. Disconnected lines twisted into asymmetrical, inward-turning shapes that had no recognizable geometric identity. They seemed scattered, random, incomprehensible either as urban form or political division. But it was the outsider's ignorance that made those boundaries unintelligible. On the ground, where turf and experience prevail, small distances and odd angles in known territory read to the knowing eye. And the violence that bred those lines is equally local and familiar.

Still, even for a foreigner to sit among the teacups and empty plates of biscuit crumbs leafing through a copy of the Belfast Peacelines Study is a chilling exercise in the banality of evil. This 65-page survey of the interface structures, complete with photographs and plan views, section lines and ratings, helped launch the ongoing campaign to convert the "peacelines" into "environmental amenities." For example, the study notes approvingly that in one stretch already "improved" along the Springfield Road, "the centre section of the Peaceline barrier, namely the decorative brick wall and associated environmental works, is visually very pleasing. The wall reads as one element in the overall composition of an environmental improvement scheme, rather than as a fortified structure." How a barrier built between hostile neighborhoods can under any circumstances be described as "visually very pleasing," or avoid its obvious purpose as a "fortified structure," is a matter the consultants sidestep. Since 1991, the British government has spent $2 million to complete the "decorative brick wall and associated environmental works"

along the Springfield Road interface alone.

There is small comfort in the study's preface that "[r]esearch...failed to reveal any similar studies relating to fortified structures" (although Mike Davis' militarized vision of "Fortress LA" springs to mind). Without such a precedent, it was the consultants' job to devise a quantitative measurement, a "score," for each of the interfaces, to choose a "weighting factor" to apply to each of their "elements:" form, materials, color, detailing, "spatial articulation," the "hard" and "soft" landscape, maintainability, "betterment," graffiti, vandalism, and (with its British spelling) "stabilising influences." To measure the visual impact of a wall between warring communities seems a ghoulish task, uncomfortably close to designing three-bathroom offices for apartheid-era South Africa – racially segregated, in accordance with the legislated perversities of the land, into white, black, and colored. But the consultants clearly undertook their assignment with relish and managed to rank-order the sites from "good" to "poor" environmental quality. The actual level of violence in the surrounding neighborhoods seems not be have been a factor, although graffiti and vandalism earned the most severe demerits in the scoring system.

It takes some careful reading to get the hang of the consultants' method. One East Belfast interface otherwise ranking near the top of the list is critiqued for a "rotating spike rail [that] marginally detracts from the appearance of the wall." Another location's score drops because the "crook-arm heavy gauge flat steel railing, painted red, with the crook-arm bent toward the footpath,...gives the appearance of a very heavy fence and is unmistakably a security structure." Conversely, where a 4.5-meter-high double palisade fence mounted on a brick wall is "painted a soft salmon/brown colour which compliments the colour of the bricks," the site's score rises accordingly.

Indeed, compatibility is always rewarded. At the Crumlin Road interface,

which wins the highest ratings of all, "the metal rails are painted cream, a colour used to pick out some of the architectural details in the adjacent houses." Likewise, in another North Belfast location, "The fence, although a long barrier bisecting an open space, is a pleasing structure. This is mainly due to its pleasant, relaxing color, which is compatible with the various finishes used in the architecture of the area." The fact that the "open space" bisected by the fence was created by knocking down a block of rowhouses apparently is not a weighted factor in the evaluation of its current visual impact. And whether any color can make the interface a "relaxing" experience is a subject that may require further empirical research.

The study is particularly disingenuous on the subject of demolition: noting, for instance, that the Ainsworth Avenue section of the "peaceline" had been extended "probably as a result of houses having been demolished," and then dropping the uncertain tone two sentences later with the flat observation, "The foundations of the demolished buildings on both these sites have not been lifted." Leaving this trace of a prior civilization behind cost Ainsworth Avenue a substantial number of points, although the fences at each end also failed to pass inspection, since the "palisade fencing in these areas is a different shade of dark green from the adjacent fencing and this further detracts from the overall appearance of the structure."

One site that must have presented a serious challenge to the consultants is the interface at Manor and Roe Streets, where a single home remains at the base of the "peaceline, " a lonely Catholic outpost known to housing officials as "the little house on the prairie." The house is not labelled in the plan view of the interface structures and the text remains silent on its existence, even as a strikingly incompatible element by the study's own standards. From the Protestant Manor Street side, the "mustard coloured corrugated profile steel cladding" of the interface is

interrupted in the middle by a series of screens and a single roofline. From the Catholic Roe Street side, the house – whose owners have refused to move – stands defiantly in a barren block, surrounded by screens and fences on all sides, across the street from another empty strip of mud where neighbors once lived. But look, there are urban-design "improvements" to this dreary picture. The kindergarten-cheery yellow wall is flanked on each side by a wrought-iron "second line of defence" painted a mild pink; in addition, at one end the fence joins "a recently constructed wall which is part of the new housing development [to form] the peace line" between two adjoining, if not exactly neighboring, sets of dwellings. Muddled by the conflicting measures of its environmental impact, the Manor/Roe interface winds up dead center in the middle of the ratings.

In fact, what the scoring system really measures is how well building materials, decoration, and greenery conceal the true purpose of the barriers. To disguise the "peaceline," to blend it into the local housing developments as though they were just another series of gated communities in Orange County – that is the study's standard of success. And that is the urban-design policy governing the maintenance of the interfaces, which are in the absurd process of being transformed from fortifications to street furniture. So the "peaceline" now comes in different colors, materials, gauges, densities. Where there was corrugated iron, there is wrought iron; where there was unadorned concrete, there is variegated brickwork; where there was chain-link, there is palisade fencing. Evergreens and thornbushes fill the empty spaces where houses used to be. But just as no amount of cosmetics can cover or repair the bruises of a battered woman, not even two-million-dollars' worth of brick, paint, and shrubbery can hide or heal the scars of "the troubles" on the streets of Belfast.

To treat the 1991 "peaceline" study as a perfectly normal planning document is to accept the role of planner as accessory-after-the-fact, an accomplice in

the near-criminal use of urban design. Neutrality, impartiality, immunity – they are not options. The planner has to say no, the "peaceline" cannot be converted into a grab-bag of "environmental amenities." That it shouldn't "pick out some of the architectural details in the adjacent houses." That it shouldn't "read as one element in the overall composition of an environmental improvement scheme, rather than as a fortified structure." That it should remain hideous, as ugly as the forces that produced it and keep it standing. That no, there can be no beating swords into palisade fences "painted a soft salmon/brown" and calling them ploughshares. If the "peaceline" is an artifact of war, a monument to partisan violence and political deadlock, then let it remain fortified, frozen solid in its corrugated splendor, until all parties sit at the negotiating table, until the communities on both sides contemplate taking the walls down, until some other rough beast slouches towards Belfast to be born. ❦